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World Refugee Council Research Paper No. 2 – July 2018

# Refugees and the City

## The Twenty-first-century Front Line

Robert Muggah with Adriana Erthal Abdenur





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The logo for the World Refugee Council, featuring a purple square with a white box containing the text "WORLD REFUGEE COUNCIL" and a purple pentagon shape to its right.

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[Robert Muggah](#) specializes in cities, security, migration, conflict and new technologies. He co-founded the Igarapé Institute, a think and do tank working on data-driven and technology-enabled safety and justice across Latin America and Africa. He also co-founded the SecDev Foundation and Group, organizations devoted to cyber security and stability in the Middle East and Eurasia and in South Asia regions. He is a regular consultant to the United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, and to several firms, ranging from Google to McKinsey & Company. Robert received his D.Phil. from the University of Oxford. He is faculty at Singularity University and teaches at universities in Brazil, Canada, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Between 2000 and 2011, he was research director of the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey.

Robert has authored dozens of peer-reviewed articles and written and edited seven books on cities, arms control, stability operations, refugees and the rise of digital gangs and cyber cartels. Robert publishes regularly with *The Guardian*, *El País*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The Globe and Mail*, *O Globo*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times* and *Wired*, and was a speaker at the Smart City Expo World Congress, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, World Economic Forum (Davos) and TED conferences in 2015, 2016 and 2017. He serves on panels appointed by the UN Secretary-General and helps convene a range of international networks, including the Global Parliament of Mayors, where he is co-chair of the advisory group.

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Previously, Adriana was the general coordinator at the BRICS Policy Center in Rio de Janeiro and co-edited the book *Emerging Powers and the UN* (Routledge, 2015). A National Productivity Scholar through the Brazilian Council for Scientific and Technological Development, Adriana has won a "Young Scientist of Our State" prize from the Rio de Janeiro Research Support Foundation, as well as a research grant from the Fulbright Commission.

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## Executive Summary

Cities are nodes of expulsion, transit and arrival for refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Today, more than 60 percent of all refugees and 80 percent of all IDPs are living in urban areas. Just 30 percent of all refugees live in rural camps. While cities are periodically overwhelmed by sudden mass influxes of forced migrants, they are remarkably effective at absorbing populations on the move. With some exceptions, the international community — and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), in particular — has been slow to empower cities to assume a greater role in protecting, assisting and promoting durable solutions for refugees, asylum claimants and other groups of concern. New compacts on migration and refugees only tangentially address the pivotal role of cities in shaping the experience of forced migrants. Instead, low- and middle-income cities, which account for the vast majority of displaced populations globally, together with upper-income cities, are developing solutions on their own. This research paper assesses the characteristics of the urban displacement crisis and identifies challenges and opportunities confronting cities. In the process, it challenges myths associated with the “refugee burden” in cities, offering preliminary recommendations for stepping up international, national and municipal cooperation.

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## Introduction

Cities are on the front line of forced migration. They are points of expulsion, transit and arrival. Most refugees and IDPs move in steps — from villages to towns, and from towns to cities. While in some cases, cities are periodically overwhelmed by mass influxes of refugees and IDPs, they are also remarkably effective at absorbing populations on the move. How can cities better prepare for the arrival of refugees? What strategies should cities adopt to integrate and settle forcibly displaced populations? And what kinds of norms, standards and practices already exist to help metropolitan authorities strengthen their responses on the ground? Given the sheer pace of urbanization in underdeveloped

and developed settings and a host of political and climatic threats, designing effective and efficient strategies to protect, care for and resettle refugees in cities is now more urgent than ever.

Cities are already advancing a range of strategies to protect and care for refugees and IDPs. Some cities are rolling out strategies on their own. A growing number of them are working in alliances — in partnership with national and state governments and businesses, as well as with other cities — to improve their responses and share experiences. The most successful strategies are comprehensive, involving multiple government departments, private providers and non-governmental groups, and benefit all city populations, not just refugees and asylum claimants. These kinds of measures avoid real and perceived competition between forced migrants and host communities. Interventions that improve access to affordable housing, lower barriers to labour market participation, strengthen educational opportunities (especially language skills) and leverage new technologies to improve access to services are especially effective.

International organizations — including the United Nations — have been slow to leverage the role of cities and their leaders in addressing the varied needs and protecting the rights of refugees. The UNHCR, for example, first elaborated a policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas in 1997, but it actually discriminated against forced migrants in cities (UNHCR 1997). While a revised strategy in 2009 (UNHCR 2009) offered some improvements, it was never fully accepted and suffered from uneven implementation. The United Nations is currently negotiating a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration that stresses the critical importance of “whole-of-government” approaches and recognizes the “particular needs of local authorities, who are the first receivers of migrants.”<sup>1</sup> It is also negotiating a global compact on refugees, which includes a few passing references to the specific needs of refugees in “urban settings” (UNHCR 2018b).

This research paper examines the ways in which cities are preparing for, and responding to, the

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the global compact draft does not define the term “local.” Nor do references to “whole-of-government” define the multi-level governance perspectives. The current draft mentions the words “urban” and “cities” just once each. These issues were noted in consultative processes with mayors in 2018. See UNHCR (2018a).

arrival of refugees. The first section sets out the broad context of the global urban displacement crisis. The second section describes some of the characteristics and dynamics of urban refugee movements. Section three examines a number of recurring challenges that cities confront in addressing refugee protection and care, including the implications of mass movements, refugee enclaving and political backlashes. It also seeks to debunk a number of myths surrounding urban refugees, including their alleged risk to security, impacts on labour markets and supposed drain on social welfare services. The fourth section explores international and city-level responses to urban refugees. The conclusion offers a number of discrete recommendations and opportunities.

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## An Urban Displacement Crisis

The world is confronting a series of unprecedented population displacement crises. As of 2018, there were around 25.4 million refugees, 3.1 million asylum seekers<sup>2</sup> and another 40.3 million IDPs (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2017) worldwide — more than at any time since World War II. What makes today's forced migration<sup>3</sup> challenges distinct from the past is that most displaced people are moving to urban areas.<sup>4</sup> According to the UNHCR (2018c), more than 13.5 million refugees (58 percent of the global caseload) and some 32.2 million IDPs (80 percent of the global caseload) reside in large, medium and small

cities.<sup>5</sup> By way of comparison, reportedly just 30 percent of all refugees live in planned camps administered by governments and international agencies (UNHCR 2017b; Katz and Brandt 2017).

Forced migrants are displaced for increasingly longer periods of time. According to Tent Partnership, a coalition of more than 80 companies, most refugees spend years in limbo. With some exceptions, rural camps and aid packages have little connection with the lives of most displaced people (Huang and Graham 2018). Roughly 61 percent of refugees lived in individual accommodation in 2017, although the global proportion is comparatively low due to the large number of Syrians dependent on camps (UNHCR 2018c). Refugees regularly struggle to gain lawful employment in many cities and so are often restricted to the informal economy. As a result, urban refugees and asylum claimants are often vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination and deportation.

