

Mixed migration and cities

Urban frontlines for displacement and mobility



Front cover photo credit: Radiokafka / Shutterstock.
Berlin, Germany

Berlin is an example of a "welcoming city" in terms of migrants and refugees, having taken many steps to integrate refugees and offer welcome to those stranded in other parts of Europe. In September 2020, around 5,000 demonstrators marched in Berlin to call on Germany to do more for refugees and migrants made homeless in Greece. Protesters said the government should not block state or local efforts to help.

Photo credit: G.M.B. Akash / Panos. 'Geneva camp' Dhaka, Bangladesh

Many cities have 'invisible' communities of refugees and migrants who live in their midst, often without full documentation or in contexts where the state is not entirely clear on their status. Here, a long term refugee community of Muslims, originally from Bihar, are now living in Bangladesh. Without clear and accepted status, they suffered decades of inter-generational discrimination, lack of access to services, jobs and education. In effect integration has failed and systemic inequality and irregularism has been established. Similar situations can be found in hundreds of cities globally.



Photo credit: Nowaczyk / Shutterstock. Lima, Peru

In 2019, IOM estimated that there were 673 million internal migrants globally. They are the main contributors to urban growth and urbanisation of countries worldwide. Although international migration dominates politics and headlines, the quiet and continuous movement of millions as internal migrants is a far greater phenomenon. Invariably when they arrive in their “arrival cities” they start at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder – normally resulting in their living in precarious, dangerous, informal settlements such as this shanty town on the side of Cerro San Cristobal, Andes Mountain, Lima, Peru.



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Contents

- 5 Acknowledgements
- 7 Foreword by DRC Secretary General
- 8 Introduction by the Head of the Mixed Migration Centre
- 10 Introduction to the Mixed Migration Centre

Section 1: Keeping track

- 14 **Report** Introduction: the far-reaching effects of Covid-19
- 19 **Report** Africa
- 32 **Report** The Middle East
- 38 **Report** The Americas
- 48 **Report** Europe
- 62 **Report** Asia

Section 2: The migrants' world

- 76 **Urban Voices** Bamako, Mali
- 77 **Urban Voices** Turin, Italy
- 78 **Interview** Jean-Paul Cavaliere - The corridor fallacy
- 82 **Urban Voices** Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 83 **Urban Voices** Nairobi, Kenya
- 84 **Interview** Michele LeVoy - Rights without papers
- 89 **Urban Voices** Bogotá, Colombia
- 90 **Urban Voices** Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 91 **Urban Voices** Tunis, Tunisia
- 92 **Interview** Mohammed Badran - Count us in
- 96 **Urban Voices** Tehran, Iran
- 98 **4Mi introduction** The Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative
- 100 **4Mi graphics** Urban origins
- 108 **4Mi graphics** Urban mixed migration hubs (1):
Why do refugees and migrants stop in cities?
- 110 **4Mi graphics** Urban mixed migration hubs (2):
Which cities are considered dangerous by refugees and migrants, and why?
- 112 **4Mi graphics** How has Covid-19 affected refugees and migrants in urban centres?

Section 3: Urban mixed migration

- 124 **Essay** Frontline cities – the urban reality of mixed migration
- 133 **Report** Data gaps
- 136 **Interview** Doug Saunders - Sticking points
- 142 **Urban spotlights** 17 spotlights
- 152 **Essay** Smugglers' paradise – cities as hubs of the illicit migration business
- 160 **Interview** Mark Micallef - The diversity and dynamism of people smuggling
- 164 **Essay** Unsafe havens – displacement within and between cities
- 172 **Case study** Vulnerable in cities
- 174 **Interview** Caterina Sarfatti - Filling the void
- 178 **Essay** Risky cities, mean streets
- 184 **Interview** Giuseppina Nicolini - Beyond emergency
- 190 **Essay** Climate exposure – the complex interplay between cities, climate change and mixed migration
- 196 **Interview** Kim Turner - Beyond the open door
- 200 **Essay** First responders – what opportunities and obstacles face urban migrants and refugees?
- 206 **Interview** Biao Xiang - Covid as catalyst
- 210 **Essay** Hot zones – the first global pandemic of the urban migrant district

Section 4: Policy and politics

- 222 **Essay** Sanctuary cities – solidarity through defiance
- 230 **Interview** Yvonne Aki-Sawyer - Invest in people, not walls
- 234 **Essay** A warmer welcome – city planners preparing for future flows
- 244 **Interview** Maimunah Mohd Sharif - Collective responsibilities
- 250 **Report** Normalisation of the extreme 2020
- 258 **Interview** Marvin Rees - Equity now!
- 262 **Report** Cities empowered
- 272 **Interview** Vittoria Zanuso - Cities of power

Foreword

This third annual flagship report by the Mixed Migration Centre, the Mixed Migration Review 2020, focuses on mixed migration and cities. This is a very timely and important focus for the Danish Refugee Council, since most of the world's displaced live in cities. As indicated by the subtitle of this report, cities are the urban frontlines of displacement and mobility, whether people on the move pass through them in transit or settle in them for the longer term, as many refugees and migrants do.

Urban centres provide refugees and migrants with important opportunities but can also expose them to a variety of risks. This has been made abundantly clear during the Covid-19 pandemic, during which many find themselves particularly vulnerable, facing job losses, poor housing and living conditions, and difficulties accessing basic services.

Reliable and compelling evidence on exactly how refugees and migrants are affected by Covid-19 is crucial. We are pleased that MMC, through its global field-based network of monitors, managed to quickly adapt its face-to-face data collection programme, the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi), to conduct remote surveys focused on the impact of Covid-19. Surveying many thousands of people on the move in countries all over the world, 4Mi has generated an unparalleled database that provides a unique insight in the human reality of refugees and migrants during these unprecedented and challenging times. 4Mi data from eight major cities around the world features in the MMR 2020.

The Covid-19 crisis is far from over and will continue to affect mobility and mixed migration in various ways. In some places, the pandemic has been a driver of migration, leading to increased movements. In other places, movement restrictions to contain the virus brought mixed migration to a standstill, with millions of people stranded all over the world.

This shows how important it is to keep track, to monitor trends and analyse the dynamics behind them, to understand what is happening and why, and to act upon this knowledge. This is what MMC teams do every day and this is what this Mixed Migration Review offers.

The MMR 2020 provides interesting new perspectives and food for thought through essays, data, and stories from refugees and migrants themselves. It is a rich report, adding much-needed nuance and expert analysis to the often-emotional debates on migration and refugees. Discussing topics such as urbanisation, the

interplay between cities, migration and climate change, displacement within and from cities, pandemics, and much more, it touches upon some of the key trends and challenges of today's world, all through an urban lens.

In the response to Covid-19 we have witnessed many positive developments: actions by governments and other stakeholders to help refugees and migrants affected by the pandemic, such as status regularisation, release from immigration detention, and ensuring access to healthcare for all. Unfortunately, we also continue to witness what we call a "normalisation of the extreme", the mainstreaming of violent or harsh treatment of refugees and migrants, sometimes under the cover of Covid.

It remains crucial to document such practices and to keep offering reliable data and evidence, nuanced and rational analysis, and new, original insights to inform and inspire policy choices and responses based on principles, values and decency.

I strongly encourage you all – policymakers, practitioners, journalists, researchers, humanitarian partners – to read this report, for inspiration and reflection, to collectively try to change the narrative and improve our responses and policies to mixed migration.



Charlotte Slente,
DRC Secretary General

Introduction

“Most migrants leave cities, travel through cities, turn up in cities, and return to cities”, says Mayor of Bristol Marvin Rees in his interview in this Mixed Migration Review 2020 ([see p258](#)). While migration is controlled by states, most migrants settle in cities and it is cities that provide them with housing, jobs, education, healthcare, and other services.

In a context of accelerating urbanisation, the future of migration will be increasingly shaped by how cities address migration. Cities attract internal and international migrants and offer refuge to a majority of today’s forcibly displaced—an estimated 60 percent of refugees and even 80 percent of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

This year’s Mixed Migration Review, accordingly, focuses on urban migration. Cities play a crucial role in mixed migration, regardless of people’s legal status, reasons for migrating, or whether the city they find themselves in is a place of transit or a destination. Cities offer multiple opportunities to people in mixed migration flows and serve many purposes. Those still in transit may temporarily stop in cities to connect to onward transportation, earn money and/or look for a smuggler ([see p152](#))¹ to continue their journey, catch up with family and friends, or to change plans. For those intending to stay, cities can offer refuge, security, livelihood opportunities or freedom, anonymity and invisibility—if that’s what they are seeking.

But cities can also expose refugees and migrants to risks, such as insecurity, crime, and poor housing and living conditions ([see p200](#)). Similarly, the presence—be it temporary or longer-term—of refugees and migrants in cities presents various opportunities and risks to cities themselves in terms of politics, management and prosperity ([see p178](#)). Urban migration is central to intra-regional movements, as cities also provide opportunities for millions of people on the move and boost regional economic growth.

Additionally, migrants and refugees can face specific risks in cities. For example, cities around the world—especially in coastal areas—will face the consequences of climate change, including rising sea levels, droughts, and lack of access to fresh water for a fast-growing population ([see p190](#)). Furthermore, internal migrants, international migrants, refugees, and IDPs in cities may face primary or secondary displacement within or between cities, for

example due to conflict, development (e.g. gentrification) and disasters, an important, but under-researched issue ([see p164](#)).

As highlighted by the global Covid-19 pandemic ([see p210](#)), there is a crucial link between human mobility and cities in times of crisis. In some regions we have seen thousands of internal migrant workers, faced with the prospect of losing their already precarious income-generating activities, quickly leaving cities to go back to rural areas, while in other places thousands of international migrant workers became stuck in cities around the world.

Clearly, urban policies cannot ignore migration, and migration policies cannot ignore urbanisation. There can be tension between national and local approaches to mixed migration, exemplified by the rise of so-called “sanctuary cities” ([see p222](#)) around the globe and an often more pragmatic approach to migration at local level that diverges from the more ideologically driven and increasingly securitised approaches and policies at national levels. Many of the positive examples we witness at city levels, including in their responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, stand in stark contrast with the actions and policies implemented by some states. As in last year’s edition, the MMR 2020 provides a sobering overview of a “normalisation of the extreme”, with a range of examples of harsh and even violent treatment of refugees and migrants, sometimes under the cover of Covid, in many countries around the world ([see p250](#)).

It has been argued by Benjamin Barber—in his 2013 book *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*²—that cities’ relative lack of sovereignty compared to that of nation states ironically makes them *more* powerful. Not having to worry about giving up sovereignty, they are better able to seek common interests and cooperate across borders on global issues such as migration. This acknowledgement is signified by the growing role of cities and mayors in global migration governance discussions ([see p262](#)). There is an increasing number of new initiatives, with cities across every region of the world directly cooperating with each other on migration issues.

To enable effective and inclusive urban planning ([see p234](#)), city leaders and local policymakers need to know who resides in their cities, whether they are there

1 This and most subsequent page references in this introduction relate to the thematic essays in this review.

2 Published by Yale University Press.

permanently or in transit in mixed migration flows. However, a key obstacle for those seeking to integrate urban and migration policy is the lack of data on migration gathered at the city level ([see p133](#)). Cities host hard-to-reach populations, including people without regular status and those on the move, which presents challenges in terms of data collection, protection responses and policy development.

MMC's Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) fills some of this data gap. Over the course of 2019 and 2020, 4Mi surveyed over 15,000 refugees and migrants, initially conducting face-to-face questionnaires as usual until the pandemic hit in March, when we switched to remote surveys, primarily on the impact of Covid-19 ([see p112](#)). The 4Mi data in this year's Review is all presented through an urban lens ([see p100 onwards](#)). It shows the importance of cities as springboards, places where people accumulate resources before embarking on international migration journeys; the crucial role of cities as major stop-overs to rest, earn money or connect to smugglers; the differences between those leaving from rural and urban places; and it lists the most dangerous cities the interviewed refugees and migrants passed through.

The MMR offers a platform for debate, via our regular series of interviews ([starting on p78](#)) with migration experts, policymakers, academics, and mayors, and via thematic essays ([starting on page 124](#)) written by experts with specialist knowledge and experience of various aspects of urban migration.

Like previous editions, MMR 2020 opens ([on p14](#)) with an overview of key trends and developments in mixed migration across the globe as well as selected policy and legislative developments. Additionally, MMR 2020 offers a series of "urban spotlights" on cities all over the world to exemplify specific issues related to mixed migration and cities.

Urban case studies

As part of MMC's focus on urban migration, MMC regional hubs conducted a series of in-depth urban migration case studies in Bamako, Bogota, Kuala Lumpur, Nairobi and Tunis. The case studies examine mixed migration dynamics in these cities by looking at urban opportunities for refugees and migrants, the risks they may face and the impact of Covid-19 on refugees and migrants in these particular urban centres. The case studies are published as separate reports and are available here: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/topics/urban-migration/>

Finally, the report includes a series of "urban voices", first-hand accounts of city life from refugees and migrants in Bamako, Bogotá, Kuala Lumpur, Nairobi, Teheran, Tunis, and Turin ([starting from page 76](#)). These individual migration stories give an important voice to people on the move and offer examples of the many twists and turns—a concept recently framed as "circumstantial migration" by migration scholar Jørgen Carling—in refugees' and migrants' lives and the role that cities play in their migration trajectories, experiences and decision making.³



Bram Frouws
Head of the Mixed Migration Centre

3 Carling, J. (2020) [Circumstantial migration: how Gambian journeys to China enrich migration theory](#). Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.

Introduction to the Mixed Migration Centre

What is the MMC?

The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy development on mixed migration.

What is MMC's mission?

The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, positively impact global and regional migration policies, inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move, and stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

What is MMC's vision?

Migration policies, responses and public debate are based on credible evidence and nuanced understanding of mixed migration, placing human rights and protection of all people on the move at the centre.

What are MMC's objectives?

- To contribute to a better, more nuanced and balanced understanding of mixed migration (knowledge)
- To contribute to evidence-based and better-informed migration policies and debates (policy)
- To contribute to effective evidence-based protection responses for people on the move (programming)

What is MMC's relationship with the Danish Refugee Council?

The MMC is part of and is governed by DRC. While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis, and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect that of DRC.

Where does MMC work?

The MMC focuses on seven core regions: Eastern Africa & Yemen, North Africa, West Africa, Middle East, Europe, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. The 36 staff members of MMC are based in Geneva and in its regional hubs in Amman, Bangkok, Bogota, Copenhagen, Dakar, Nairobi and Tunis, where it works in close cooperation with regional partners, stakeholders and donors. Through the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi) approximately 100 monitors collect data on mixed migration in over 20 countries across different migration routes globally, conducting approximately 10,000 in-depth interviews with refugees and migrants on the move annually.

For more information on MMC visit our website:

www.mixedmigration.org

follow us on: [@Mixed_Migration](https://twitter.com/Mixed_Migration)

or write to us at: info@mixedmigration.org

Who supports MMC and the Mixed Migration Review?

The Mixed Migration Review 2020 builds upon the work by the various MMC regional hubs and 4Mi data collection projects, supported by a wide range of donors, including (between mid-2019 and November 2020): DANIDA, the European Commission, Frantz Hoffmanns Mindelegat, GIZ, ICMPD, le Ministère Français de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, OHCHR, Robert Bosch Stiftung, Swedish Postcode Foundation, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the START Network, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), UNFPA, UNHCR, USAID, Winrock International and the World Bank (through IGAD).