It is not entirely surprising that refugees and IDPs are seeking sanctuary in cities. For one, there are more cities than ever before: the world has undergone a process of hyper-urbanization. In the 1950s, fewer than 30 percent of the world's population lived in a city: today, the proportion is closer to 55 percent. This trend is expected to continue. More than 68 percent of the global population will live in cities by 2050, with 90 percent of all future urban growth occurring in low- and medium-income settings, in particular in Africa and Asia.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, the global rural population is reaching its peak and will contract over the coming decades. It is not just people migrating to cities — warfare and other forms of organized violence are also moving into urban spaces (Evans 2017). Indeed, military and humanitarian doctrines are adjusting to accommodate a much larger number of strategic and tactical operations in cities in the coming decades.<sup>7</sup>

Cities offer a range of benefits for populations fleeing from war, persecution and discrimination.

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2 See [www.unhcr.org/ph/figures-at-a-glance](http://www.unhcr.org/ph/figures-at-a-glance).

3 Forced migration is a broad category that refers to movements of refugees and IDPs — both those displaced by conflict in their own country of origin and those displaced by natural or environmental disasters, famine, or development projects. The concept thus encompasses demographic movements such as flight, evacuation, displacement and resettlement. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2000), a forced migrant is anyone who moves in order to “escape persecution, conflict, repression, natural and human-made disasters, ecological degradation, or other situations that endanger their lives, freedom or livelihood.”

4 For the purposes of this paper, we adopt the UNHCR's (2009) definition of “urban area” as “a built-up area that accommodates large numbers of people living in proximity to each other, and where the majority of people sustain themselves by means of formal and informal employment and the provision of goods and services. While refugee camps share some of the characteristics of an urban area, they are excluded from this definition.” See also [www.unhcr.org/en-us/urban-refugees.html](http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/urban-refugees.html).

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5 The proportion of refugees living in urban areas reportedly declined from 60 percent in 2016 to 58 percent in 2017. It is important to stress that this estimate is rendered from a sample of just 16.5 million refugees, or 83 percent of the total population. Disaggregated subnational data is not regularly collected by the UNHCR. See UNHCR (2018c).

6 See [www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html).

7 See Muggah (2015), International Committee of the Red Cross (2016) and Collinson, Elhawary and Muggah (2010).



For one, they can facilitate personal anonymity, connectivity to dense social networks, formal and informal labour opportunities and access to essential services that are otherwise unavailable in rural areas. While national governments are the custodians of refugee-related legislation, networks of urban authorities, local businesses and community organizations are pivotal actors when it comes to meeting the short- and medium-term needs of displaced people. This is because the drivers of social and economic integration — housing, education, and social and economic services — are frequently designed, delivered and financed by municipalities (Brandt 2017).

Even so, it would be wrong to idealize transit and arrival cities. The vast majority of the world's urban refugees are not relocating to developed cities in North America or Western Europe. Instead, they are moving to neighbouring countries, often to poor and underdeveloped cities and slums in Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Muggah 2018; 2017b). In most cities — even in developed cities in North America and Western Europe (Eurocities 2015; 2016) — urban refugees end up living in lower-income informal settlements. As a result, they are often recipients of uneven access to basic services and face challenges entering the formal and informal labour markets. From Paris and Stockholm to Nairobi and Accra, urban refugees can face stigmas that limit their integration and reinforce cultural and spatial segregation. When refugee influxes are not adequately prepared for and poorly managed, the new arrivals can exacerbate existing fault lines and generate new ones altogether (Brandt and Katz 2017; 100 Resilient Cities 2017).

While many large cities formally adopt a “welcoming” posture to refugees, new arrivals often face a range of challenges to ensuring their care and management. This is because all cities — from megacities to smaller towns — suffer from social and economic divides. These fissures can translate into racism, xenophobia, exclusion and marginalization. In cities experiencing political turbulence, economic disruption and rising insecurity, refugees and other displaced populations are often targets of recrimination. The scapegoating of forced migrants is hardly restricted to cities. To complicate matters, many city authorities are struggling to address these challenges (assuming they acknowledge them at all). They also frequently lack the necessary autonomy, discretion and capacity to deliver adequate services, particularly

when confronted with upsurges in newcomers, which further exacerbates local grievances.

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## Characteristics and Dynamics of Urban Displacement

The relationships between forced migration and cities have attracted growing attention over the past two decades.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the UNHCR's official policy on addressing urban refugees first emerged in 1997, and activist and scholarly attention has grown since then.<sup>9</sup> Yet the links between urban centres and displaced people stretch far back through history. For eons, cities have played a central role in shaping the politics of migration, including in relation to the very concept of “sanctuary.”<sup>10</sup> Cities are creative, innovative and adaptive precisely because of forced migration, not in spite of it (Sassen 2004).

The involvement of cities in welcoming refugees and providing sanctuary has deep roots dating back thousands of years. The practice is universal, evident in early Christian, Islamic, Judaic, Buddhist, Sikh and Hindu societies. Indeed, foundational religious texts highlight how cities — and their religious institutions in particular — served as sites of refuge for suspected criminals, debtors, escaped slaves, priests and others. Consider, for example, the “cities of refuge” named in Joshua 20:7-8 in the Old Testament — Golan, Ramoth, Bosor, Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron — that offered the right of asylum to perpetrators of accidental manslaughter. Throughout history, cities and municipal leaders have resisted demands from higher authorities — from kings to presidents — to apply coercive measures restricting the rights of people seeking sanctuary. The latest resistance of US “sanctuary cities” to federal law is just the

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8 For example, Jonathan Darling (2017) outlines four accounts of these relationships: displacement and the camp-city; dispersal and refugee resettlement; the “re-scaling” of borders; and the city as sanctuary.

9 See, for example, Jacobsen (2006) and Buscher (2011) for a review of the literature. Also visit <https://visit.org/france/urban-refugees> for an example of a group supporting urban refugees.