Photo credit: Mark Henley / Panos. Paris, France

Young African refugees, migrants and second-generation Africans in France thrive in certain quarters of cities, creating and maintaining their own support systems and enjoying their own culture, foods, and languages. Thriving communities like this in Chateau Rouge in the 18th arrondissement of Paris often provide very positive experiences to newly arrived migrants and refugees who integrate quickly. The urban experiences of newly arrived migrants and refugees is not always negative, solitary or without colour even if integration into the wider host community is more problematic where they often face institutional and attitudinal barriers.



Photo credit: Sk Hasan Ali / Shutterstock. Dhaka, Bangladesh

A massive fire at the Shialbari Jhilpar Slum in Rupnagar area razed hundreds of shanties to the ground, leaving thousands homeless. In many cities in developing countries internal migrants, refugees and asylum seekers reside with other urban poor in informal settlements that are far less protected and more prone to natural and man-made disasters. In some cases involving fires in slums, the risk is not accidental but the result of deliberate arson when the valuable land they live on is in dispute between developers and eviction cannot be effected through regular channels.



Section 1

Keeping track

A detailed roundup of mixed migration trends and policy responses from around the world in 2020.

This section offers an overview of mixed migration and policy responses from across the world. After an introduction that focusses on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the section is separated into the following regions: Africa, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, the Americas, and Europe, detailing both key developments regarding people on the move and the policies adopted or actions taken national authorities.¹

Introduction: the far-reaching effects of Covid-19

By Peter Grant²

Snapshot of global mixed migrations flows

While the coronavirus pandemic has undoubtedly exacerbated the plight of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in mixed migration flows around the world, its impact on the scale of movements varies considerably by location. While migration from East Africa to Yemen has reduced significantly since the outbreak of Covid-19 and even resulted in thousands of returns to Ethiopia from Saudi Arabia, migration from the Maghreb to Italy has increased. Meanwhile, the crisis in the Sahel has continued to displace tens of thousands of people, with projections suggesting that the spread of the virus could result in the displacement of 1 million more. In the Middle East, where the crises in Syria and Yemen have deepened, the pandemic has highlighted the vulnerability of the millions of migrant workers in the Gulf who have faced quarantine, job losses and even deportation to their countries of origin. In the Americas, many people have been stranded en route to the north as a result of restrictions, with some Venezuelan refugees, migrants and asylum seekers even attempting reverse migration back into Venezuela due to loss of livelihood. In Europe, meanwhile, arrivals through the Eastern Mediterranean route have dwindled to historic lows as border controls have hardened, justified in part by the pandemic. And in Asia, hundreds of thousands of Afghans have left Iran to return to Afghanistan as economic hardship and an increasingly hostile environment in the country have been exacerbated by the spread of Covid-19.

Normalising the extreme

In the last few years, the mixed migration landscape has increasingly been characterised by the “normalisation of the extreme”: the mainstreaming of measures, from militarised border control to indefinite detentions, that would have been almost unthinkable a decade ago. It is important to remember that, even before the outbreak of Covid-19, migration management in many parts of the world was already marked by violence, protection failures, and human rights violations.³ The pandemic has, however, brought these underlying pathologies into a harsh new light. As the virus has spread, it has made the longstanding plight of millions of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers impossible to ignore.

For them, the impact of the pandemic has been very significant. While border closures have left thousands stranded, restrictions on movement within countries

have been devastating to local economies, hitting migrant workers in the informal sector or without documentation particularly hard. The implications have not only left many migrant workers destitute and without savings, plunging them into even greater precarity, but have also impacted profoundly on communities in their home countries where remittance flows have suddenly come to a halt. At the same time, refugee registration and other essential services were also widely suspended. In some countries, the pandemic has even appeared to be used as a pretext to impose more draconian restrictions on refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, as well as to suspend even minimal rights and protections, illustrating how easily a crisis can enable a further slide in standards that would have been deemed unacceptable only a short while before.

Though each region of the world has its own dynamics, there are some shared patterns to the issues facing refugees, migrants and asylum seekers:

- In **Africa**, border closures have left thousands stranded and driven down flows dramatically along some key migration routes, such as maritime crossings from the Horn of Africa to Yemen. Conflict-related displacement has continued regardless, however, leaving those fleeing violence at even greater risk. Meanwhile, crossings to Italy from the North of Africa have increased, despite Covid-19 and the continued dangers of the journey, with an increasing share of Maghreb nationals (particularly Tunisians) among those migrating.
- In the **Middle East**, millions continue to be internally displaced as a result of the longstanding conflicts in Syria or living as refugees in Jordan, Lebanon or Turkey. Their situation has become even more challenging in the wake of the pandemic, with increased economic hardship, limited access to services and rising discrimination in their host countries. The crisis has also brought into sharp relief the predicament of millions of migrant workers across the region whose livelihoods were suddenly halted, with deportations, mass quarantines and other discriminatory measures imposed on foreign workers across the Gulf in particular.

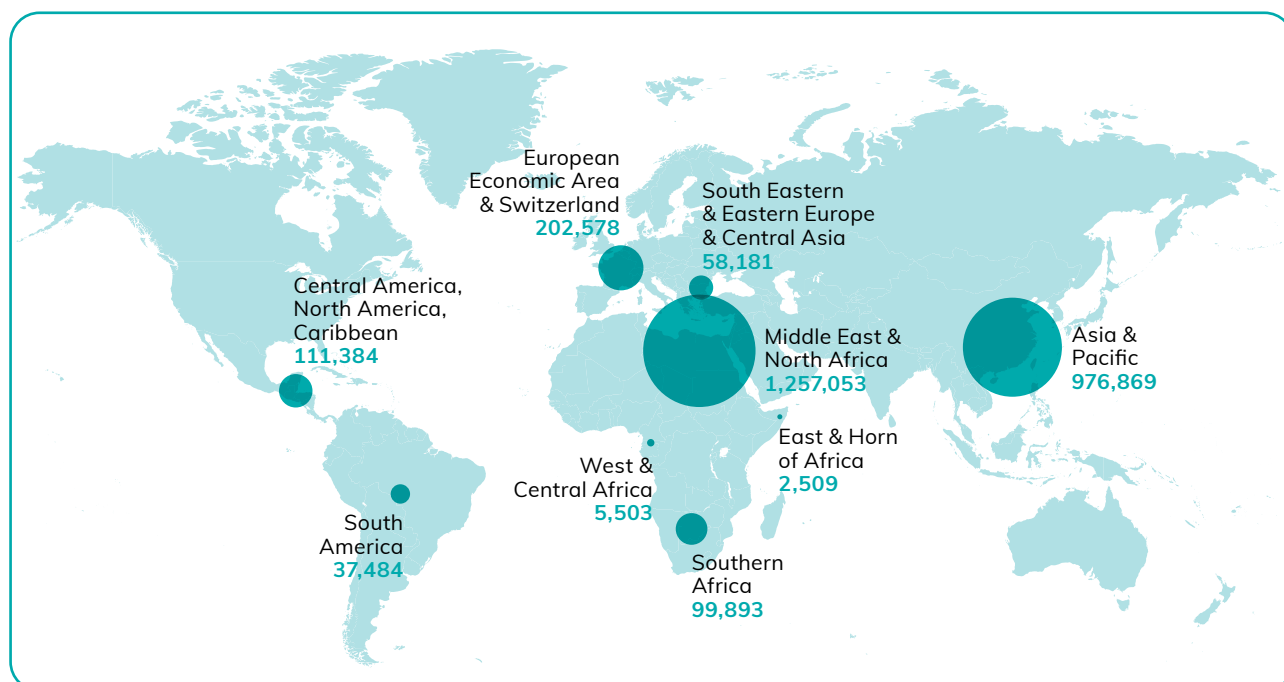
² Peter Grant is an urban specialist and independent consultant.

³ See *Normalisation of the extreme* on page 250.

- In the **Americas**, even before the pandemic, regional collaboration towards the ongoing crisis in Venezuela was already eroding. The pandemic has left many refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in neighbouring countries suddenly trapped by closed borders or facing destitution due to loss of income. In North America, the pandemic appears to have ushered in a further erosion of protections, however, particularly with the introduction of immediate deportations for refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers apprehended at the border between the US and Mexico. Nevertheless, migration has continued from Central America and beyond, though border closures have stalled movement: in particular, thousands of Cuban, Haitian, African and Asian migrants and asylum seekers travelling north have been stranded in Panama.
- In **Europe**, while border restrictions were imposed across the continent, implications for refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers have been especially stark as asylum applications were suddenly suspended, ports in key destination countries such as Italy declared “unsafe” for arrivals, and an increasingly hostile response seen from Malta to new arrivals from Africa, and from Greece towards attempted crossings from Turkey. The already troubling protection gaps in place previously have deteriorated further in the wake of Covid-19.
- In **Asia**, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya remain displaced in Bangladesh, in cramped and unsanitary conditions they make them highly vulnerable to the spread of the virus. Since the beginning of the year, hundreds of Rohingya attempting to migrate elsewhere have been trapped at sea for weeks as countries such as Malaysia and Thailand have refused them entry. The pandemic has also highlighted the extreme vulnerability of Asia’s migrant workforce. This was especially evident in India, where the sudden announcement of lockdown left millions without income and resulted in the vast reverse exodus of migrants back to their home villages. Others, attempting to return to neighbouring countries like Nepal, found the borders closed and were unable to return home.

Estimate of known cases of stranded migrants by IOM Region

(as of July 2020)



Source: IOM (2020) [Covid-19 Impact on Stranded Migrants](#)

Calls for greater protection

In May 2020, the **UN Network on Migration** issued a statement urging states to suspend forced returns for the duration of the coronavirus crisis, emphasising the need to protect the health of migrants and their communities. While the statement acknowledged the necessity of border closures and movement restrictions as temporary measures to contain the virus, it also stated that “they must be implemented in a way that is non-discriminatory and proportionate to achieving the public health aim pursued.” Furthermore, “forced returns can intensify serious public health risks for everyone—migrants, public officials, health workers, social workers and both host and origin communities.” It also praised governments that had implemented measures to ensure that migrants were included in national Covid-19 strategies.⁴

In June, as some restrictions began to ease, the UN’s **International Labour Organization** (ILO) issued a statement on the plight of migrant workers stranded in host countries, often in cramped and hazardous conditions, many without access to any social welfare or protection. ILO also drew attention to the difficulties faced by returning migrant workers and the emerging “crisis within a crisis” many face in their home countries, including poverty and unemployment. It urged countries to work together to ensure a coordinated reintegration strategy for the tens of millions of individuals affected.⁵

The **UN Refugee Agency** (UNHCR) has issued similar statements highlighting the potential threat posed by the pandemic to human rights and protections, particularly for refugee and displaced populations.⁶ In April, a joint UNHCR-**UNICEF** statement called attention to the fact that “with the rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the needs of refugee children have become even more acute. Meeting those needs is key to safeguarding both their wellbeing today and future potential.”⁷ In July, UNHCR also called on governments to ensure strong protections were in place to prevent abuses as the pandemic created the potential for increasing human trafficking and smuggling of vulnerable groups.⁸

A UN policy brief published in June, *Covid-19 and People on the Move*, also emphasised the value of an approach based on human rights and inclusion, arguing that “exclusion is costly in the long-term” and that “no-one is safe until everyone is safe”. It also argued that “people on the move are part of the solution”, referencing the central role they play in their societies and the need “to remove barriers that inhibit their full potential.”⁹

Multilateralism gathers pace

The Global Compact on Refugees

Affirmed in December 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) draws on decades of international law on refugee protection. Following this, the first **Global Refugee Forum** was held in December 2019. Bringing together some 3,000 representatives from governments, business and civil society, it was the first public test of the GCR since its agreement a year before.¹⁰

The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly provided a pretext for some governments to roll back their responsibilities towards refugees and asylum seekers. Fortunately, the GCR provides an important framework for protection and cooperation that is even more valuable at a time of global crisis. Indeed, many of the core commitments of the GCR—responsibility sharing, protection, inclusion in national systems—provide a clear blueprint for responding effectively to the challenges created by the virus. UNHCR has emphasised that, while the pandemic may delay the implementation of some measures enshrined in the GCR, it also provides a compelling incentive to accelerate the realisation of others, such as the rollout of inclusive access to social safety nets and health care.¹¹ While the response of governments to the crisis has been mixed, it is notable that some countries have indeed implemented similar measures as protective mechanisms to help refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers during the crisis.

4 UN Network on Migration (2020) [Forced returns of migrants must be suspended in times of Covid-19](#).

5 ILO (2020) [ILO warns of COVID-19 migrant “crisis within a crisis”](#).

6 UNHCR (2020) [Beware long-term damage to human rights and refugee rights from the coronavirus pandemic: UNHCR](#).

7 UNHCR (2020) [As COVID-19 pandemic continues, forcibly displaced children need more support than ever](#).

8 UNHCR (2020) [UNHCR warns of increased COVID-19-related trafficking risks for refugees, displaced and stateless](#).

9 UN (2020) [Covid-19 and People on the Move](#).

10 Sewell, A. (2019) [Key takeaways from the first Global Refugee Forum](#), New Humanitarian.

11 UNHCR (2020) [The role of the Global Compact on Refugees in the international response to the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

The Global Compact for Migration

2020 was supposed to be a landmark year for the recently agreed Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), with the first Regional Migration Review Forums to assess its progress scheduled for the latter part of the year.

The onset of Covid-19 has raised concerns around the GCM's implementation, as finances and political focus have now been diverted into addressing the crisis. The Multi-Partner Trust Fund, established as a focal point for fundraising to support the implementation of the GCM, faced some challenges even before the pandemic as some countries were reluctant to contribute to it directly. At the same time, the pandemic has also illustrated the value of coordinated multilateral cooperation and the fact that the welfare of citizens and migrant populations in host countries go hand in hand: "From a public-health perspective, the virus does not distinguish between nationals or migrants, and having a two-tiered system in place to access essential medical service during this health crisis serves no one's interest."¹²

The future of the GCM in the context of Covid-19

A recent Mixed Migration Centre report, *Covid-19 and the Global Compact for Migration: Is a Compact born in a crisis born again in the whirlwinds of three global crises?*, explores Covid-19's implications for the GCM.¹³ Drawing on interviews with a range of stakeholders from government, business, and civil society, the report presents a detailed analysis of the current state of the GCM and the impact of the pandemic's "three crises": its threat not only to public health, but also to protection and the economy. While recognising that Covid-19 represents a "make-or-break" moment for the GCM, the research shows how many of the compact's provisions have the added benefit of contributing to the management of the pandemic. Indeed, many of the more progressive responses to the pandemic, such as the extension to migrants of free health care, food programmes, and shelter mirror the commitments of the GCM. Among other insights, the report highlights that:

- *In many ways, the pandemic has served to validate the real value of the GCM.* This is demonstrated by the wide range of actions endorsed in the GCM that states have implemented as practical responses to the three linked crises of Covid-19.
- *Energy around the GCM is still strong.* Moving forward, it will be important that governments link positive actions and protective strategies to their support of the GCM. This will help cement the real links between its provisions and responding effectively to the pandemic, as well as other future crises.
- *There is a need to shift from temporary to permanent responses to the pandemic:* Again, the GCM presents a valuable roadmap for navigating the crisis in the long term, offering a variety of "solutions" that will pave the way for a more resilient recovery.
- *Countries must build on the growing awareness of the vital contribution migrants make to their societies.* Alongside heightened xenophobia and prejudice in some contexts, there has also been increased recognition of the central role migrants typically play in ensuring essential services such as health care, food supply, and transportation. Governments should capitalise on these sentiments to support the creation of more tolerant and inclusive popular attitudes towards migrants.