10 For example, Greek and Roman temples and medieval churches were spaces of asylum for fugitives from the law. Cities have long provided opportunities to those fleeing from oppression, war and natural disasters.

most recent example. Indeed, the enforcement of federal law is not the duty of cities. Cities can, and often do, take proactive steps to support new arrivals in defiance of national authorities.<sup>11</sup>

Cities receive a wide category of refugees, asylum claimants and IDPs — some who stay only temporarily and others who settle for longer periods of time. The duration of their stay depends on a wide range of legal, geographic, cultural and socio-economic factors. Even so, there are signs that the average length of refugee status is increasing. Today, the average duration of displacement is roughly two decades, compared to just nine years in the 1990s (Milner and Loescher 2011). In contrast to the 1980s and 1990s, when forced migration was more closely associated with rural camps, refugees are increasingly seeking safer ground in cities close to where the opportunities are (Brandt, Jones and Katz 2017). They are also staying closer to home — most often in neighbouring countries. Contrary to the claims of most contemporary media and populist politicians, only a modest proportion of the world's forced migrants — fewer than 16 percent — make it to North America, Western Europe or Australasia.<sup>12</sup>

Looking ahead, cities stand to receive a growing number of the world's displaced population. A rise in political crises, together with the irresistible economic and cultural pull of cities, is driving forced migrants, including refugees and IDPs, to urban centres. Take the case of Syria, where the total (rural) refugee camp population is more than 440,000 people, but the total number residing in urban and peri-urban areas is at least 5.2 million (92 percent of the total).<sup>13</sup> Although this is just one of 17 situations monitored by the UNHCR, it reflects the growing trend away from camps and toward clustering in urban settings, including in areas of the world in which cities suffer from chronic resource scarcity and weak governance. Policy debates and initiatives that

fail to account for the fast-changing dynamics of forced migration to cities are going to prove dangerously off the target and ineffective.

Cities will also experience a dramatic increase in the number of so-called “environmental migrants” or “climate refugees” seeking higher ground in the coming decades. While not (yet) legally classified as refugees, between 25 million and one billion people are likely to be forcibly displaced due to climate risks by 2050 (Kamal 2017). The IOM conservatively estimates that the number could reach 200 million,<sup>14</sup> roughly four times the current number of refugees and IDPs. The World Bank claims that the number will be closer to 143 million — particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America (Rigaud et al. 2018). Most of the populations affected by rising sea levels, water salinization and heat islands are residing in low-lying coastal areas, many of them in slums and shantytowns. Indeed, two-thirds of the world's cities are on the coast, and more than 1.5 billion people live in designated coastal areas.

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## Challenges and Opportunities of Urban Displacement

Even the best-resourced municipal authorities are often overwhelmed when large numbers of refugees arrive suddenly, as the recent movement of roughly 1.5 million refugees to Western European cities<sup>15</sup> shows. From Amman to Athens, urban services and infrastructure are often quickly overwhelmed by the arrival of refugees, asylum seekers and forcibly displaced populations. The sense of disorder and otherness — together with real or perceived competition over services — can also fuel fear and resentment. These tensions cannot be glossed over — indeed, they may be exploited by nationalist and reactionary political parties, further undermining national immigration policies.

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11 In the United States, the doctrine of preemption confers cities with the right to take action, in particular when doing so does not contravene federal and state law. In other words, in the absence of a conflict with federal or state law, the power granted to municipalities is as broad as that of the federal and state legislatures. See Muggah and Thouzé (2018).

12 According to the UNHCR (2017b), roughly 84 percent of all refugees reside in developing countries.

13 See [https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria#\\_ga=2.233485918.1973862691.1521468092-1877404574.1498071330](https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria#_ga=2.233485918.1973862691.1521468092-1877404574.1498071330) for more details.

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14 See [www.iom.int/migration-and-climate-change](http://www.iom.int/migration-and-climate-change).

15 See <http://ec.europa.eu/echo/node/4115> for more details on refugee movements to Europe in 2015 and 2016.

When refugees and IDPs move into cities, there is often a perception that they represent a threat to public order. Reports of refugee youth harassing local residents are common in cities across Europe, with conservative media often generalizing from a small sample of cases. For example, one of the most widely reported cases in Europe involved a string of sexual assaults and thefts during the 2015/2016 New Year celebrations in Cologne, Hamburg, Dortmund, Dusseldorf, Stuttgart and Bielefeld. A leaked police report estimated that 1,200 women were sexually assaulted and some 2,000 men of “Arab or North African” appearance were involved in group attacks (Noack 2016). The attacks generated international shockwaves and led to the hardening of attitudes on immigration across Europe and the United States (YouGov 2016). Rumours followed that refugees were behind all wider crime waves in the region, particularly in Germany (Bershidsky 2018; Alkousaa 2018; Guttridge 2016).

Contrary to popular belief, however, refugees are not typically associated with increases in crime or wider social disturbances. Indeed, most evidence from upper-, middle- and low-income settings suggests that refugee communities — and mixed migrant communities, more generally — are *less* prone to crime than average host communities.<sup>16</sup> A recent study in the United States, for example, found that crime actually decreased in cities where refugees and asylum seekers were resettled (New American Economy 2017). For example, out of the 10 US cities accepting the largest number of refugees between 2006 and 2015, crime declined in nine — in some instances, dramatically so. The one city where crime increased — West Springfield, Massachusetts — was suffering from a wave of opioid-related crime even before refugees started arriving (*ibid.*). This is not to say that refugees and asylum claimants are not involved in crime, but rather to highlight that they are often involved at rates below the national average.

One of the reasons why crime does not increase in areas where refugees arrive is because refugee communities frequently exert greater social controls and self-restraint. In Germany, for example, Syrian and Iraqi refugees reportedly commit far fewer crimes than other residents, because they do not want to jeopardize their legal

status (Deutsche Welle 2017). That said, according to government sources, rejected asylum claimants from Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia were slightly more likely to be involved in crime than locals (Huggler 2018). Meanwhile, from Sweden to the Netherlands, there is no evidence that refugee centres contribute to rising crime, despite claims to the contrary (*Dutch News* 2018). The evidence of the association between refugees and insecurity in cities outside advanced economies is more limited. There is some research indicating that although these populations are frequently scapegoated for security concerns, refugees rarely generate significant negative impacts on public security in their host countries (UNHCR Standing Committee 1997; Grindheim 2013).

Another popular belief is that refugees are more likely to be linked to an upsurge in extremist violence in urban settings. This claim is not supported by the literature. For example, in the United States, the number of refugees arrested on terrorism-related charges since January 1, 2015 — a total of four people — pales in comparison to the total number of refugees entering the country: around 85,000 in 2016, 46 percent of whom were Muslim (Ellingsen 2017). This finding is consistent with earlier research showing that between 1975 and 2015 not a single person in the United States was murdered by a refugee from the seven countries (Iran, Libya, North Korea, Somalia, Syria, Venezuela and Yemen) on which the current US administration has imposed travel bans (Nowrasteh 2017). Although some refugee groups have historically formed militant groups (Muggah 2006) or joined some insurgent factions involved in cross-border conflicts (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2000), this activity has typically occurred with support from external state backers and is, in any case, exceedingly rare (Carrion 2015).