Global Forum on Migration and Development

The Twelfth Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) was held in January 2020 in Ecuador, themed on "Sustainable approaches to human mobility: Upholding rights, strengthening state agency, and advancing development through partnerships and collective action." Under this umbrella, the event focused in particular on "Joint responses to mixed migration flows", "Migration narratives and communication", and "Addressing human mobility as part of urban and rural development strategies".¹⁴ The 2020 GFMD, focusing on "The future of human mobility: Innovative partnerships for sustainable development", is scheduled to be hosted in the UAE in January 2021.

12 Kainz, L. (2020) [As Covid-19 slows human mobility, can the Global Compact for Migration meet the test for a changed era?](#) Migration Policy Institute.

13 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [COVID-19 and the Global Compact for Migration: Is a Compact born in a crisis born again in the whirlwinds of three global crises?](#)

14 GFMD (2020) [The 2019 Ecuador Chairmanship](#)

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

In July 2020, the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development was held in New York, with migration dominating discussions alongside Covid-19. The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) input to the HLPF process emphasised that “well-managed migration can be both a development strategy and a development outcome”. IOM identified a number of factors linking migration with sustainable development, including continued inequality, climate change, ongoing conflict, demographic change, urban growth, and digital technologies. In particular, the submission highlighted the importance of good migration governance and a range of entry points for migration to support sustainable development, including “Human well-being and capabilities”, “Sustainable and just economies” and “Urban and peri-urban development”.¹⁵

UN asylum ruling sets climate change precedent

In January 2020, the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) issued a landmark ruling in the case of an individual who had unsuccessfully lodged a claim for asylum in New Zealand in 2015. A national of Kiribati, the complainant argued that by deporting him and his family back to his home country, New Zealand had violated his right to life: as the impacts of climate change had devastated livelihoods, caused widespread environmental degradation and contributed to violent land conflicts, Kiribati could no longer be regarded as habitable. While the HRC did not find that New Zealand had violated his right to life, given that sufficient protections were in place, it nevertheless represented the first UN human rights ruling on an individual protection claim related to climate change and “determined that countries cannot deport people who have sought asylum due to climate-related threats”.¹⁶ In the words of the HRC's Vice Chair Yuval Shany, “this ruling sets forth new standards that could facilitate the success of future climate change-related asylum claims”.¹⁷ This issue may have particular urgency for inhabitants of Kiribati and other low-lying island states in the Pacific, as they are especially vulnerable to rising sea levels and other impacts. It is already estimated that “one in seven of all movements in Kiribati—whether between islands or internationally—are attributed to environmental change”.¹⁸

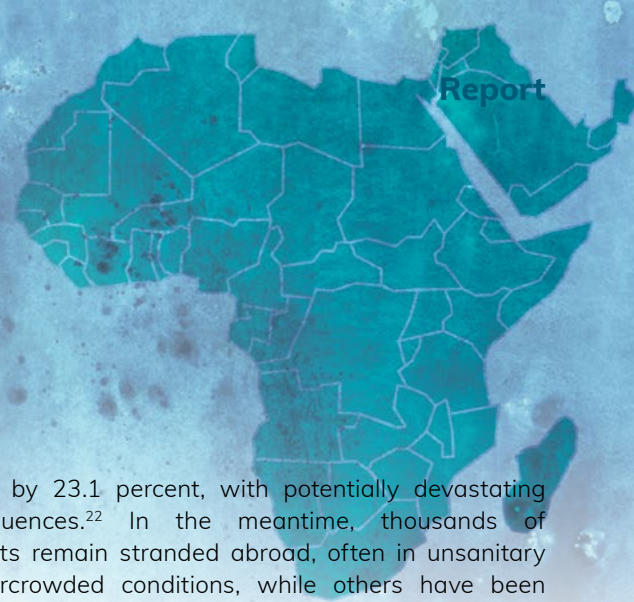
15 IOM (2020) [IOM input to the HLPF 2020 – Accelerated action and transformative pathways: Realizing the Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development](#).

16 UN News (2020) [UN human rights ruling could boost climate change asylum claims](#).

17 OHCHR (2020) [Historic UN Human Rights case opens door to climate change asylum claims](#).

18 Alexis-Martin, B., Dyke, J., Turnbull, J. & Malin, S. (2020) [Climate crisis: Migration cannot be the only option for people living on “drowning” islands](#). The Conversation; ESCAP (2016) [Kiribati: Climate Change and Migration](#).

Africa



Overview

Although international coverage predominantly focuses on migration to other regions, particularly Europe and the Gulf, the large majority of those uprooted by large-scale conflicts in Africa remain internally displaced in their home countries or as refugees in neighbouring states. Uganda, for instance, was host to some 1,429,286 refugees as of the end of August 2020, the large majority from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).¹⁹ These displaced populations frequently face profound challenges, including widespread hunger and malnutrition, due to limited humanitarian assistance. Of the ten displacement crises worldwide selected by the Norwegian Refugee Council as the “most neglected” in 2020, nine were in Africa; all are unfolding humanitarian catastrophes that are likely to be exacerbated by lack of funding and the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.²⁰

Political and economic instability have also contributed to increased movement in 2020 from the Maghreb, particularly Tunisians, amidst high levels of unemployment and unrest. After a decline in 2019, movement along the Central Mediterranean route towards Italy has increased significantly during 2020, despite heightened border restrictions with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, however, migrants across the region have faced greater uncertainty as a result of the lockdowns imposed by governments in response, with many losing their main source of livelihoods.

Most migration of all types in Africa, however, continues to take place within the continent, driven largely by the search for employment and other opportunities.²¹ The development of various regional agreements to support free movement of people and goods has been underpinned by recognition of the shared economic benefits that migration has brought for richer and poorer countries alike. Covid-19 and its associated restrictions on movement, including border closures and quarantine measures, has therefore had wide ranging impacts. In particular, the economic fallout will be acutely felt in many countries of origin that are heavily dependent on the remitted earnings of migrant workers abroad. In April 2020, the World Bank predicted that income from remittance flows to sub-Saharan Africa could

reduce by 23.1 percent, with potentially devastating consequences.²² In the meantime, thousands of migrants remain stranded abroad, often in unsanitary or overcrowded conditions, while others have been subjected to arbitrary detention and deportation and now face an uncertain future in their home countries as recession approaches. Many have suffered stigma not only abroad but also on return to their home countries, due to the widespread belief in both contexts that they may be spreading the virus.

Implementation of the GCM in Africa

The African Union has developed a three-year (2020-2022) implementation plan for the GCM in Africa, making it the first region to develop a specific localised strategy to support the realisation of its commitments. The document includes a detailed breakdown of how to achieve the different aims, such as the development of better migration data and the prevention of trafficking.²³

From the Maghreb to Europe

There are two main routes from the Maghreb into Europe: the Central Mediterranean route to Italy and Malta (predominantly from Tunisia and Libya) and the Western Mediterranean route to Spain (primarily from Morocco and Algeria, overland into the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, or across the sea to the Spanish mainland). Both routes have distinct dynamics that have fluctuated over time. While most who depart from these countries are nationals of those states (particularly in the case of Tunisia) or refugees and migrants from neighbouring countries, these flows also include many refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and even Asia. For example, a significant number of those travelling to Italy are Bangladeshi: in July 2020, almost half of all arrivals from Libya originated from Bangladesh.²⁴

19 UNHCR (2020) [Uganda: Comprehensive refugee response portal](#).

20 Norwegian Refugee Council (2020) [Africa is home to nine of ten of the world's most neglected crises](#).

21 IOM (2020) [Africa Migration Report – challenging the narrative](#).

22 World Bank (2020) [World Bank predicts sharpest decline of remittances in recent history](#).

23 AU (2020) [3 Year Implementation Plan of Action for the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration \(GCM\) in Africa \(2020-22\)](#)

24 UNHCR (2020) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard – July 2020](#).

Crossings to Italy increase

While sea crossings along the Central Mediterranean route to Italy declined in 2019 to 11,471—less than half the total in 2018 (23,370)—movement along this route has increased considerably in 2020, with some 14,014 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers travelling this route between 1 January and 31 July 2020, compared to 3,867 during the same period in 2019.²⁵ Even in the immediate aftermath of border restrictions imposed as a result of the pandemic, movement to Italy has been significantly higher than the previous year: for example, in the two-month period of April-May 2020, the number of people arriving in Italy from Libya and Tunisia to Italy increased by 352 percent and 480 percent respectively.²⁶ Mirroring the growing importance of Tunisia as a point of embarkation, 40 percent of arrivals in Italy in the first seven months of 2020 were nationals of Tunisia.²⁷

Tunisia overtakes Libya as the primary point of embarkation

In recent years, while much discussion on the Central Mediterranean route continues to focus on migration from Libya, its relative importance has reduced as movement from Tunisia has increased: while 91 percent of arrivals in Italy in 2017 embarked from Libya, this figure fell to 56 percent in 2018 and again to 36 percent in 2019.²⁸ Despite a spike in departures from Libya in the latter part of 2019 and the early months of 2020, overall during the first seven months of 2020 Tunisia remained the top embarkation point, accounting for 47 percent (6,628) of arrivals in Italy compared to 40 percent (5,674) from Libya. However, from both countries the total number of registered arrivals in Italy increased more than fivefold in the first seven months of 2020 compared to the same period the year before.²⁹

Most common nationalities of Mediterranean sea and land arrivals (to Spain, Italy, Greece, Malta and Cyprus)

from January to end of September 2020

Country of origin	Proportion	Number of arrivals
Tunisia	20.6%	10,110
Algeria	14.0%	6,864
Others	9.1%	4,443
Bangladesh	7.0%	3,455
Afghanistan	6.5%	3,197
Syrian Arab Rep.	6.3%	3,079
Morocco	6.1%	2,975
Mali	4.7%	2,324
Côte d'Ivoire	4.3%	2,098
Guinea	3.3%	1,601

Note: Nationality data for 2020 arrivals are still being updated by countries.

Source: UNHCR <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

25 UNHCR (2020) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard – July 2020](#); UNHCR (2020) [Mediterranean situation: Italy](#).

26 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update – Quarter 2 2020](#).

27 UNHCR (2020) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard – July 2020](#).

28 UNHCR (2020) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard – December 2019](#); UNHCR (2019) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard – December 2018](#).

29 UNHCR (2020) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard – July 2020](#).

More Tunisians on the move...

Mirroring the increase in embarkations from Tunisia to Italy during the year, another striking development is the substantial increase in the number of Tunisian nationals within these arrivals. Between 1 January and 30 April, only 191 Tunisians were registered in Italy, amounting to just 6 percent of all arrivals in that period. However, from May, the picture began to change as the number of Tunisians migrating to Italy began to rise and by July 4,145 Tunisians were recorded, amounting to 58.7 percent of all registered arrivals that month.³⁰ However, many of those who attempt the crossing do not succeed: among other incidents, in early June a migrant boat sank off the coast of Tunisia en route to Italy, resulting in the deaths of at least 53 on board.³¹

...amid domestic challenges

Even before the Covid-19 outbreak, Tunisia was struggling with a prolonged economic crisis and governance challenges. These issues have only been brought into sharper focus by the pandemic and its impact on livelihoods, driving the spike in migration north to Europe from its shores.³² While the number of Tunisians attempting the crossing to Italy has increased considerably, refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from other countries such as Côte d'Ivoire are also making the journey in growing numbers from Tunisia after losing their jobs amid the pandemic.³³ Given the ongoing insecurity and violence in neighbouring Libya, an increasing number of refugees and migrants there are also attempting to move on to Tunisia, mostly as a transit point for their next step to Europe, though in practice many may end up spending extended periods in the country.³⁴

EU, Tunisia hold talks to curb irregular migration

While Italy's repatriation agreement with Tunisia was suspended during the height of the pandemic, deportations resumed in August 2020.³⁵ The growing number of arrivals during 2020 has led the European Union (EU) to explore options for greater cooperation. In August, EU representatives met in Tunis with government officials to discuss future agreements and offered an additional €10 million of

funding to support its border management. Tunisia was keen to ensure that any arrangement was mutually beneficial, with an emphasis not only on strengthened security but also on employment and development. The EU is reportedly willing to provide further support in the long term if measures are put in place to curb irregular migration to Europe.³⁶ The EU has also sought to engage other North African states with similar deals to reduce migration flows from the Maghreb. In December 2019, for instance, the EU agreed to grant Morocco €101.7 million to strengthen its border management³⁷

While more secure than war-torn Libya, refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers living in Tunisia nevertheless face significant challenges in accessing basic services or finding reliable employment, issues exacerbated further in the wake of the lockdown.³⁸ According to IOM, some 53 percent of migrants in the country lost employment between 22 March and 3 May, a figure that is even starker when the large proportion without employment on the eve of the pandemic is factored in: in practice, the employment rate reduced from 64 percent when lockdown began to just 11 percent some six weeks later.³⁹ An MMC survey of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in Tunisia found that 94 percent of those who were working when Covid-19 broke out reported a loss of income. The financial impact has meant many are unable to afford basic goods as a result. Some had also been left unable to send remittances home and experienced other impacts, such as increased anxiety and loss of housing.⁴⁰

The Western Mediterranean route

The Western Mediterranean route to Spain has seen less movement during the first half of 2020 with a total of 8,622 arrivals (7,306 by sea and 1,316 by land) between January and June 2020, compared to 13,263 during the same period in 2019.⁴¹ The single largest nationality migrating to Spain between January and June 2020 were Algerians, comprising 31 percent (2,638) of all registered arrivals—a significant jump from 7 percent (872) during the same period in 2019.⁴²

30 UNHCR (2020) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard – July 2020](#); UNHCR (2020) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard – April 2020](#).

31 Bathke, B. (2020) [More than 50 migrants died in shipwreck near Tunisia](#). InfoMigrants.

32 Allouche, Y. (2020) [Perilous crossings from North Africa to Europe swell as economic gloom sets in](#), Middle East Eye.

33 Barigazzi, J. (2020) [Uptick in irregular migration from Tunisia worries Rome](#), Politico.

34 Pronczuc, M. (2019) [Migrants flee Libyan 'prison' to Tunisia](#), Politico.

35 Castelfranco, S. (2020) [Italy resumes migrant deportations](#) Voice of America

36 Arab News (2020) [EU-Italy delegation in Tunisia to discuss slowing migration](#); Hungary Today (2020) [Commissioner: EU, Mediterranean Countries must cooperate to stop illegal migration](#)

37 European Commission (2019) [The EU is boosting its support to Morocco with new programmes worth €389 million](#)

38 Sandrasagren, M. (2020) [The Tunisian Organisations working to protect Sub-Saharan African Migrants from eviction in the time of Covid-19](#), Minority Rights Group International.

39 The New Arab (2020) [Half of migrants in Tunisia lose jobs as a result of coronavirus pandemic](#).

40 MMC (2020) [MMC North Africa 4Mi Snapshot – July 2020 - The impact of Covid-19 on refugees and migrants in Tunisia - a focus on employment and livelihoods](#).

41 UNHCR (2020) [Spain sea and land arrivals: 1 January – 30 June 2020](#).

42 Ibid.

Report

By contrast, the proportion of Moroccans in this timeframe more than halved from 30 percent (3,986) in the first half of 2019 to 14 percent (1,210) in the first half of 2020. This decline has been attributed to the increased cooperation between Morocco and Spain since early 2019, with Moroccan naval patrols now intercepting many more vessels at sea, while Spanish maritime rescue in Moroccan waters has reduced significantly from levels in 2018.⁴³

More Algerians on the move to Spain

There has been an upsurge in undocumented migration to Europe from Algeria, with authorities reporting more than three times the number of people arrested for attempting to leave the country irregularly between January and May 2020 than during the same period in 2019.⁴⁴ Though in the immediate term Covid-19 had the effect of slowing migration, with just 16 arrests for attempted migration in March compared to 828 in January, overall the pandemic has increased pressure to migrate for many Algerians who see little optimism in their country's fragile economy. Political instability is a further consideration that may be driving the decision of some to migrate: whilst widespread peaceful protests

beginning in February 2019 led to the end of Abdelaziz Bouteflika's 20-year rule, since then the country has been rocked by further unrest and a continued crackdown on activists by his successor, Abdelmadjid Tebboune.⁴⁵

Morocco locks out... Moroccans

In an attempt to prevent the spread of Covid-19, on 13 March 2020 Morocco took the unusual step of barring entry into the country not only of foreigners but also of its own nationals. As a result, thousands of Moroccans were left stranded outside the country, including both documented and undocumented migrant workers in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Some were still trapped there months later, in difficult living conditions and with little certainty as to when they would be able to return.⁴⁶ There were even stories in the weeks following the lockdown that some Moroccans in mainland Spain were engaging human smugglers to return them clandestinely to Morocco, driven by uncertain employment prospects and fears around the high prevalence of the virus in Spain.⁴⁷ In one incident in late March, around 100 Moroccans reportedly paid €5,400 each to be transported by dinghy back to the Moroccan coast.⁴⁸

Spain: sea and land arrivals

(Jan-June 2020)



Source: Reliefweb / UNHCR <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/77923.pdf>

43 Martin, M. (2020) *El acuerdo con Rabat reduce al mínimo los rescates de Salvamento Marítimo en aguas marroquíes*. El País

44 Allouche, Y. (2020) *Perilous crossings from North Africa to Europe swell as economic gloom sets in* Middle East Eye

45 Ibid.

46 VOA (2020) *Moroccans trapped in Spain for 2 months head home at last*

47 Al-Awawi, M.M. (2020) *Pandemic sparks reverse migration from Spain to Morocco* The Arab Weekly

48 Martin, M. (2020) *Más de 5.000 euros por escapar de España en patera* El País

More dangerous waters

The journey across the Central Mediterranean from North Africa to Italy remains one of the most hazardous migration corridors in the world, with 1,262 dead and missing in 2019.⁴⁹ Though this represents a reduction from previous years, given the relatively low number of crossings overall, the level of risk for those who make the journey has actually increased: in IOM's words, "while the total number of deaths recorded in 2019 in the Central Mediterranean has decreased, all available data indicate that conditions for those embarking on this journey are worsening."⁵⁰ Its estimates suggests that the journeys of individuals migrating to Italy have become progressively more hazardous, not less: "one in 33 people died attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean in 2019, compared to one in 35 in 2018 and one in 51 in 2017."⁵¹

Between January and the end of July 2020, 290 fatalities occurred along the Central Mediterranean route.⁵² Besides the danger of drowning, those making the crossing also face the risk of being intercepted by national coast guards at sea. Tunisia's interior ministry, for instance, reported that 2,226 people had been intercepted between January and the end of May 2020 alone.⁵³

The EU's firmer hand

Both the reduction in overall arrivals and the rising proportion of deaths among those making the journey links to the increasingly restrictive approach of control and containment adopted by the EU. This includes the agreement between Italy and Libya, originally brokered in February 2017 and renewed until 2023, whereby in return for training and technical assistance Libyan coast guards agree to intercept and return migrant boats. Libya's coast guard intercepted some 6,439 refugees and migrants from January until the end of July 2020, an increase of 41.7 percent compared to the same period in 2019.⁵⁴ Human rights groups estimate that in the first three years of the original agreement, at least 40,000 people had been returned to Libya, many of them to detention centres "where they remain subject to abhorrent conditions of detention, and face serious abuses including torture and rape, as well as overcrowding."⁵⁵

Dead and missing on Western Mediterranean

A total of 552 people died or went missing along the Western Mediterranean route for the whole of 2019.⁵⁶ One of the deadliest incidents took place in early December 2019 when a boat carrying more than 150 passengers, originating from Gambia, sunk off the coast near Mauritania with at least 62 deaths.⁵⁷ Later that month, a boat carrying up to 100 migrants from Morocco to Spain capsized, with at least eight deaths and another 24 missing.⁵⁸ The number of fatalities for the first seven months of 2020 (60) was significantly lower than the total during the same period in 2019 (205).⁵⁹ Nevertheless, major incidents continue to occur: in August 2020, for example, another boat capsized off the Mauritanian coast, leading to the deaths of at least 27 people on board.⁶⁰

Morocco and Algeria both undertake interceptions of migrants at sea. The consequences for those on board can be serious: in Algeria, for instance, where some 1,433 migrants were intercepted between January and the end of May 2020, those caught attempting to migrate can receive six-month prison sentences.⁶¹

Insecurity intensifies in Libya

As of May-June 2020, there were 600,362 migrants in Libya⁶² and as of the end of July 2020, 46,823 registered refugees.⁶³ While much research on migration in Libya focuses on those transiting through the country, there is a large number of long-term migrants who live and work in the country, with many sending remittances back home. Though they may also face risks of violence or harassment, their situation is different in important respects to those in transit.⁶⁴ For both groups, however, the economic impacts of the pandemic have been severe. For refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers intending to travel on, the crisis has profound implications for their ability to continue their journey. With many without work and struggling to cover the costs of their basic needs, it is likely that significant numbers may be left immobile due to lack of resources.⁶⁵

Myriad protection concerns

The ongoing conflict in Libya between the UN-endorsed, Turkey-backed, and Tripoli-based Government of National Accord and a competing government allied with

49 IOM (2020) [Missing migrants: Tracking deaths along migratory routes](#)

50 IOM (2019) [Mediterranean migrant arrivals reach 76,558 in 2019; deaths reach 1,071](#)

51 IOM (2020) [Mediterranean arrivals reach 110,699 in 2019; deaths reach 1,283. World deaths fall.](#)

52 IOM (2020) [Missing migrants: Tracking deaths along migratory routes.](#)

53 Bathke, B. (2020) [More than 50 migrants died in shipwreck near Tunisia.](#) InfoMigrants.

54 UNHCR (2020) [Libya: Activities at disembarkation – Monthly update, July 2020.](#)

55 Amnesty International (2020) [Libya: Renewal of migration deal confirms Italy's complicity in torture of migrants and refugees.](#)

56 IOM (2020) [Missing migrants: Tracking deaths along migratory routes.](#)

57 Al Jazeera (2019) [Dozens dead as migrant boat sinks off Mauritania coast: UN](#)

58 Wallis, E. (2019) [At least 8 dead, dozens missing after migrant boat capsizes between Morocco and Spain.](#) InfoMigrants.

59 IOM (2020) [Missing migrants: Tracking deaths along migratory routes.](#)

60 Petesch, C. (2020) [27 dead after migrant boat capsizes off West African coast.](#) Washington Post.

61 Allouche, Y. (2020) [Perilous crossings from North Africa to Europe swell as economic gloom sets in.](#) Middle East Eye.

62 IOM (2020) [Libya's migrant report – Key findings: Round 31 May-June 2020](#)

63 UNHCR (2020) [Operational portal: Refugee situations – Libya](#)

64 IOM (2019) [Living and Working through Conflict: The status of long-term migrants in Libya](#)

65 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [The impact of Covid-19 on the mobility of refugees and migrants in Libya](#)

the Libyan National Army (supported by the United Arab Emirates, Russia, and Egypt), has escalated since April 2019 and resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians in the fighting, with many more displaced from their homes. In this context, the large population of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers is particularly vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and detention by security forces as well as criminal groups.⁶⁶

The business of abuse

This abuse is sustained by Libya's weak governance and the power of different militias over various official functions, including the management of detention centres. The criminalisation of migration from the country—a situation supported by the EU policy and funding (see box below)—has also created a lucrative industry of abuse and detention targeting migrants and asylum seekers. More than half of those intercepted at sea by the Libyan coast guard in 2020 are believed to be unaccounted for, likely trapped in one of the country's known detention facilities or secretive “data collection centres” that are off-limits to humanitarian organisations.⁶⁷ Those held in detention are frequently subjected to torture, sexual assault, and other human rights violations, including extortion, with those unable to pay often sold on to other militias. As human trafficking and abduction has developed into a lucrative industry, there is growing evidence that officials and government agencies are heavily implicated themselves.⁶⁸

Italy renews its MOU with Libya

The controversial 2017 Memorandum of Understanding between Italy and Libya, designed to curb migration between the two countries in return for funding and technical assistance for the Libyan coast guard, was automatically extended for another three years in February 2020. This was despite widespread criticism by human rights groups and calls from Dunja Mijatović, the Commissioner for Human Rights for the Council of Europe, for Italy to end the agreement amidst continued reports of the detention and mistreatment of thousands of migrants returned to Libya. Her statement concluded: “This tragedy has gone on for too long now, and European countries have contributed to it. It is urgent that Italy, the EU and all its member states take action to put an end to it.”⁶⁹

Since 2017, when Italy began to provide Libya's coast guard with financial assistance to support its interception and return of boats heading towards Europe, more than 40,000 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers have been forcibly returned to Libya. Many of them have subsequently been subjected to brutal violence and human rights violations in the detention system.⁷⁰ Those who try to escape have been subjected to arbitrary and disproportionate violence, as illustrated by reports of three Sudanese migrants who were shot dead after trying to escape after being forcibly returned to Libya by the coast guard in July 2020.⁷¹

A December 2019 MMC report, drawing on more than 5,000 in-depth surveys of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in Libya conducted between May 2017 and June 2019, found that around one in ten respondents reported being detained at some point while in Libya: of these, around three-quarters did not know why they were being held, while the remainder reported that they were held for ransom. Respondents who were in Libya with the intention of travelling on to Europe were twice as likely to be detained. Strikingly, too, those whose migration journey was driven by the need to escape conflict or persecution were more likely to suffer detention once they reached Libya. Refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from Eastern Africa were also four times more likely to be detained than those from West, Central or North Africa.⁷²

Dangers overland to Libya

While there is significant media coverage of the dangers faced by those attempting sea crossings from Libya and also the serious human rights abuses suffered in the country's detention centres, less attention has been given to the threats faced by sub-Saharan refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers as they journey overland to Libya from East and West Africa. Both routes involve considerable dangers of extortion, sexual assault, and death from physical abuse, starvation or illness, particularly in the desert areas joining Niger and Libya as well as from violence in West Africa. A July 2020 report by MMC and UNHCR, drawing on extensive interviews from those who had journeyed along these routes, estimated that some 1,400 deaths had taken place in 2018 and 2019, amounting to at least 72 deaths each month—a situation that made it “one of the deadliest land crossings in the world”.⁷³

66 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Libya: Events of 2019](#)

67 Nashed, M. (2020) [What happens to migrants forcibly returned to Libya?](#) New Humanitarian.

68 US Department of State (2020) [Trafficking in Persons Report 2019: Libya](#).

69 Council of Europe (2020) [Commissioner calls on the Italian government to suspend the co-operation activities in place with the Libyan Coast Guard that impact on the return of persons intercepted at sea to Libya](#).

70 Nashed, M. (2020) op. cit.

71 Bathke, B. (2020) [Three migrants killed in Libya after being intercepted in the Mediterranean and returned](#), InfoMigrants.

72 Lichtenheld, A. (2020) [What Makes Refugees and Migrants Vulnerable to Detention in Libya?](#) Mixed Migration Centre.

73 UNHCR and MMC [“On This Journey, No one Cares If You Live or Die”: Abuse, protection, and justice along routes between East and West Africa and Africa's Mediterranean coast.](#)

This was highlighted by the massacre of 30 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers (the majority from Bangladesh) in the northeast Libyan town of Mizdah, allegedly by the family of a trafficker in revenge for his death at the hands of those detained. Reports from the survivors suggested that they had been tortured for ransom by the gang and the trafficker in question had been killed in a “mutiny” by some of his captives. His relatives had then launched an attack with heavy weapons against them.⁷⁴

Movement to and from Sudan

Darfur’s enduring legacy of displacement

There are some 1.6 million people still displaced in Sudan, a legacy of the protracted conflict in Darfur.⁷⁵ Ongoing insecurity has left many unable to return to their home communities years after fleeing them, and renewed outbreaks of violence have also caused further displacement. In Western Darfur, inter-communal violence forced some 11,000 people to seek refuge in Chad in January 2020 alone,⁷⁶ and there have been further incidents during the year. Clashes in the region towards the end of July resulted in another 2,500 Sudanese crossing into Chad and affected another 20,000 people in Western Darfur.⁷⁷

Extensive emigration

Sudan also remains a significant country of origin for refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers elsewhere including Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Libya for those intending to travel on to Europe. There have been reports since December 2019 of police roundups and arrests of refugees and migrants living in settlements in Khartoum, with those detained reportedly obliged to pay fines to secure their release.⁷⁸

Large refugee population, major transit route

Sudan also hosts a significant number of refugees and asylum seekers: of the 1,069,536 registered in the country at the end of August 2020, the large majority were from South Sudan (814,750), with sizeable numbers from Eritrea (120,825), Syria (93,497), the Central African Republic (20,605) and other countries such as Ethiopia, Chad and Yemen.⁷⁹ UNHCR’s Sudan Refugee Response Plan 2020 has expanded its focus to recognise the diversity of the refugee populations in the country.⁸⁰ Due

to its location, Sudan also remains an important transit point for migration routes in both East and West Africa. Though often used as a stepping-stone to North Africa and then Europe, or to the Gulf, migrants may spend an extended period in the country before moving on.

Insecurity in the Sahel

The spread of conflict across the Sahel region, beginning with an uprising in Mali in 2012 but now concentrated increasingly in Burkina Faso, where extremist armed groups have committed numerous atrocities and uprooted hundreds of thousands of people, has created mass displacement across the region. By June 2020, UNHCR reported 3,363,634 persons of concern in the region, including 1,731,690 internally displaced persons (IDPs), 836,278 refugees, 649,738 returnees and 145,928 others. The largest concentration of refugees was in **Chad** (476,015), mostly from Sudan and Central African Republic (CAR).⁸¹ The region also continues to host significant numbers of refugees from nearby conflicted-affected countries, such as the Central African Republic and Nigeria.