Even so, there is evidence that the inflow of refugee and IDP populations can impact labour markets, even if the effects are misunderstood. For one, the short-term negative effects of refugee inflows are often attenuated and frequently reversed in the longer term. A recent study examining the impacts of refugee arrivals to a US commuting zone revealed no adverse long-term impact on

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, research by Robert Adelman et al. (2017), examining immigration and refugee flows in more than 200 US cities across four decades. See also Kubrin (2009).

the US labour market.<sup>17</sup> Another study of the effects of Syrian refugees on labour markets in neighbouring countries, such as Jordan, shows that they had virtually no disruptive effects on cities, whether in relation to unemployment rates or labour force participation (Fakih and Ibrahim 2016). By contrast, when the World Bank analyzed the impact of Syrian refugees on the Turkish labour market, it found differential implications (both positive and negative), depending on such factors as the category of work, whether the work was formal or informal, and the gender of the labourer.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, there can be short- and long-term effects of refugees on urban economies depending on the existence (or not) of pro-migration policies, including the right to work, mobility rights and access to legal identity (Del Carpio and Wagner 2015).

Refugee movements also have mixed impacts on social services. Depending on the context, refugees can generate a short-term surge in demand for basic needs, which may include housing, health, education and welfare services. If it is not prepared for, addressing these needs can negatively affect service provision to host communities, including generating inconveniences and delays. In many cases, however, countries lack adequate and appropriate dispersal policies, which can generate excessive demands on cities. A review of countries in the European Union, for example, found that it was common in most cities for refugees to receive poor accommodation, uneven integration service support, slow access to labour rights, limited access to social and disability care, and poor child protection. These shortfalls were not due to the “excessive” needs of refugees and asylum claimants per se but occurred because many countries and cities lacked qualified staff and adequate resources to address refugee needs on the ground.

While the evidence is still limited, refugees appear to generate longer-term net benefits on local economies (Taylor et al. 2016). When refugees arrive with few or no assets and limited social networks, they will invariably require additional assistance

with basic services and necessities upon arrival. In Canada, for example, private sponsorship programs have helped fill this gap by leveraging private citizen networks.<sup>19</sup> In the long term, however, the net effects of refugees are frequently (but not always) positive (Reynolds 2017), especially as these populations pay taxes and contribute to the economy through increased participation in the labour market and entrepreneurial activity. Immigrants frequently have a very positive effect on pension systems in ways that can boost government finances in countries with aging populations, as is the case in parts of Europe. Skilled immigrants, in particular, are highly beneficial to the functioning of the welfare state in the context of an aging population.<sup>20</sup>

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## Piecemeal International Responses

The legal and operational standards for the protection, care and assistance of refugees in cities are gradually evolving. Neither the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, nor several human rights conventions,<sup>21</sup> include specific references to urban refugees or the roles and responsibilities of authorities in urban areas. The newly minted 2016 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 11, lay out aspirations for making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable for all, but do not explicitly mention urban

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17 This is explained in part by the adjustment of the local economy to the arrival of refugees, in production patterns, the adoption by local firms of alternative production techniques and investments by locals in education and occupational upgrading, all of which can either attenuate or even reverse the competition posed by newcomers. See Mayda (2017).

18 Even as there was displacement of informal workers, there was also an increase in formal employment for Turkish workers due to occupational upgrading (Del Carpio and Wagner 2015).

19 See [www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/guide-private-sponsorship-refugees-program.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/guide-private-sponsorship-refugees-program.html).

20 For a recent overview of this literature, see Horn (2016).

21 These include the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), as well as Convention No. 111, the Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation (1958) of the International Labour Organization.

refugees.<sup>22</sup> While non-binding, the *New Urban Agenda* document is more pointed, highlighting the importance of laws, policies and practices that prioritize the protection and care for forced migrants, including “the full respect for the human rights of refugees [and] internally displaced persons” (Habitat III Secretariat 2017, 11). It makes repeated references to the principle of non-discrimination “regardless of migration status” (Beier and Fritzsche 2017) and offers some practical steps for city authorities to improve approaches to refugee care and maintenance.

Indeed, *New Urban Agenda* explicitly calls for greater cooperation between national and local authorities to address the challenges of forced migration. This collaboration is essential, since national governments have typically undervalued the central role of host cities in all aspects of supporting refugees.<sup>23</sup> The agenda also highlights the critical role of capacity development that will lead to empowering and strengthening refugee populations. Such support is not just legal and normative. Nor is it limited to material resources. While nation-states are often skeptical and even hostile toward refugees, the agenda (Habitat III Secretariat 2017, 11) stresses the need to invest in “synergies between international migration and development at the global, regional, national, subnational and local levels by ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration through planned and well-managed migration policies, and...supporting local authorities in establishing frameworks that enable the positive contribution of migrants to cities and strengthened urban-rural linkages.” These infrastructures are especially critical in nation-states that are unable or unwilling to offer the requisite protection and support.

Among the most important recent developments with respect to the protection and care of migrants and refugees are the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration and the global compact on refugees. Still under review, these initiatives seek to

develop a comprehensive and predictable approach to growing migration, including for refugees and IDPs. The draft documents set out a wide range of principled strategies to improve policies and practices associated with protecting and caring for refugees and IDPs, but they are silent on the specific role of cities and urban authorities or the requirements of urban refugees and asylum seekers. Oddly, the current draft of the global compact on refugees is not clear at all on the specific role of urban authorities. To wit, it mentions the word “urban” only four times and “cities” just once.

While not traditionally a major provider of assistance to urban refugees and displaced persons, the World Bank has stepped up its engagement in recent years. The World Bank has issued a number of policy papers on urban refugees,<sup>24</sup> focusing particularly on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where it estimates that 80–90 percent of refugees are living in urban areas. The organization calls for more focused place-based approaches that build on, rather than duplicate, existing governance structures and service delivery mechanisms. The World Bank has made some \$1.4 billion available since 2016 through a Global Concessional Financing Facility, with a goal of supporting refugees and host communities in MENA cities. What is more, the World Bank and the UNHCR agreed to establish a new data centre to improve statistics on the patterns and dynamics of refugee movements globally.<sup>25</sup>

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## Inadequate Engagement from the UNHCR

The lead agency for refugees, the UNHCR, has pursued a piecemeal approach to urban refugees over the past two decades. After forming an Urban Refugee Working Group, the agency first set out a basic policy statement in 1997 — the “UNHCR Comprehensive Policy on Urban Refugees” (UNHCR 1997). Concerned with the financial implications of expanding its caseload, the UNHCR instead emphasized the need to *reduce* assistance and

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22 In the UNHCR’s preamble to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, there is mention in paragraph 23 of the importance of reflecting the needs of specific categories of vulnerable populations including “refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants” (see [www.unhcr.org/2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development.html](http://www.unhcr.org/2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development.html)). The UNHCR notes, however, that refugees and IDPs are not singled out as a specific group in any of the 17 SDGs. See UNHCR (2017c, 1).

23 While nation-states often deploy technocratic formulas to allocate people across communities or direct services, it is cities that must determine how to locate a housing project, integrate refugees into local schools or manage relations at the neighbourhood scale.