Funding appeal for the Sahel crisis

In June 2020, UNHCR launched a \$186 million appeal to respond to the growing humanitarian crisis faced by refugees and IDPs in the Sahel. This included, in addition to the \$97 million included in its original 2020 strategy, \$29 million to support investments in Covid-19 prevention and a further \$60 million to expand its emergency operations.⁸² In July, a tripartite agreement between the African Development Bank (AfDB), UNHCR, and the G5 Sahel secured \$20 million in AfDB funding for governments in the region to invest in Covid-19 prevention among displaced populations.⁸³

Displacement soars in Burkina Faso

More than half of the IDPs in the region were concentrated in Burkina Faso, where the escalation of armed raids and insurgency in the north and east has caused widespread displacement. The total number of IDPs in the country increased from 47,029 in December 2018 to 560,033 in December 2019, and continued to rise during 2020 to 1,013,234 by 8 August.⁸⁴ While much of this displacement has been driven by repeated and indiscriminate attacks against communities, with at least

74 Daraghi, B. (2020) *Libya: 30 migrants killed in revenge attack by family of murdered smuggler*. Independent.

75 Wachiyaya, C. (2020) *Sudan’s internally displaced yearn for real peace to go home*. UNHCR.

76 Schlein, L. (2020) *Violence in Sudan’s Darfur State Sends Thousands Fleeing to Chad*. VoA.

77 UN (2020) *Violence in Sudan’s Western Darfur forces 2,500 into Chad: UN refugee agency*

78 Zere, A.T. and el-Gizouli, M. (2019) *Xenophobia threatens to undermine Sudan’s revolution* Al Jazeera

79 UNHCR (2020) *UNHCR in Sudan - All Refugee Population Dashboard (31 August 2020)*

80 MMC (2020) *Quarterly Mixed Migration Update Q1 2020: North Africa*

81 UNHCR (2020) *UNHCR Sahel crisis response: 1-30 June 2020*

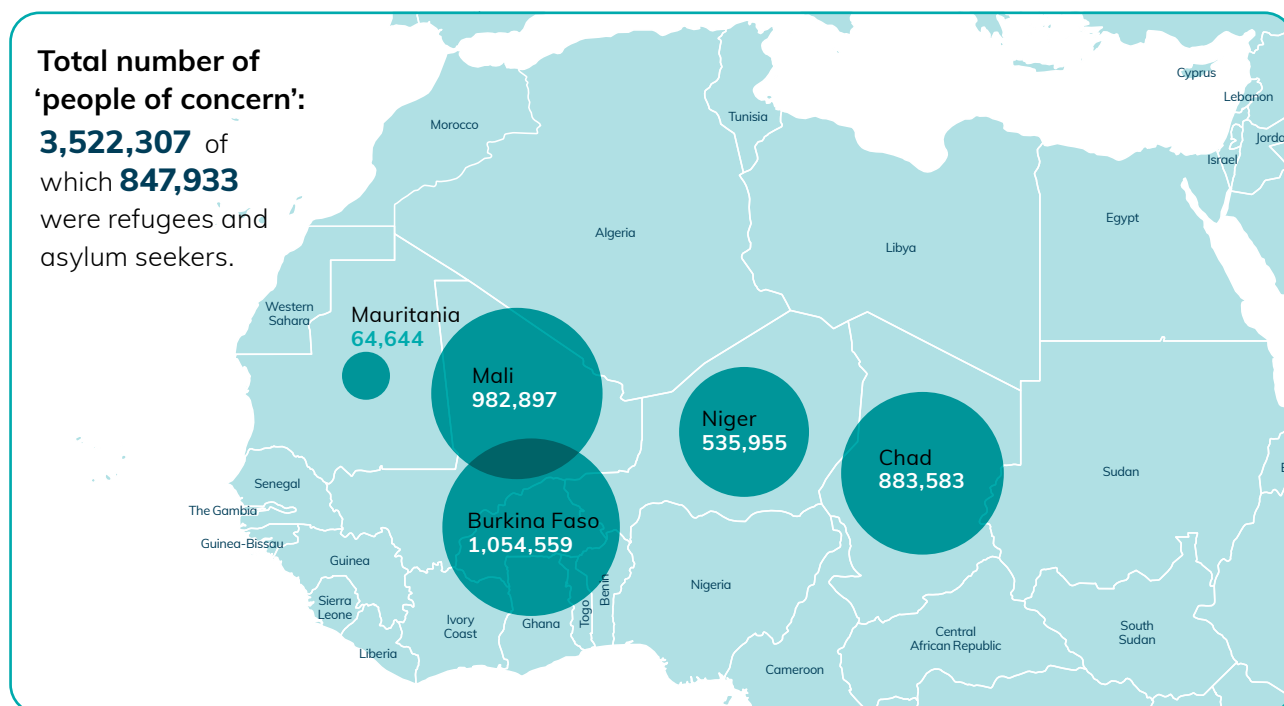
82 UNHCR (2020) *UNHCR appeals for US\$186 million for refugee and displacement crisis in Sahel*.

83 UNHCR (2020) *US\$20 million for Sahel drive to curb COVID-19*. The G5-Sahel is a cooperation framework grouping Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger.

84 UNHCR (2020) *Operational portal: Burkina Faso*.

Refugees, asylum-seekers, refugee returnees, internally displaced people (IDP) and IDP returnees, in central Sahel

(up to October 2020)



Source: UNHCR <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/sahelcrisis>

183 separate attacks on civilians recorded between January and the end of July 2020 alone,⁸⁵ the outbreak of the Covid pandemic also threatens to aggravate the humanitarian crisis, with more than one in ten people in the country food insecure.⁸⁶ Among those displaced are thousands of Malian refugees who had originally fled their home country as a result of conflict, who were again uprooted following attacks on the camps where they were living.⁸⁷

Mali's manifold crises

Many of those who returned to Mali are also likely to be in continued displacement, given ongoing conflict in the country. The number of IDPs has increased steadily from 120,298 on 31 December 2018 to 207,751 at the end of 2019 and continued to rise in the first half of 2020 to 266,831 at the end of June.⁸⁸ Terrorism, communal violence and increasing lawlessness in many parts of the country have led to the death and displacement of thousands of civilians. Political unrest also culminated in a military coup against President Ibrahim Keita on 18 August 2020. In late September, a new president and

prime minister were sworn in at the head of a transitional administration that is due to govern until elections are held in early 2022.

Fleeing from Nigeria to Niger

Around 23,000 civilians in Nigeria's northwestern states of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara fled an upsurge in armed attacks to neighbouring Niger's Maradi region in April 2020. In total, by June around 70,000 Nigerians had crossed the border and some 23,000 Niger nationals has also been internally displaced in the area as a result of the violence.⁸⁹ An attack at the beginning of June 2020 by armed men on a camp in Intikane, in western Niger, hosting 20,000 Malian refugees and 15,000 Nigerien IDPs, resulted in at least three deaths and displaced thousands of camp residents.⁹⁰

Niger continues to host a sizeable number of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers due to its key location along the Central Mediterranean land route. Border closures imposed because of the pandemic have left large numbers stranded in the country, including many

85 ACLED (2020) [Burkina Faso: 01/01/20 – 31/07/20](#).

86 Norwegian Refugee Council (2020) [A record one million displaced by violence in Burkina Faso amid Covid-19](#).

87 Mednick, S. (2020) [Thousands of Malian refugees flee Burkina Faso camps after attacks](#) The New Humanitarian; Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: West Africa – Q2 2020](#)

88 UNHCR (2020) [Operational Portal: Mali](#)

89 UNHCR (2020) [Maradi area hosts more than 70,000 refugees and 23,000 IDPs](#); UNHCR (2020) [Nigeria violence sees 23,000 refugees flee into Niger in last month alone](#).

90 Al Jazeera (2020) [Thousands flee Niger refugee camp after attack](#).

forced to quarantine in makeshift facilities in the north. With assisted voluntary returns suspended, in April the Niamey government agreed to the creation of a humanitarian corridor for migrants trapped in Niger, enabling IOM to repatriate several groups during May and June to Burkina Faso, Benin, Guinea, and Mali. IOM also assisted with the return of 1,400 Nigeriens from Burkina Faso in early May. Thousands of Nigeriens also returned from Nigeria from March, the majority young *talibés* studying at Koranic schools.⁹¹

Algeria's expulsions

Algeria has also continued to conduct expulsions across the border into Niger, including during lockdown, despite agreeing to suspend forced returns while borders remained formally closed.⁹² These forced expulsions of foreigners reportedly escalated again as borders reopened, with the NGO Alarme Phone Sahara documenting a number of mass deportations, including that of some 693 Niger nationals who crossed the border on 27 July. Three days previously, an unofficial convoy with an estimated 361 people of different nationalities, including 140 Malians, was also reported.⁹³

Covid-19 brings further disruption

While the Sahel and other parts of West and Central Africa have been relatively open for intra-regional migration, the impact of Covid-19 and border closures has slowed movement for some months, with IOM monitoring at key crossing points showing a 39 percent reduction in weekly flows between January and the end of May 2020 across West and Central Africa as a whole. Much of this drop was observed in March, when movement plummeted, before picking up again in April and May: during this two-month period, activity increased again by 65 percent. The impact of mobility restrictions on migrants during this period was significant: around 17,000 migrants and 2,000 pastoralist herders were stranded at borders, either unable to continue their journey or to return home, while some 1,500 had been forced to quarantine.⁹⁴

The long-term impact of Covid-19 is likely to be further displacement as the pandemic exacerbates the existing problems of poverty, violence, and lawlessness. According to projections from the Danish Refugee Council's Foresight system, a pioneering tool developed to predict emerging humanitarian crises, the impact of the pandemic could lead to the displacement of an additional one million people in the Sahel region.⁹⁵

Conflict in Central Africa

Across Central Africa, armed conflict continues to drive internal displacement as well as cross-border flight, with neighbouring countries in many cases both hosting refugees fleeing violence or persecution from the other.

Cameroon divisions deepen

In Cameroon, a protracted separatist movement centring around the western Anglophone regions of the country has resulted in some 3,000 civilian deaths since October 2016, with both government forces and armed insurgents responsible for executions, abductions and torture. While the unrest has fluctuated over time, there are fears that it may be entering a new phase following the announcement of national elections in November 2019, when attacks rose sharply.⁹⁶ Insecurity has persisted during 2020, with further attacks by both sides throughout the year, despite attempted peace talks in June. By the end of July, though the context made precise estimates difficult, at least 285 civilians had been killed since the beginning of the year⁹⁷ and 679,393 were internally displaced in the western regions.⁹⁸

In Cameroon's Far North region, violence by the militant Boko Haram group has resulted in many deaths and the displacement, as of July 2020, of 321,886 people in the area. These IDPs remain highly vulnerable to further attacks, as evidenced at the beginning of August by a night attack involving child suicide bombers on a displacement camp in Nguetchewe that killed at least 17 civilians and injured 16 others.⁹⁹ The region hosts hundreds of thousands fleeing violence in neighbouring countries, with 115,981 refugees from Nigeria (many themselves fleeing violence by Boko Haram across the border) and another 299,761 from the Central African Republic (CAR).

Continued displacement in and from Central African Republic...

After years of civil conflict, 609,379 CAR nationals are living outside their country. Even more people are internally displaced: 658,998 as of the end of June 2020.¹⁰⁰ The refugee and IDP populations combined amount to a quarter of the country's total population. Despite a February 2019 peace agreement, violence has persisted and much of the country remains under the control of armed groups, with 2020 bringing further displacement as thousands have been forced to move

91 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: West Africa – Q2 2020](#); Hinnant, L. & Debre, I. (2020) [Desert or sea: Virus traps migrants in mid-route danger zone](#), ABC News.

92 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: West Africa – Q2 2020](#); Hinnant, L. & Debre, I. op. cit.

93 Alarme Phone Sahara (2020) [Resumption of travel between African states - new large-scale deportations from Algeria to Niger](#)

94 IOM (2020) [Covid-19 – impact on mobility: West and Central Africa May 2020](#).

95 Hodal, K. (2020) [Covid to displace more than a million across the Sahel, new tool predicts](#), The Guardian.

96 Craig, J. (2020) [Briefing: Cameroon's intensifying conflict and what it means for civilians](#), New Humanitarian.

97 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Cameroon: Civilians killed in Anglophone regions](#).

98 UNHCR (2020) [Operational portal: Cameroon](#).

99 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Cameroon: Boko Haram suicide bombers strike displacement site](#).

100 UNHCR (2020) [Operational portal: Central African Republic](#)

due to insecurity.¹⁰¹

...and Democratic Republic of Congo

The DRC also faces significant challenges as a result of continued conflict, with 1,672,000 newly displaced by violence during 2019, bringing the total number of IDPs in DRC to more than 5.5 million, more than a tenth of the world's internally displaced population.¹⁰² This trend has continued into 2020, with hundreds of thousands displaced by intercommunal fighting and armed clashes—including more than 200,000 from the beginning of April to 5 May in Ituri province alone¹⁰³—as well as by flooding. The Covid-19 pandemic, arriving in the wake of another Ebola outbreak and a measles epidemic, threatens to exacerbate this humanitarian catastrophe. Refugees and IDPs are especially vulnerable, particularly as international funding shortfalls have meant that only a fraction of needs are currently being met.¹⁰⁴ There has also been a striking uptick in the number of Congolese detected along the Eastern Mediterranean route in 2020: as of the end of July 2020, DRC nationals constituted the third-largest group (10.9 percent) among registered arrivals in Greece after Afghans (38.1 percent) and Syrian (23.9 percent).¹⁰⁵

East Africa and the Horn

Ever-riskier routes in search of work

The long-established migration route between Ethiopia and the Gulf states, where migrants typically seek out low-paid employment in construction or as domestic workers, involves overland routes through Somalia and Djibouti before crossing the Gulf of Aden or Red Sea to reach Yemen, despite the ongoing conflict there, to continue towards Saudi Arabia. This route is highly perilous, with those making the journey often subjected to torture and abduction by traffickers as well as harassment and mistreatment by Saudi authorities.¹⁰⁶ Border closures and the spread of Covid-19 have exposed those travelling along this route to even greater dangers from traffickers, armed groups and security forces.

Fewer reach Yemen

Migration flows from the Horn of Africa to Yemen have declined sharply since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. More restrictions at key departure points in Djibouti and Somalia, imposed in response, have dramatically reduced

entries. While IOM estimates that there were over 138,213 new arrivals during 2019,¹⁰⁷ in the early months of 2020 these numbers reduced by around 90 percent. For example, while in May 2019 there were 18,904 recorded arrivals to Yemen from the Horn of Africa, the number in May 2020 was just 1,725.¹⁰⁸ Of these, 88 percent were Ethiopian, while the remaining 12 percent were Somali.¹⁰⁹ This downward trend continued in subsequent months, with arrivals to Yemen falling to 1,008 in June and 579 in July. There were a total of 32,455 arrivals in the first seven months of 2020, a 65 percent decrease from the 93,416 arrivals during the same period in 2019.¹¹⁰

Tighter restrictions

Ethiopia and other countries in the region imposed wide-ranging restrictions on mobility, including border closures, in response to the pandemic. The Ethiopian government's announcement of a five-month state of emergency in early April included the almost total closure of its land borders and a reduction in passenger flights.¹¹¹ While Covid-19 appears to have slowed people-smuggling from Somalia to Yemen in the immediate term, in practice these measures might prompt refugees and migrants to rely on smuggling networks through areas where they might previously have been able to travel without the help of smugglers in order to avoid the new restrictions. With smugglers navigating alternative routes to avoid detection, there are concerns that those making the journey are now exposed to even greater hazards than before.¹¹² Thousands of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers have also been stranded as a result of border closures in transit countries, with IOM reporting that in September that 1,012 Ethiopians were still stranded in Djibouti and 574 in Somalia.¹¹³

Ethiopia ends blanket protection for Eritrean refugees

In April 2020, it emerged that Ethiopia had amended its policy towards asylum seekers from Eritrea some three months earlier. The move, which was not announced at the time, ended the automatic granting of refugee status to any Eritreans arriving in Ethiopia. There are concerns that thousands of Eritreans fleeing persecution and oppression in their home country could be endangered as a

101 Norwegian Refugee Council (2020) [The world's most neglected displacement crises in 2019](#).

102 IMDC (2020) [Democratic Republic of the Congo: Displacement associated with conflict and violence](#).

103 OCHA (2020) [République démocratique du Congo Note d'informations humanitaires pour les provinces du Bas-Uélé, Haut-Uélé, de l'Ituri et la Tshopo du 21 avril au 05 mai 2020](#).