24 See, for example, World Bank (2017a) and Christensen and Harild (2009).

25 See, for example, World Bank (2017b).

promote self-reliance among urban refugee populations.<sup>26</sup> While the UNHCR claimed that the problems with its implementation were external,<sup>27</sup> the policy came under heavy criticism (Human Rights Watch 2002) for explicitly limiting refugees from moving to cities. A succession of internal evaluations determined that the UNHCR's 1997 policy statement was inadequate, ineffective and unevenly applied (Obi and Crisp 2002).

Following a wave of consultations, the UNHCR made tentative gestures to move beyond its minimalist approach and more assertively advocate for refugee rights in cities. An unpublished 2003 paper by the organization's Evaluation and Policy Assessment Unit (EPAU) advocated a more robust strategy, but it was later shelved. According to one analyst, the UNHCR was not prepared to endorse and formalize the paper's guiding principles, which resulted in the paralysis of policy-making processes on urban refugees (Crisp 2017b). The new proposal was deemed to be too rights-oriented and radical for some senior managers, many of whom preferred the efficiency gains of the "camp-based" model. Other staff expressed their concerns that the focus on refugees in cities could antagonize refugee-hosting countries that saw forced migrants as a political threat to regional and domestic security.

With the backing of new leadership in the UNHCR, the agency introduced an updated policy to strengthen reception, protection and integration in urban areas in 2009 (UNHCR 2009). In it, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres urged a strategy based on principles of engagement with low- and middle-income states, highlighting their responsibilities to protect and care for refugees. The 2009 policy drew heavily from the 2003 EPAU paper and emphasized the importance of protecting the rights of urban refugees, expanding comprehensive protection strategies, promoting self-reliance, expanding

partnerships with municipal authorities (including mayors), conducting urban needs assessments, improving reception and registration facilities in built-up areas, and fostering constructive relations.

While representing an improvement on the 1997 policy, the 2009 strategy was not nearly as effective as was hoped (Crisp 2017a; 2017b). The UNHCR established an Urban Refugee Steering Group to oversee its implementation, but the organization did not think through the wider financial and human resource implications of the new strategy. Predictably, UNHCR field offices were requested to do more with less and complained that they lacked the funds and skills to put the policy into practice. The ability of UNHCR staff to establish partnerships with new players — including mayors — was more fraught than expected. In the end, the new policy resulted in very little change in UNHCR practice. In 2014, the UNHCR established a separate policy on alternatives to camps (UNHCR 2014) but offered no further guidance on how to engage cities with urban refugees.

While headed by a new high commissioner, Filippo Grandi, the UNHCR has not taken any new steps to expand its approach to urban refugees. Indeed, the UNHCR's *Strategic Directions, 2017–2021* report makes a single reference to urban refugees — acknowledging that they constitute the majority of the organization's caseload<sup>28</sup> — but offers no concrete recommendations for cities or urban authorities. And while the report acknowledges that "cities and municipalities have developed creative and innovative social cohesion and integration schemes" (UNHCR 2017a, 10), it offers no further treatment of the issue, much less recommendations on how to strengthen their role. The UNHCR's inability to deliver a coherent approach to urban refugees is exacerbated by disagreements within and outside the organization. Refugee-hosting governments and implementing partners have not always been supportive.<sup>29</sup> The end result is a fragmented approach (Crisp 2017a; 2017b).

26 According to the UNHCR (2009, 2), "experience with the 1997 policy statement revealed a number of other difficulties. It was preoccupied with the growing cost of providing assistance to refugees in urban areas, which limited its scope of application. So too did its focus on the issue of refugees who take up residence in an urban area after moving in an irregular manner from their country of first asylum. In addition, the 1997 paper did not establish a sufficient balance between UNHCR's security concerns in urban settings and the need to deal with the underlying causes of the refugees' frustration."

27 Some of the key stumbling blocks, according to the UNHCR, are related to complications associated with status determination, as well as the legal limitations imposed by some states on the freedom of movement of refugees (including to cities). See UNHCR (2009).

28 The single statement is that "patterns of displacement are also changing in a rapidly urbanizing world. While significant numbers of refugees and internally displaced people are still confined to camps or live in scattered rural areas, the number fleeing into urban settings has grown, further exacerbating problems of urban poverty and exclusion. Today, six out of every 10 refugees falling under UNHCR's mandate live in urban areas" (UNHCR 2017a, 5).

29 While the UNHCR and its partners are increasingly expected to work with cities on issues related to resettlement quotas, integration models and financial assistance, it is a new and unfamiliar area of work.

Against this backdrop, cities are demanding broader international and national engagement on migration issues. It is worth noting that their calls for greater involvement are coming at a time when nation-states are backing away from their obligations to forced migrants. For example, in the United States, cities have demanded greater involvement in shaping the global compact on safe, orderly and regular migration in the wake of the country's withdrawal (Allen-Ebrahimian 2017). In 2017, the IOM, together with the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) network, hosted a global conference on cities and migration to reaffirm the central place of cities.<sup>30</sup> Approximately 150 cities from around the world signed the Mechelen Declaration, requesting a seat at the table (Brandt and Earle 2018). And in 2018, a small group of cities, led by New York, sent recommendations to improve the overall wording and text of the global compact, stressing the importance of clarifying key concepts and the responsibilities of mayors.<sup>31</sup>

Cities are also agitating for greater involvement in international refugee-related issues. Specifically, they have petitioned the UNHCR, requesting a greater voice in deciding the content of the global compact for refugees.<sup>32</sup> While the draft still makes comparatively limited mention of the role of cities in dealing with urban refugees, it does highlight the potential dividends of city twinning to share good practices and lessons on the ground.<sup>33</sup> In addition to the UCLG and 100 Resilient Cities (a non-profit organization devoted to promoting urban resilience), intercity networks such as the Global Parliament of Mayors are also agitating for more concerted engagement and seeking direct talks with the UNHCR (Global Parliament of Mayors 2017).

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30 See [www.citiesandmigration.com/](http://www.citiesandmigration.com/).

31 Private communication with officials connected to the mayors' offices of the cities of New York and Bristol, England.

32 See [https://issuu.com/brookings/docs/mayors\\_letter\\_to\\_unhcr\\_signatori/2](https://issuu.com/brookings/docs/mayors_letter_to_unhcr_signatori/2).

33 In 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. The declaration includes a comprehensive refugee response framework, designed to ease pressure on host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third country solutions and support conditions in countries of origin. The global compact on refugees is expected to be adopted in December 2018.

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## City and Intercity Responses

A growing number of cities are developing legislative and policy frameworks designed to welcome refugees and promote protection, care and assistance. Prominent examples include “welcoming cities” and “sanctuary cities” in the United States. Specifically, there are more than 100 welcoming cities committing to plan for integration, develop institutional strategies for inclusion, build leadership among new arrivals and provide support to refugees.<sup>34</sup> The roughly 500 jurisdictions describing themselves as sanctuary cities in the United States are self-selecting (Dinan 2017). Despite threats of cuts to funding, they are resisting federal efforts to enforce immigration law and seek to protect, assist, support and settle migrants, including refugees and people displaced by violence and persecution. This strategy of non-cooperation on immigration law enforcement does not mean that sanctuary cities are able to prevent federal agents from conducting raids in those urban areas.

Similar in some ways to the experience of the United States, “cities of sanctuary” in the United Kingdom offer another approach to providing compassionate solutions for refugees. Today, at least 80 cities of sanctuary are committed to welcoming refugees, asylum seekers and others seeking safety. Cities across Europe are also adopting similar strategies, in cooperation with Eurocities — a network of major European cities founded in 1986 and now bringing together the local governments of more than 140 of Europe's largest cities and 45 urban centres.<sup>35</sup> They are actively building bridges by raising public awareness, creating linkages with sister cities and fostering partnerships. These initiatives across North America and Western Europe offer examples of solidarity and positive collaboration between national and city authorities to ensure adequate care for people fleeing persecution.

While it generates tension with federal counterparts, the implementation of sanctuary policies may help contribute to greater safety

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34 See [www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/our-network#municipalities](http://www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/our-network#municipalities).

35 See <http://wsdomino.eurocities.eu/eurocities/home>.

and economic progress in the long run. Cities, states and countries with sanctuary policies are safer and more prosperous than those without them; indeed, there is no empirical evidence that sanctuary cities exhibit statistically higher rates of crime than those without sanctuary policies (Gonzalez, Collingwood and El-Khatib 2017). Sanctuary cities work to build trust between law enforcement agencies and migrant communities, enhancing overall public security. Likewise, the economies of sanctuary cities, towns and counties — whether measured in terms of the population's income, reliance on public assistance or labour force participation — are largely more resilient than their non-sanctuary counterparts.

There are countless examples of ways in which cities are strengthening their approaches to protecting and caring for urban refugees. In New York, for example, city authorities launched ActionNYC,<sup>36</sup> which offers free, safe legal assistance for migrants and refugees in multiple languages. In Barcelona, the SAIER (Service Centre for Immigrants, Emigrants and Refugees) program<sup>37</sup> provides free advice on asylum and return, while Milan works with the UNHCR and Save the Children to offer services for unaccompanied minors. Montreal established the BINAM (Bureau d'intégration des nouveaux arrivants à Montréal) program<sup>38</sup> to provide on-the-job training and mentoring to new arrivals, and São Paulo has created municipal immigration councils to help design, implement and monitor the city's policies. Likewise, cities such as Atlanta and Los Angeles<sup>39</sup> are requiring that migrants — in particular, refugees — have equal access to city facilities, services and programs regardless of their citizenship status. There are also innovations emerging from Latin America, where cities are seeking to expand cooperation across borders (Muggah, Folly and Abdenur 2018; Muggah 2017a).

Cities are also banding together, pooling their resources to achieve greater influence on the urban refugee agenda. Today there are more than 200 intercity networks dedicated to urban priorities ranging from governance and climate

change to public safety and migration. Several of them have dedicated guidelines on how cities can protect and care for refugees. For example, the Global Parliament of Mayors, established in 2016, focuses on, among other things, promoting inclusive cities for refugees and advocating on their behalf.<sup>40</sup> The International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities is another.<sup>41</sup> As noted above, coalitions such as the UCLG have teamed up with think tanks and international agencies to strengthen information sharing and best practices.<sup>42</sup> Another new initiative is Urban20, which is promoting social integration, among other issues, and planning an inaugural meeting in October 2018.<sup>43</sup> There are also opportunities to expand intercity collaboration on urban refugee priorities; a prime example is the Global Alliance for Urban Crises' recent establishment of a working group on protracted urban displacement.<sup>44</sup>

Regional city networks are also stepping up on the urban refugee agenda. For example, in 2015, Eurocities released a statement on refugees in the wake of the influx of refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, which emphasized how “cities in arrival, transit and destination countries in Europe...have a particular role in the guarantee of basic protection to asylum claimants and in the reception and integration of newcomers...” (Eurocities 2015, 1). Since then, Eurocities has launched a new initiative, Solidarity Cities, which aims to help cities to provide professional social support and guidance, promote positive public perceptions of asylum seekers and identify effective long-term solutions to protect social cohesion and integration.<sup>45</sup> After all, cities are where asylum seekers wait for status determination, and where they remain as undocumented migrants if their applications are rejected or if return decisions are not enforced.

36 See [www1.nyc.gov/site/actionnyc/index.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/actionnyc/index.page).

37 See [www.bcn.cat/novaciudadania/arees/en/saier/saier.html](http://www.bcn.cat/novaciudadania/arees/en/saier/saier.html).

38 See [www1.ville.montreal.qc.ca/banque311/content/int%C3%A9gration-des-nouveaux-arrivants](http://www1.ville.montreal.qc.ca/banque311/content/int%C3%A9gration-des-nouveaux-arrivants).

39 See [www.lamayor.org/sites/g/files/wph446/f/page/file/Exec.%20Dir.%20No.%202020-Standing%20with%20Immigrants.pdf](http://www.lamayor.org/sites/g/files/wph446/f/page/file/Exec.%20Dir.%20No.%202020-Standing%20with%20Immigrants.pdf).

40 See <https://globalparliamentofmayors.org/>.

41 See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2016).

42 Examples include the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Profiles and Dialogue project, involving 10 cities in Europe and the Middle East. See [www.uclg.org/en/issues/migration](http://www.uclg.org/en/issues/migration).

43 See [www.c40.org/press\\_releases/u20-cities-leading-voices-g20-summit-buenos-aires](http://www.c40.org/press_releases/u20-cities-leading-voices-g20-summit-buenos-aires).

44 See <http://urbancrises.org/>.

45 See <http://solidaritycities.eu/>.



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## Recommendations

City authorities and civil society organizations are often the first line of support for migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, whether they are fleeing political, social or economic threats (Eurocities 2016; World Economic Forum 2017). Cities routinely provide targeted programs for the protection, care and, eventually, integration of newcomers. In ideal cases, national and city authorities may facilitate legal access to existing health, education and social services rather than creating parallel systems. Private and non-governmental entities are often heavily involved in providing essential integration and resettlement support. In other cases, however, nation-states may be hostile to accepting newcomers and may adopt restrictive policies to limit their entry. The experiences surrounding forced migration to the city — of both newcomers and hosts — thus vary widely, sometimes even within a given country.

The generosity of cities stands in contrast to the actions of the growing number of nation-states closing their borders, dividing communities and denouncing migrants. For the most part, cities are instinctively open, diverse, cosmopolitan and solutions-oriented. Cities are not asking permission to provide sanctuary to the most vulnerable members of society: they are often stepping up when national authorities fail to take action. While not all cities have equal capacity, many of them are actively supporting refugees and asylum seekers in ways aligned with internationally accepted principles of human rights, social justice and refugee law. In the process, cities are affirming their urban sovereignty and expressing the rights and responsibilities of self-governance (Muggah and Barber 2016).