104 UNHCR (2020) [As COVID-19 and conflict surge, DR Congo displaced face deadly consequences of chronic underfunding](#).

105 UNHCR (2020) [Mediterranean situation: Greece](#).

106 Human Rights Watch (2019) [Ethiopians abused on Gulf migration route](#).

107 IOM (2020) [Regional Migrant Response Plan for the Horn of Africa and Yemen](#).

108 UN News (2020) [In Yemen, thousands of Ethiopian migrants stranded. Covid-19 likely widespread](#).

109 IOM (2020) [Migrant arrivals and Yemeni returns from Saudi Arabia in May 2020](#).

110 IOM (2020) [Impact of Covid-19 movement restrictions on migrants along the Eastern Corridor as of 31 July 2020](#).

111 IOM (2020) [Impact of Covid-19 movement restrictions on migrants along the Eastern Corridor: Report 4 as of 30 June 2020](#).

112 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: East Africa and Yemen – 2020 Q2](#).

113 IOM (2020) [Covid-19 regional overview on mobility restrictions: As of 17 September 2020](#).

result.¹¹⁴ The change came around the same time as the governments of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia agreed a Joint Plan of Action 2020 in January.¹¹⁵ In April, the Ethiopian government announced plans to close Hitsats camp and relocate some 27,000 refugees living there to two other already overcrowded camps. Humanitarian agencies highlighted the high risks such a move would pose, with lack of water, sanitation or adequate shelter in these settlements contributing to the spread of Covid-19.¹¹⁶

Deportations of Ethiopians from Saudi Arabia

Those who managed to reach Saudi Arabia also face the risk of deportation. In March 2017, Saudi Arabia initiated a campaign to remove undocumented Ethiopian migrants in the country, offering what was initially a 90-day amnesty to allow them to return without incurring penalties. The offer was subsequently extended until November 2017. By the end of July 2020, some 390,000 migrants are estimated to have returned to Ethiopia since the expulsions began in 2017.¹¹⁸ There have been widespread reports of violence, abuse and dehumanising treatment of detained migrants by security officials.¹¹⁹

Yemen becomes more dangerous

Within Yemen itself, the already hazardous situation for Ethiopian and other African migrants deepened with the onset of the pandemic, leaving thousands stranded in the country and at heightened risk of harassment. Already stigmatised, African refugees and migrants in Yemen have been widely blamed for the spread of the Covid-19 virus, with many forcibly rounded up and relocated in remote camps with little access to essential services, placing them at greater risk of infection.¹¹⁷

The mass repatriation of Ethiopian migrants from Saudi Arabia continued during the Covid-19 pandemic, despite concerns that these returns could exacerbate its spread.¹²⁰ While returns of African migrants fell from 8,963 in March to 2,757 in April, with none reported at all in May, flights resumed again in June with 387 migrants returned to Addis Ababa and 334 to Mogadishu.¹²¹ However, returns to Ethiopia were again halted in July and no returns took place in August.¹²² In the meantime, thousands of Ethiopian migrants due to be deported have

Impact of Covid-19 on the number of new arrivals in Yemen by sea (mainly Ethiopians)



Source: <https://migration.iom.int/reports/yemen-%E2%80%94-flow-monitoring-points-migrant-arrivals-and-yemeni-returns-january-june-2020>

114 Marks, S. (2020) *Ethiopia ends blanket protection for Eritrean refugees*, VOA.

115 Shaban, A. (2020) *Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia agree 2020 Joint Plan of Action after Asmara summit*, Africa News.

116 Ashly, J. (2020) *Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia resist camp closure amid COVID-19 fears*, New Humanitarian

117 UN (2020) *In Yemen, thousands of Ethiopian migrants stranded, Covid-19 likely widespread*.

118 IOM (2020) *Return of Ethiopian Migrants from The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (5 May 2017 – 31 July 2020)*.

119 Gardner, G. (2019) *Ethiopians face beatings and bullets as Saudi 'deportation machine' cranks up*, The Guardian

120 Pilling, D. & England, A. (2020) *Saudi Arabia repatriating thousands of migrants back to Ethiopia*, Irish Times.

121 IOM (2020) *Impact of Covid-19 movement restrictions on migrants along the Eastern Corridor: Report 4 as of 30 June 2020*.

122 IOM (2020) *Impact of Covid-19 movement restrictions on migrants along the Eastern Corridor as of 31 August 2020*.

reportedly languished for months in brutal conditions: testimony and images from those being held in these facilities show large numbers being held in inhumane and unsanitary living conditions, with some bearing the signs of physical beatings.¹²³

Pandemic-related returns to Ethiopia

It is anticipated that massive job losses in destination countries across the world could lead to the return of between 200,000 and 500,000 migrants to Ethiopia by the end of 2020.¹²⁴ The challenges they face on return are considerable. Detained in close confinement in their countries of work and facing further quarantine on return to Ethiopia, it is likely that significant numbers may have contracted the virus that causes Covid-19. At the same time, other migrants have been stigmatised as potential carriers, leading to isolation and exclusion. This has further exacerbated the difficulties they face amidst a flagging national economy that offers limited prospects for the sudden return of thousands of workers.¹²⁵

This picture is further complicated by the turmoil in Ethiopia itself. In recent years conflict, environmental stress and human rights abuses have resulted in widespread internal displacement, with Ethiopia reaching the third-highest level of new displacements in 2018, amounting to almost 3.2 million, the large majority resulting from conflict (2,895,000) as well as a smaller number from disasters (296,000) such as drought and floods. The proportion fell during 2019, with 1,052,000 newly displaced by conflict and 504,000 from disasters.¹²⁶

These drivers of displacement persist, particularly as inter-communal tensions have continued in 2020. In particular, the killing on 29 June of Hachalu Hundessa, an Oromo musician and activist, triggered a wave of protests and unrest, including targeted inter-ethnic violence as well as official reprisals. Preliminary estimates suggested that by mid-July at least 8,420 people had been displaced and 239 killed in the violence.¹²⁷ The Oromia region, where much of Ethiopia's marginalised Oromo population resides, has seen a cycle of demonstrations and official crackdowns in recent years in response to the perceived encroachment of the central government on the community's culture, language and autonomy. Given that the majority of migrants travelling through Yemen are Oromo, there is some evidence to suggest that political persecution may be driving some to leave the country.¹²⁸

IGAD takes a step towards free movement

In February, ministers from member states of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) approved the draft **Protocol on Free Movement of Persons** in the IGAD Region and called on the bloc's Council of Ministers to adopt the instrument.¹²⁹ Once in place, the protocol will be similar to other regional free movement arrangements, including that within the East African Community (EAC), although the existence of multiple regional mechanisms with different memberships poses some challenges to the smooth implementation of these provisions in practice.

Moreover, several of the comparable mechanisms, such as the EAC's endorsement of free movement of persons and goods—agreed in 2010—have yet to be implemented. This suggests, amidst ongoing security concerns across the region, that the terms of the IGAD protocol could remain merely aspirational for some time to come.¹³⁰ A further barrier to implementation is that there are significant disparities between different IGAD member states: some are major refugee-producing countries, for instance, while others are themselves hosting large refugee populations from neighbouring countries. There is also considerable variation in the level of affluence and development between various member states.

IGAD member states have been cooperating to develop a coordinated regional response to managing the Covid-19 pandemic.¹³¹ In June, a coalition of national and international NGOs called on governments and regional bodies in East Africa to work together to strengthen protections for vulnerable groups stranded in border areas in the wake of lockdown closures and restrictions on movement.¹³²

123 Brown, W. & Zelalem, Z. (2020) [Investigation: African migrants 'left to die' in Saudi Arabia's hellish Covid detention centres](#). Sunday Telegraph.

124 Nebehay, S. (2020) [Migrant workers need support, jobs at home after pandemic disruption: ILO](#) Reuters.

125 Marks, S. (2020) [Ethiopian workers are forced to return home, some with coronavirus](#). New York Times.

126 IMDC (2020) [Ethiopia](#).

127 IFRC (2020) [Emergency Plan of Action \(EPoA\) Ethiopia: Civil unrest](#); Meseret, E. (2020) [Ethiopia's week of unrest sees 239 dead, 3,500 arrested](#). Washington Post.

128 MMC (2020) [MMC East Africa and Yemen 4Mi Snapshot - June 2020: Ethiopians and Somalis interviewed in Yemen](#).

129 IGAD (2020) [Protocol On Free Movement Of Persons endorsed at ministerial meeting](#).

130 MMC (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: East Africa and Yemen – Quarter 1 2020](#).

131 IGAD (2020) [Call for action: IGAD ministers of finance meeting on response to the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

132 Amnesty International (2020) [East Africa: People seeking safety are trapped at borders due to COVID-19 measures](#)

Migrants targeted in South Africa

There are some 4.2 million migrants currently living in South Africa, predominantly from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Lesotho, along with an additional 300,000 refugees and asylum seekers from countries including Somalia, DRC, and Ethiopia.¹³³ These groups have periodically suffered spikes in xenophobic violence, including during 2008 and 2015, with reported incidents also showing a rise again in 2019.¹³⁴ As attacks are often triggered by tensions around competition for jobs, the country's precarious economic situation—unemployment rose above 30 percent in the first quarter of 2020, even before the pandemic hit—could prove volatile. At the end of July, for instance, reports emerged of mob violence in Thokoza township, with migrant-owned businesses torched and foreigners attacked. Blaming the lack of local jobs on migrants living in the neighbourhood, crowd members reportedly justified the violence as “sanitising the area”.¹³⁵

Greater restrictions on refugees

In January 2020, South Africa amended its Refugees Act to introduce a range of new restrictions on the rights of refugees. Justified in the name of “national security”, the reform has been widely criticised by human rights groups as a violation of national and international law.¹³⁶ By prohibiting refugees and asylum seekers from engaging in political activities, it threatens to impact particularly on dissidents, particularly from the DRC, Rwanda and Zimbabwe. There are also concerns that the legislation signals a broader shift in South Africa's attitude towards refugees.¹³⁷ It comes amidst an apparent increase in anti-refugee rhetoric and rising xenophobia.

Fencing out Covid

The South African government has been criticised for failing to take action to ensure migrants, who are among the most vulnerable groups, are protected from the social and economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the first measures as the country entered a national lockdown in March was to build a fence on the border with Zimbabwe to prevent irregular migration, on the basis that this would help stem the spread of the virus. Critics of the proposal argued that this would not be effective and that authorities should instead be investing resources into inclusive health care and welfare for all, including migrants and foreigners in the country.¹³⁸

133 IOM (2020) [IOM facilitates assistance to Zimbabweans in South Africa stranded by Covid-19 related national lockdown](#)

134 BBC (2019) [South Africa: How common are xenophobic attacks?](#)

135 Bornman, J. (2020) [Xenophobic South African mobs: 'We are sanitising'](#) New Frame

136 Hobden, C. (2020) [South Africa takes fresh steps to restrict rights of refugees](#) The Conversation

137 Jalloh, A. (2020) [South Africa: New refugee laws 'target political dissidents'](#), DW.

138 Rugunanan, P. (2020) ["South Africa belongs to all who live in it", Covid-19 showed it does not](#) OpenDemocracy.

The Middle East

Overview

Across the Middle East, particularly in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey as well as within Syria itself, millions of Syrians continue to live as refugees or internally displaced people (IDPs) as the conflict continues. Even before the outbreak of Covid-19, their situation was characterised by discrimination, poverty, and inadequate living conditions. The pandemic and its accompanying restrictions on movement have further complicated these challenges. With many depending on informal employment for their income, refugee households in the region have been especially hard hit.

Discriminatory treatment, even scapegoating, of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers has exacerbated their situation further. In Yemen, where thousands of Ethiopian nationals have been stranded as freedom of movement has shrunk, xenophobic sentiment linking migrants with the spread of the virus has created added challenges. The pandemic has also highlighted institutional forms of discrimination towards refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in other countries. In the Gulf, in particular, where millions of foreigners are engaged in construction, domestic work, and other sectors with little in the way of rights or protections, migrants have been quarantined in unsanitary conditions, deported or put on unpaid leave in the wake of Covid-19.

Syria enters a tenth year of war

The Syrian conflict, now in its tenth year, has uprooted more than 5.5 million refugees. Almost two-thirds of them are based in Turkey, with significant populations in Lebanon and Jordan, as well as smaller numbers in Iraq and Egypt.¹³⁹ Furthermore, some 6.5 million others have been displaced within Syria itself, including more than 1.8 million during 2019 as a result of fighting in the north-east and north-west of the country.¹⁴⁰ The ongoing conflict and resulting humanitarian crisis have had devastating implications, with 11.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.¹⁴¹

Major donor conference

In June 2020, the EU and the UN co-hosted the 4th Brussels Conference, “Supporting the future of Syria and the region”, securing a total of \$5.5 billion in pledges for humanitarian support to civilians in Syria and neighbouring host countries for 2020.¹⁴² As of July 2020, only \$1.46 billion of the \$3.82 billion needed for the Syria Humanitarian Response Plan 2020 had been received.¹⁴³ The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan has also expanded its requirements in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁴⁴

Covid-19 hits conflict-affected Idlib

The situation is especially severe in opposition-held Idlib province, bordering Turkey, where since December 2019 Syrian forces have waged a major campaign to regain control of the area, in the process triggering the single largest displacement in the entire war.¹⁴⁵ In February 2020 alone, for example, some 454,000 IDP movements were recorded in Idlib governorate.¹⁴⁶ Following a ceasefire brokered in early March by Russia and Turkey, the situation became more stable, with more than 103,000 Syrians estimated to have returned to rural Idlib or neighbouring Aleppo governorate by early April.¹⁴⁷

Covid-19 now poses a significant threat for the approximately 1 million IDPs in Idlib, most of whom reside in overcrowded camps with limited access to even basic healthcare. The first confirmed case in Idlib in July 2020 has alarmed humanitarian organisations in the area who fear the impact could prove devastating.¹⁴⁸

139 UNHCR (2020) [Syria Regional Refugee Response](#).

140 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2020) [Syria-Country information](#).

141 OCHA (2020) [About OCHA Syria](#).

142 EU (2020) [Supporting the future of Syria and the region - Brussels IV Conference](#).

143 OCHA (2020) [Syria Humanitarian Response Plan 2020](#).

144 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (2020) [COVID-19 Response](#).