Less positively, the international humanitarian and development system has been comparatively slow to recognize the urban turn in forced displacement. Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, the focus was largely on refugees residing in rural areas and “warehoused” in camps. This bias was reinforced by UN member states, especially those hosting large numbers of refugees. For its part, the UNHCR adopted an explicitly anti-urban approach to refugees up until the late

1990s.<sup>46</sup> It advocated policies to reduce refugee inflows to cities, largely at the request of member states. Not surprisingly, research underlined the weak performance of the UNHCR in meeting urban refugee needs (Obi and Crisp 2001). More recently, megatrends such as urbanization (and, increasingly, climate change) are forcing a change of approach. Cities, together with networks such as Urban Refugees, which works with dozens of organizations in 40 countries,<sup>47</sup> are taking the lead.

Cities have a comparative advantage when it comes to protecting and assisting refugees. Nation-states enact legislation, enforce rules and in some cases enact programs that are top-down. By contrast, cities are required to operate in the practical realm and are key to delivering interventions on the ground (Katz and Noring 2016). Cities are uniquely placed to offer services for refugees and asylum seekers and to tailor them to the specific requirements of new arrivals and the local community. While cities may not be in a position to enact immigration legislation, they can change laws and policies to make life easier for refugees. Cities will need resources to scale up their activities — and this may require changes in laws so that cities can determine their own residence policies and keep tax revenues generated by migrants who move there. While all cities are distinct, there are nevertheless some lessons that can be distilled and shared around the world.

**Where possible, adopt multi-level and multi-stakeholder strategies to promote refugee protection and assistance:** Approaches to addressing refugee needs should align national, state and city priorities. Ideally, multi-level governance, dialogue and cooperation with national counterparts should be pursued. In most cases, cities will need to build the “political space” for additional engagement and develop creative resource mobilization strategies. Some finances may come from international agencies and private companies, either channelled through or around national counterparts. Other resources may be provided directly from national and state-level authorities. Still more support may be generated from municipal public and private partners. Indeed, there are exciting examples

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<sup>46</sup> The UNHCR issued its first policy on urban refugees in 1997, urging national state responsibility for protection, assistance and refugee self-reliance. See UNHCR (1997).

<sup>47</sup> See <http://urban-refugees.org/the-ngo-network/>.

of cities co-producing services with businesses and neighbourhood organizations. These kinds of highly local and horizontal collaborations are critical to reaching the most vulnerable groups.

**Strengthen information collection and sharing systems to improve overall coordination and cooperation:** A major challenge facing city service providers — whether they are public, private or non-governmental — is information asymmetry. In many cities there may be a lack of understanding among service providers and refugees or asylum claimants themselves of specific laws and policies. What is more, public, private and third-sector service providers may also have a poor grasp of refugee demographics and diverse refugee needs. Information that is better organized and more accessible can help improve the prioritization of specific services and strengthen referral systems. At the same time, special precautions are required to protect the personal data of refugees and asylum claimants, in particular biometric information that could put individuals at risk (Crisp 2018).

**Adopt comprehensive solutions involving multiple partners, rather than channelling all responses through a single entity:** It is not enough to develop a dedicated public department or unit that effectively and efficiently centralizes all responsibilities for urban refugees. Instead, it is preferable to adopt a coordinated approach to protection, assistance and durable solutions that brings together partners from government, business and civil society. City leaders need to build bridges with key stakeholders — housing authorities, property developers, financial services, trade associations, health and education providers, legal advocates, media networks and others. Ensuring early involvement of local service providers — schools, hospitals, clinics and banks — and clarifying how refugees and asylum claimants can apply for services will also help with the integration process. Requiring that the views of refugees are included in formal public and private sector performance evaluations can help build incentives for city authorities to welcome them.

**Promote strategies that guarantee equal access and create incentives for local integration:** There are several considerations when assessing city-based strategies to support migrants and refugees. First, since all cities face constraints in housing, health care and employment, special treatment for refugees can foster a sense of unfairness among host communities. Second, local decision makers

often do not have a strong incentive to support refugees who are non-voters. Third, programs that grant services to refugees based on legal rather than residential status can unintentionally perpetuate stigma. Fourth, education and socialization programs are essential, especially those that teach language skills. Strategies that emphasize equal access and needs-based assistance are advisable. It is important to stress that such a focus constitutes a potential challenge to the UNHCR's mandate, given the organization's status-based approach to assisting refugees and asylum seekers.

**Develop new guidance for cities that sets out good practices for protection, care and assistance, as well as for voluntary return of urban refugees and asylum claimants:** The UNHCR's 2009 policy and the *New Urban Agenda* both offer important insights that could inform the production of such guidance. Specific examples of standards and practices drawn from cities associated with the UCLG, Eurocities, 100 Resilient Cities, the Urban Alliance and the Global Parliament of Mayors could also be consulted. These guidelines could issue standards for the provision of legal rights, subsistence, health, education and accommodation assistance.<sup>48</sup> They could also highlight the importance of language training and of recognizing the specific academic and vocational qualifications of new arrivals and the right to access employment, along with strategies to include refugees in decision making, implementation and monitoring of interventions.

**Support training programs for aid organizations and local governments involved in providing urban protection, care and assistance:** More training is needed for large aid organizations — which, traditionally focused on camps, have been slow to upgrade their capacities and reorient their approaches — to help them transition to supporting urban refugees. Even greater attention is required to strengthen the capacities of city-based organizations responsible for providing services and support. Organizations such as Urban Refugees<sup>49</sup> and Welcoming Cities and Counties<sup>50</sup> are helping local organizations to build skills in resettling and reintegrating new refugees, as well as in integrating newcomers and marginalized members

<sup>48</sup> See UNESCO (2016) and the Toolkit for Equality initiative at [www.eccar.info/en/eccar-toolkit-equality](http://www.eccar.info/en/eccar-toolkit-equality).

<sup>49</sup> See [www.urban-refugees.org/](http://www.urban-refugees.org/).

<sup>50</sup> See [www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/member-municipalities](http://www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/member-municipalities).

of host communities (who may see newcomers as competitors for scarce resources/resources already inaccessible to them). In some cases, these local organizations are administered by refugees and connected using a range of web-based platforms.

**Advocate for adequate financial assistance from national authorities to support city-based, co-designed solutions for refugees:** Cities can experience enormous strain on their physical and service infrastructure with mass or even medium influxes of refugees and newcomers. There is a risk that these surges overwhelm local capacities and generate tension in the host community. These tensions can not only undermine the protection of refugees, but also inflame populist politics at the national level. At a minimum, international and national authorities must make emergency resources available in the event of large and rapid arrivals of migrants. National governments may resist these efforts, given their desire to centralize resources and limit city discretion. Even so, there are some international financial institutions providing loans, credit and grants directly to cities in low- and middle-income settings where resources are especially scarce. Where possible, cities should emphasize co-designed strategies with local public, private and non-governmental actors.<sup>51</sup>

**Explore options for state- or city-based visas for refugees and asylum claimants:** At the moment, visas are typically issued at the country level and offer few controls over where new arrivals move. While a controversial proposal, state- or even city-based visas could help redirect immigration that could bring significant dividends to cities and refugees and asylum claimants. Such a measure could also include temporary work permits and even pathways to citizenship. So that their effectiveness can be gauged, such strategies are already being tested in the case of migrants — including through Canada’s Provincial Nominee Program.<sup>52</sup> Several US states are also seeking to enact similar state-based systems. Meanwhile, the mayor of Palermo, Italy, offers all new arrivals “honorary citizenship” ceremonies. He has advocated the abolishment of resident permits for migrants (including refugees), advocating

instead for the European Union to allow complete freedom of movement (van der Zee 2017).

**Promote exchanges across cities, including through South-South cooperation and refugee-led, community-based organizations:** Since developing world cities find themselves at the forefront of dealing with intensifying refugee flows but often operate in isolation from one another, they would benefit from more channels for sharing experiences and adopting best practices. Partnering cities in developing countries and incorporating them into intercity networks could help to promote the development, adoption and adaptation of innovative solutions to mitigate the risks and optimize the benefits of refugee flows to such cities.

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51 Consider the case of the dozen Spanish cities that set up a network to allow residents to volunteer their homes to refugee arrivals (Anderson 2015).

52 See [www.canadaexpressentry.org/provincial-nominee-program/](http://www.canadaexpressentry.org/provincial-nominee-program/).

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## About CIGI

We are the Centre for International Governance Innovation: an independent, non-partisan think tank with an objective and uniquely global perspective. Our research, opinions and public voice make a difference in today's world by bringing clarity and innovative thinking to global policy making. By working across disciplines and in partnership with the best peers and experts, we are the benchmark for influential research and trusted analysis.

Our research programs focus on governance of the global economy, global security and politics, and international law in collaboration with a range of strategic partners and support from the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, as well as founder Jim Balsillie.

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## À propos du CIGI

Au Centre pour l'innovation dans la gouvernance internationale (CIGI), nous formons un groupe de réflexion indépendant et non partisan doté d'un point de vue objectif et unique de portée mondiale. Nos recherches, nos avis et nos interventions publiques ont des effets réels sur le monde d'aujourd'hui car ils apportent de la clarté et une réflexion novatrice pour l'élaboration des politiques à l'échelle internationale. En raison des travaux accomplis en collaboration et en partenariat avec des pairs et des spécialistes interdisciplinaires des plus compétents, nous sommes devenus une référence grâce à l'influence de nos recherches et à la fiabilité de nos analyses.

Nos programmes de recherche ont trait à la gouvernance dans les domaines suivants : l'économie mondiale, la sécurité et les politiques mondiales, et le droit international, et nous les exécutons avec la collaboration de nombreux partenaires stratégiques et le soutien des gouvernements du Canada et de l'Ontario ainsi que du fondateur du CIGI, Jim Balsillie.

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## About the World Refugee Council

There are more than 21 million refugees worldwide. Over half are under the age of 18. As a growing number of these individuals are forced to flee their homelands in search of safety, they are faced with severe limitations on the availability and quality of asylum, leading them to spend longer in exile today than ever before.

The current refugee system is not equipped to respond to the refugee crisis in a predictable or comprehensive manner. When a crisis erupts, home countries, countries of first asylum, transit countries and destination countries unexpectedly find themselves coping with large numbers of refugees flowing within or over their borders. Support from the international community is typically ad hoc, sporadic and woefully inadequate.

### Bold Thinking for a New Refugee System

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is leading a consensus-driven effort to produce a new Global Compact for refugees in 2018. The World Refugee Council (WRC), established in May 2017 by the Centre for International Governance Innovation, is intended to complement its efforts.

The WRC seeks to offer bold strategic thinking about how the international community can comprehensively respond to refugees based on the principles of international cooperation and responsibility sharing. The Council is comprised of thought leaders, practitioners and innovators drawn from regions around the world and is supported by a research advisory network.

The WRC will explore advances in technology, innovative financing opportunities and prospects for strengthening existing international law to craft and advance a strategic vision for refugees and the associated countries.

The Council will produce a final report grounded by empirical research and informed by an extensive program of outreach to governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society. The Council aims to have concluded its work by early 2019.

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## À propos du Conseil mondial pour les réfugiés

Il y a en ce moment dans le monde plus de 21 millions de réfugiés, et plus de la moitié d'entre eux ont moins de 18 ans. En outre, de plus en plus de personnes sont forcées de quitter leur pays natal et partent à la recherche d'une sécurité, et elles sont alors confrontées aux limites importantes qui existent quant aux possibilités d'accueil et à la qualité de ce dernier. À cause de cette situation, les réfugiés passent maintenant plus de temps que jamais auparavant en exil.

En ce moment, le système de protection des réfugiés ne permet pas de réagir adéquatement à la crise des réfugiés d'une façon planifiée et globale. Quand une crise éclate, les pays de premier asile, les pays de transit et les pays de destination finale se retrouvent sans l'avoir prévu à devoir composer avec un grand nombre de réfugiés qui arrivent sur leur territoire, le traversent ou en partent. Et le soutien fourni dans ce contexte par la communauté internationale est en règle générale ponctuel, irrégulier et nettement inadéquat.

### Des idées audacieuses pour un nouveau système de protection des réfugiés

Le Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés (HCR) dirige des efforts découlant d'un consensus et visant à instaurer un nouveau « pacte mondial pour les réfugiés » en 2018. Mis sur pied en mai 2017 par le Centre pour l'innovation dans la gouvernance internationale (CIGI), le Conseil mondial pour les réfugiés (CMR) veut compléter ces efforts.

Le CMR vise à proposer une réflexion stratégique audacieuse sur la manière dont la communauté internationale peut réagir de façon globale aux déplacements de réfugiés, et ce, en se fondant sur les principes de la coopération internationale et du partage des responsabilités. Formé de leaders, de praticiens et d'innovateurs éclairés provenant de toutes les régions du globe, le CMR bénéficie du soutien d'un réseau consultatif de recherche.

Le CMR examinera les progrès techniques, les occasions de financement novatrices ainsi que les possibilités pour ce qui est de renforcer le droit international et d'y intégrer une vision stratégique pour les réfugiés et les pays concernés.

Par ailleurs, le CMR produira un rapport final fondé sur des recherches empiriques et sur les résultats d'un vaste programme de sensibilisation ciblant les gouvernements, les organisations intergouvernementales et la société civile. Son objectif est de terminer son travail au début de 2019.



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