145 BBC (2020) [Syria war: Why does the battle for Idlib matter?](#)

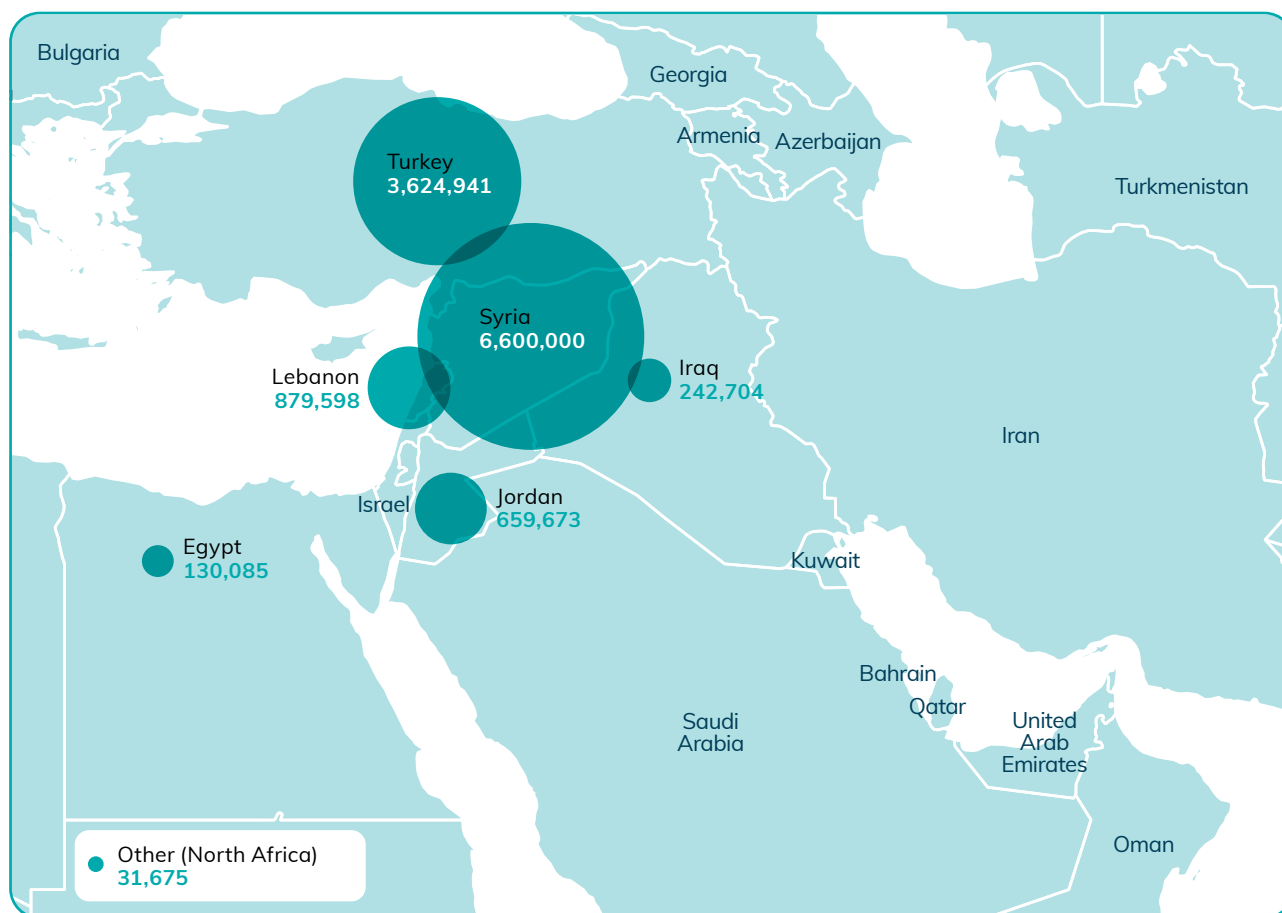
146 Humanitarian Response (2020) [Syrian Arab Republic: IDP movements](#).

147 France24 (2020) [‘Our lives go from danger to danger’: Displaced Syrians begin returning to Idlib](#)

148 BBC (2020) [Coronavirus: Idlib’s first Covid-19 case raises fears for Syria camps](#).

Syrian displaced as IDPs and refugees in the Middle East in 2020

(as of Oct 2020)



Source: all data from UNHCR <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

Many seek sanctuary in Lebanon...

Lebanon remains the country with the largest per capita refugee population in the world. Though official UNHCR figures put the number of Syrian refugees in the country at 892,310 as of the end of May 2020, government figures suggest that the true total could be around 1.5 million.¹⁴⁹ In addition, Lebanon hosts around 200,000 Palestinian refugees and around 17,000 other predominantly Iraqi and Sudanese refugees.¹⁵⁰ Even before the arrival of Covid-19 Lebanon was struggling with profound economic and political turmoil, a situation made worse by a huge explosion in a warehouse in Beirut on 4 August 2020 that killed approximately 200 people, injured 5,000 and left as many as 300,000 temporarily homeless.¹⁵¹ Against a background of deteriorating security, the country's refugee populations have faced increasing challenges.

...as Covid fans discrimination

Since many are undocumented and face barriers accessing secure employment, a large number of Syrians in Lebanon work in the informal sector, typically for lower than average pay and with little in the way of labour protections. As a result, the context for most remains precarious. An International Labour Organization survey published in May 2020 found that just 2 percent of Syrian respondents had social security, for example, while 95 percent of those in employment did not have valid work permits.¹⁵² The increasing barriers that refugees face in gaining legal residency—almost three quarters of Syrians in Lebanon now lack legal residency—undermines their ability to access health, education and other essential services, while placing them at constant risk of abuse and even deportation.¹⁵³ During 2019, the Lebanese government launched a drive to forcibly return undocumented Syrians who had entered the country after 24 April 2019, with hundreds deported in its wake.¹⁵⁴

149 UNHCR (2020) [Syria Regional Refugee Response](#); UNHCR (2020) [Lebanon: January 2020](#)

150 UNHCR (2020) [Lebanon: January 2020](#)

151 BBC (2020) [Beirut explosion: What we know so far](#).

152 Kebede, T., Stave, S. & Kattaa, M. (2020) [Facing Multiple Crises: Rapid assessment of the impact of Covid-19 on vulnerable workers and small-scale enterprises in Lebanon](#). ILO/FAFO.

153 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Lebanon: Events of 2019](#).

154 Murdock, H. (2019) [Facing harassment in Lebanon, Syrian refugees ponder dismal options](#). VOA.

Syrians have had to contend with rising xenophobia not only from Lebanese civilians, but also senior politicians who have used them as a convenient scapegoat for the country's ills, including widespread unemployment. The outbreak of Covid-19 in the country has heightened discrimination against Syrians. Besides being at higher risk of contracting the virus due to overcrowding and limited access to clean water or sanitation, Syrian refugees also face greater barriers to accessing tests.¹⁵⁵ These issues have been exacerbated by the stigmatising response of some local authorities. According to Human Rights Watch, at least 21 municipalities put in place harsher restrictions for Syrian refugees with the stated aim of containing the virus, including limited movement, curfews, and quarantines.¹⁵⁶ By specifically targeting Syrians with additional measures, authorities have unfairly identified them as a risk. From a public health perspective, too, this stigmatisation has been counterproductive: in this climate of surveillance, some Syrians have reported their fear of even being tested for the virus in case they are then deported.¹⁵⁷

Reforms to the kafala system

The widespread practice of *kafala*, prevalent across the Gulf and other countries such as Lebanon, has long been criticised for encouraging abuse and exploitation of foreign workers. Commonly, migrants are “sponsored” by their employers and remain heavily dependent on them during their residency, with many experiencing long working hours, poor pay and confiscation of their passports. The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown these issues into even sharper focus, from overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions to the threat of deportation and the unequal power relations between national employers and foreign workers.

The vulnerability of migrants employed under *kafala* was highlighted by reports of dozens of Ethiopian maids who had been “dumped” by their employers outside the Ethiopian consulate in Lebanon.¹⁵⁸ Their situation was aggravated by the limited assistance provided by their embassy to support them. In June, reports emerged that the Ethiopian government had almost tripled the

cost of repatriation, to \$1,450, with two weeks mandatory quarantine, making the prospects of return even more daunting for the abandoned migrant workers.¹⁵⁹ There are more than 100,000 Ethiopian migrants in Lebanon, making up the bulk of the country's domestic workers. Mass protests and a deepening financial crisis in the last months of 2019 left many without employment.¹⁶⁰ Their predicament has been worsened by the pandemic, with many more losing their jobs.

In the **United Arab Emirates**, a law was passed in the wake of the pandemic's onset that enabled companies to end work contracts, lower salaries and compel workers to take unpaid leave.¹⁶¹

2020 delivered some attempts to reform of the system, including:

- In March, **Lebanon** launched a consultation on the *kafala* system. Under the current *kafala* arrangement, migrant workers are “sponsored” by a Lebanese employer and forfeit their immigration status if they decide to leave them. This makes them highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Human rights groups have called for the system to be reformed so that migrant workers are free to leave or change employers and enjoy minimum wage, freedom of movement and other basic protections.¹⁶²
- In June, **Oman** passed legislation to relax restrictions for migrant workers. Under these amendments, non-nationals are able to transfer their sponsorship without the permission of their existing employer after completing a two-year contract. Before, foreigners could face a two-year ban on re-entry to Oman if they left their employer without authorisation.¹⁶³
- In August, **Qatar** passed two ground-breaking legal amendments that could bring significant change to the situation of migrants in the country. The policy changes lifted restrictions on the ability of foreign workers seeking an alternative employer and also established a minimum wage for workers. If properly implemented, these

155 Al Saba, R. (2020) [Lebanon: For Syrian refugees, discrimination is the greatest barrier to accessing Covid-19 testing](#) Minority Rights Group International.

156 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Lebanon: Refugees at risk in Covid-19 response](#).

157 Majzoub, A. & Hardman, N. (2020) [Lebanon's refugee restrictions could harm everyone's health](#), Human Rights Watch.

158 Cheeseman, A. (2020) [“Thrown away like garbage”: the plight of foreign workers in crisis-hit Lebanon](#), Telegraph; Amnesty International (2019) [End Kafala: Justice for migrant domestic workers in Lebanon](#).

159 Zelalem, Z. & Ullah, A. (2020) [Ethiopia strands its citizens in Lebanon by tripling price of repatriation](#), Middle East Eye.

160 Zelalem, Z. (2020) [Ethiopians in Lebanon: Between revolution and slavery](#), OpenDemocracy.

161 DW (2020) [Coronavirus deepens risks for migrant workers in the Gulf](#).

162 Amnesty International (2020) [Lebanon: New kafala consultation an opportunity to protect migrant workers' rights](#).

163 Migrant-Rights.org (2020) [Oman eases restrictions on sponsorship transfer](#)

changes could reduce the control that existing employers have exerted over their workforce and reduce the risk of exploited workers being underpaid.¹⁶⁴

Abuses against migrant workers in the Gulf escalate amid pandemic

For decades, the oil-rich Gulf region has relied on migrant labourers, predominantly from Africa and Asia, to work in its domestic and construction sectors. At the same time, despite their dependence on foreign workers, many Gulf countries have also become notorious for their exploitative and discriminatory treatment of migrants. From long working hours in hazardous environments to unpaid wages and inadequate living conditions, migrant workers in the Gulf have often enjoyed few rights or protections.¹⁶⁵

The outbreak of Covid-19 has brought their predicament into even sharper focus, with reports of forced repatriation and dangerous living conditions for migrant workers. In **Bahrain**, for example, an inspection of 420 dormitories found that only three met health and safety requirements.¹⁶⁶ The response of some governments in the Gulf region to the crisis has appeared to prioritise the profit margins of local employers over the protection needs of their foreign workforces. The **United Arab Emirates**, for instance, passed legislation that allowed companies to terminate work contracts, renegotiate lower salaries and force workers to take unpaid leave.¹⁶⁷

In **Qatar**, there are over 2 million foreign labourers who collectively make up around 95 percent of the workforce, their numbers swelled by a building boom ahead of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.¹⁶⁸ There have been continued reports of the abuses suffered by construction workers in particular, with Qatari authorities accused of failing to investigate the deaths of hundreds of migrants every year, many of whom were working up to 10 hours a day in temperatures as high as 45C.¹⁶⁹

After hundreds of construction workers were infected with Covid-19, a strict lockdown was imposed on large areas of Doha's Industrial Area, Qatar's country's largest migrant worker camp. Residents were forcibly quarantined in cramped and unhygienic conditions, with limited access to clean water or hand sanitiser.¹⁷⁰ Following the outbreak, the Qatari government also allowed employers to suspend their operations during the outbreak and to put migrant workers on unpaid leave or end their contracts. This left thousands of workers without a source of income, forcing some to beg for food to survive.¹⁷¹ Police rounded up dozens of Nepali migrant workers in March, informing them they were going to be tested for Covid-19, before instead deporting them to Nepal.¹⁷²

Similar reports emerged in **Kuwait**, following an official amnesty for any migrants who presented themselves to authorities for repatriation between 1 and 30 April, with no fines to pay and the promise of re-entry to the country in future. Some 23,000 migrants who registered were subsequently detained in unsanitary and overcrowded desert camps while they waited to be returned to their home countries. Unable to practice social distancing or other safety measures, the prolonged containment led to protests that were broken up by security forces with tear gas and rubber bullets.¹⁷³

Pressure grows in Turkey

Turkey continues to host the largest population of registered refugees in the world, including almost 3.6 million Syrian refugees and 330,000 refugees and asylum seekers from other countries as of May 2020.¹⁷⁴ In recent years, the number of new arrivals has generally been on the rise: some 454,664 recorded in 2019, compared to 268,003 in 2018 and 175,752 in 2017. However, with increased border restrictions, the annual total for 2020 will likely be much lower, with only 63,560 recorded arrivals in the first half of the year. The majority of new arrivals during this period were from Afghanistan, Syria and Pakistan.¹⁷⁵ By 15 September, out of some 87,877 registered arrivals in the year so far, 35,067 (40 percent) were from Afghanistan, 12,319 (14 percent) from Syria and 9,818 (11 percent) from Pakistan.¹⁷⁶

164 Amnesty International (2020) [Qatar: New laws to protect migrant workers are a step in the right direction](#)

165 Amnesty International (2020) [COVID-19 makes Gulf countries' abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore](#)

166 Salama, S. (2020) [98% of labour accommodations in Bahrain area fertile land for Covid-19](#) Gulf News

167 Allison, T. and Sanders, L. (2020) [Coronavirus deepens risks for migrant workers in the Gulf](#) DW

168 Cousins, S. (2020) [Migrant workers can't afford a lockdown](#). Foreign Policy; Human Rights Watch (2020) [Qatar: Events of 2019](#).

169 Pattison, P. & Sedhai, R. (2020) [Sudden deaths of hundreds of migrant workers in Qatar not investigated](#). The Guardian.

170 Pattison, P. & Sedhai, R. (2020) [Covid-19 lockdown turns Qatar's largest migrant camp into "virtual prison"](#). The Guardian.

171 Pattison, P. & Sedhai, R. (2020) [Qatar's migrant workers beg for food as Covid-19 infections rise](#). The Guardian.

172 Amnesty International (2020) [Qatar: Migrant workers illegally expelled during Covid-19 pandemic](#).

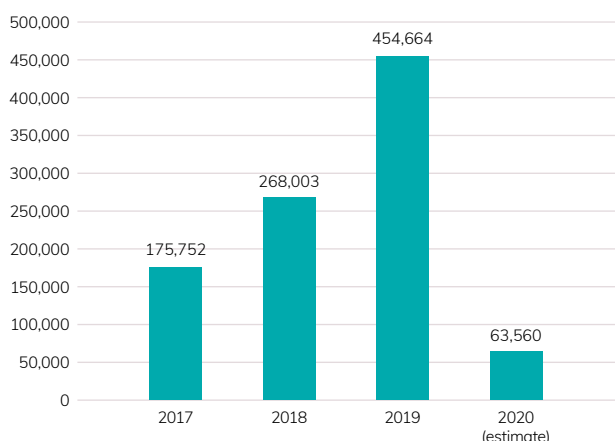
173 Ullah, A. (2020) ["Like sardines": Migrant workers suffering in Kuwait's desert detention camps](#). Middle East Eye.

174 UNHCR (2020) [Turkey May 2020](#).

175 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Middle East – Quarter 2 2020](#); Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Middle East – Q1 2020](#).

176 Government of Turkey (2020) [Düzensiz göç](#).

Pre-Covid-19 rising numbers of new arrivals of mixed flows in Turkey



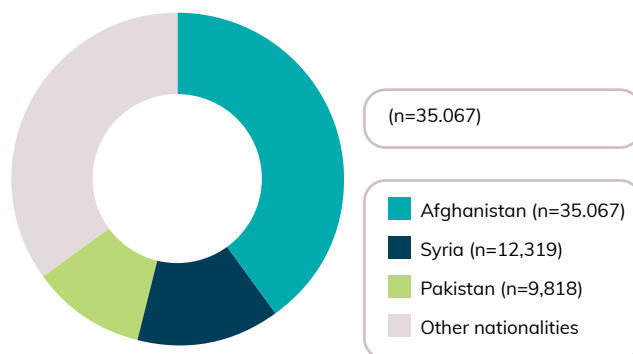
Relations with the EU come under strain

As outlined in the Europe section below, the 2016 EU–Turkey agreement has come under repeated strain, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan regularly threatening to end the agreement. Following on from threats in September 2019 to open the Greek-Turkish border if his proposal for an expanded “safe zone” in northern Syria was not supported,¹⁷⁷ tensions came to a head in February 2020 after 33 Turkish troops were killed in Idlib province by Syrian forces. In the wake of the attacks, Erdoğan declared that the border with Greece had been opened, triggering the movement of thousands of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers to the border with Greece. While Erdoğan has been accused of weaponising Turkey’s vulnerable refugee population for political ends, Ankara has criticised the perceived failure of the EU to shoulder more of the financial burden of refugee protection. The Turkish government claims to have spent \$40 billion on refugee assistance since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011.¹⁷⁸ While the Turkish borders were again closed in March in response to Covid-19, by May government officials suggested that movement towards the border might resume once the pandemic was contained.¹⁷⁹

While Turkey condemned the violence carried out by Greek security forces on those attempting to cross the border, resulting in at least three deaths, many refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers who had journeyed there were also treated poorly by Turkish authorities. Later in March, with the spread of Covid-19, Turkish police reportedly burned down tents and forced thousands of refugees, migrants,

Nationalities of new arrivals in Turkey in 2020

(up to September)



and asylum seekers onto buses, transporting them en masse across the country to quarantine camps.¹⁸⁰

Refugees bear the brunt of Covid-19

In Turkey, as elsewhere, refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers have been especially vulnerable to the health and economic impacts of Covid-19. The situation of many refugees across the country makes prevention strategies such as hand washing and social distancing especially challenging. Of the 1.7 million recipients of humanitarian assistance through the Emergency Social Safety Net programme, at least 71 percent reside in inadequate housing, 12 percent lack access to water and sanitation while 17 percent face overcrowding.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, given the widespread reliance on informal employment, their situation has become even more precarious in the wake of lockdown. One survey conducted shortly after the outbreak found that 69 percent of refugee households reported having lost employment as a result of Covid-19. Access to health care, education and other essential needs had also been constrained.¹⁸²

Crisis continues in Yemen

Yemen faces the largest humanitarian crisis in the world, with 80 percent of its population now in need of assistance as a result of conflict, food shortages, natural disasters and, more recently, the spread of Covid-19. In a context where even basic healthcare remains beyond the reach of millions of civilians, the implications of the pandemic could be catastrophic.¹⁸³ Amid severe

177 Molana-Allen, L. (2020) [Turkey threatens to ‘open gates’ for Syrian refugees to leave and move to the West if it doesn’t get safe zone](#). Telegraph.

178 Cetingulec, M. (2020) [Syrian refugees villainized as Turkey faces costs of coronavirus](#). Al-Monitor.

179 Al Jazeera (2020) [Turkey, Greece spat over border policy and treatment of refugees](#).

180 Fallon, K. & Boersma, A. (2020) [‘There is no future’: the refugees who became pawns in Erdoğan’s game](#). The Guardian.

181 IFRC (2020) [Impact of Covid-19 on Refugee Populations Benefitting from the Emergency Social Safety Net \(ESSN\) Programme](#).

182 Ibid.

183 UNICEF (2020) [Yemen crisis](#).

funding shortfalls, millions could be left without essential assistance. Meanwhile, displacement in Yemen continues unabated. By the end of 2019, there were an estimated 3,635,000 IDPs in the country, including some 398,000 new displacements during the year.¹⁸⁴ Reports suggest that the spread of Covid-19 has also contributed to further displacement, against a backdrop of rising xenophobia and scapegoating.¹⁸⁵

Discrimination against African migrants increases

One of the most egregious instances of this took place in April 2020, when thousands of Ethiopian migrants were forcibly removed by Houthi forces to the border with **Saudi Arabia**, justified on the grounds that they might be “coronavirus carriers”, with many killed in the process. Saudi security forces reportedly shot many of those attempting to flee over the border, while hundreds of others were detained in unsanitary immigration centres.¹⁸⁶

As of July 2020, IOM estimated that at least 14,500 Ethiopian migrants—and likely many more—have been stranded in Yemen by Covid-19 and restrictions on movement. A large number of them have been subjected to detention, harassment and forced relocation. Given that many are living in inadequate shelter or sleeping outside, they are especially vulnerable to the spread of the virus.¹⁸⁷ To add to these challenges, migrants have also had to contend with being scapegoated as “spreaders” of the disease, resulting in violent attacks, denial of access to essential services and forced movement.¹⁸⁸

Israel's Deposit Law declared unconstitutional

Israel's Deposit Law, enacted in May 2017, required asylum seekers—officially termed “infiltrators” by Israeli authorities, with few rights or protections—to deposit 20 percent of their earnings in an account that they could only access when they left the country. The legislation, intended to encourage Eritrean and Sudanese residents to leave, was widely criticised for exacerbating the economic insecurity of an already impoverished group.¹⁸⁹ However, in April 2020 the law was struck down by Israel's High Court as unconstitutional, with the government ordered to repay the accumulated sums.¹⁹⁰

Given the steady attrition of refugee rights in the country over the last decades, however, it is likely that Israel's predominantly Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers will face other challenges. In August 2020, for instance, Israel's intelligence minister announced that the ongoing discussions around the normalisation of relations between Israel and Sudan could include the repatriation of Sudanese to their home country, a move that human rights groups warned could put their lives at risk.¹⁹¹

184 Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2020) [Yemen](#).

185 UN News (2020) [Covid-19 scapegoating triggers fresh displacement in Yemen, warns migration agency](#).

186 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Yemen: Houthis kill, expel Ethiopian migrants](#).

187 UN (2020) [In Yemen, thousands of Ethiopian migrants stranded, Covid-19 likely widespread](#).

188 UNOCHA (2020) [Migrant arrivals plummet while antimigrant abuse spikes leaving thousands stranded](#).

189 Davidson, S. (2019) [Israel's "Deposit Law" is pushing asylum seekers to financial ruin](#) News Deeply

190 Yaron, L. (2020) [Israel's top court strikes down law requiring asylum seekers to deposit 20% of salaries](#) Haaretz

191 Sokol, S. (2020) [Minister says Sudan deal to include sending back asylum seekers](#) Times of Israel

The Americas

Overview

The Venezuela crisis continues to dominate mixed migration patterns in Latin America, with the number of Venezuelans fleeing their country still growing in the early months of 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic and the rollout of lockdowns, border closures and other restrictions in response subsequently pushed tens of thousands of Venezuelans to return, driven by destitution: the suspension of their predominantly informal livelihoods left many unable to even pay their rents. Venezuela itself is likely to experience further instability as a result of the pandemic. With other states potentially maintaining border restrictions in the near future, this could result in higher levels of internal displacement within the country.¹⁹²

The United States (US) has responded to the Covid-19 crisis by granting unprecedented powers to migration agents at the southern border with Mexico to intercept and return the vast majority of individuals apprehended at the border. This fast-track expulsion process, justified by US officials as a public health measure, further undermines the ability of vulnerable individuals to access asylum procedures.¹⁹³ Thousands of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers have been deported through this process since it was put in place. Originally passed on 21 March 2020 with a 30-day initial window, it has since been renewed on multiple occasions and at the time of writing had been extended again to 21 September.¹⁹⁴

The measure follows a series of increasingly hostile measures including the Asylum Cooperative Agreement (ACA) with Guatemala, agreed in July 2019 and beginning in November 2019, that enabled the removal to Guatemala of hundreds of non-Guatemalan asylum seekers from the US before it was suspended in March 2020. This and other yet-to-be-implemented ACAs with El Salvador and Honduras suggest a shift away from the use of the Migration Protection Protocols to deport individuals to Mexico to the increasing reliance on Northern Triangle countries as “safe third countries”.

The crisis in Venezuela continues

Years of insecurity, turmoil, and growing poverty in Venezuela have left the oil-rich country in a state of extreme hardship, with millions lacking access to food, health care, and other essentials. To date, around one in six Venezuelans have been driven by the humanitarian crisis to flee their country.¹⁹⁵ By early July 2020 more than 5.2 million were estimated to have left. Most head south into Colombia or on to Peru or Chile through Ecuador or Brazil. The largest populations are currently hosted in Colombia (1,788,380), Peru (829,677), Chile (455,494), Ecuador (362,887), the US (351,144), Brazil (246,617) and Argentina (179,069).¹⁹⁶

Growing post-flight vulnerability

While Venezuelan migration to Colombia and other countries predates the deterioration of the situation in Venezuela, the demographic profile of those leaving the country since 2014 has changed significantly compared to the relatively affluent and well educated Venezuelans who left the country in previous years.¹⁹⁷ As the humanitarian emergency in Venezuela has continued with no apparent end in sight, reports have highlighted the increased vulnerability of arrivals and the growing proportion of those facing health challenges as a result of disabilities, chronic illnesses or age.¹⁹⁸ Increasingly, arrivals are “poorer and more vulnerable Venezuelans for whom migration is more difficult but who see little alternative.”¹⁹⁹ Particularly since 2017–18, when the economic crisis deepened significantly, the majority of those leaving the country have been impoverished and with low levels of education. Their migration journey is much more hazardous and protracted as a result.²⁰⁰

192 Miranda, A. (2020) [The impact of Covid-19 on the Venezuelan displacement crisis](#). IDMC.

193 Schacher, Y. & Beyrer, C. (2020) [Expelling Asylum Seekers is Not the Answer: U.S. Border Policy in the Time of Covid-19](#) Refugees International

194 U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2020) [Fact Sheet: DHS measures on the border to limit the further spread of coronavirus](#)

195 International Crisis Group (2020) [Seizure of parliament plunges Venezuela into deeper turmoil](#).

196 Plataforma Regional de Coordinación Interagencial (2020) [RMRP dashboard](#), July 2020.

197 Hanson, R. (2018) [4 charts show Venezuela's worsening migrant crisis](#). The Conversation; Freier, L. & Parent, N. (2018) [A South American Migration Crisis: Venezuelan outflows test neighbors' hospitality](#) Migration Policy Institute.

198 Stott, M. & Long, G. (2020) [Venezuela: refugee crisis tests Colombia's stability](#). Financial Times.

199 Faiola, A & Krygier, R. (2019) [As Venezuela's crisis deepens, the most vulnerable are joining the exodus](#). Washington Post.

200 Mixed Migration Centre. (2019) [Waning Welcome: The growing challenges facing mixed migration flows from Venezuela](#).

Major hosting countries of Venezuelan refugees and migrants

(up to Oct 2020, not including those without regular status)

5.5M
Total approx.
Venezuelan refugees and migrants worldwide



Source: R4V <https://r4v.info/es/situations/platform>

While some countries have rolled out various protection measures to support poor and vulnerable groups amid the Covid-19 pandemic, Venezuelans are not necessarily able to benefit from these. In Peru, for instance, cash assistance for low-income households was not extended to refugees, migrants, or asylum seekers.²⁰¹ As many such people depend on informal labour to survive, lockdown restrictions have left them in an even more precarious situation. Large numbers have been pushed by the crisis into destitution and homelessness, with women in particular at heightened risk of sexual abuse and domestic violence as a result.²⁰² In host countries across

the region, xenophobic discrimination has reportedly risen due to negative associations linking Venezuelans with the spread of the coronavirus.²⁰³ There have however also been some positive examples of governments in the region responding to address the immediate impacts of the pandemic on Venezuelans living in their territory: for instance, Colombia announced the extension of existing visas and permits for residents until 30 May or until the initial phase of the crisis had passed.²⁰⁴

201 RMRP (2020) [RMRP 2020 – Covid 19: May 2020 revision](#).

202 Martinez, M. (2020) [Covid-19's double dangers for Venezuelan women in Colombia](#), New Humanitarian.

203 RMRP (2020) [RMRP 2020 – Covid 19: May 2020 revision](#).

204 Migracion Colombia (2020) [Migracion Colombia suspend vigencia de sus tramites por cuarentena](#)

Regional solidarity wavers

In September 2018, 11 out of 13 Latin American countries agreed the landmark Quito Declaration on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region. This includes a generous range of humanitarian assistance and protection commitments related to residency documentation, combatting xenophobia and facilitating access to health, education, and work. In mid-2019, however, some key receiving countries adopted more restrictive entry policies.

Between June and July 2019 Peru, Chile and then Ecuador in quick succession announced tighter entry requirements for Venezuelans.²⁰⁵ Caribbean countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago and the Dominican Republic, have implemented similar visa restrictions of their own.²⁰⁶ As most Venezuelans lack access to the money or documentation necessary to complete these processes, it was predicted that these measures could result in an increase in irregular migration to these countries, as well as place further pressure on Colombia as the primary host country in the region.²⁰⁷

At the Quito Declaration's Fifth Technical Meeting, held in November 2019, the 11 participating states restated their commitment to a harmonised strategy for humanitarian support and integration.²⁰⁸ One notable positive step was **Brazil's** granting of prima facie refugee status to more than 21,000 Venezuelans in December, apparently in response to reports of serious human rights abuses taking place in Venezuela.²⁰⁹

Border policies across the region grew more restrictive in response to Covid-19. In March 2020, **Colombia** announced the closure of its borders with Venezuela.²¹⁰ In the immediate aftermath, over 5,000 Colombian soldiers were sent to the border to protect informal crossing points into the country and all migration services for those seeking to enter Colombia were suspended. Though the intention of this freeze was to halt arrivals from Venezuela, as a result many Venezuelans who would normally have used official channels of entry have instead relied

on informal entry, with no health checks or other protections in place.²¹¹

By the end of March 2020, all national borders in Latin America had been closed in response to the virus, with the exception of Nicaragua.²¹² These restrictions have exacerbated the insecurity already faced by Venezuelans on the move, in particular their vulnerability to extortion or violence from armed groups and criminal organisations operating in the area. With thousands of Venezuelans still desperate to cross into Colombia, many have been forced to bribe officials or pay criminals to enter the country illicitly. In this context, the risks on the other side of the border have also increased, with arrivals facing the potential threat of forced recruitment by armed rebel groups, sexual exploitation and trafficking.²¹³

Thousands return home

Even before the crisis, many Venezuelan refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers had limited access to medical care due to poverty or their irregular status in their country of exile. Their situation has also become even more precarious since pandemic-prompted lockdowns, particularly since a large proportion of Venezuelans rely on informal work to survive. The sudden loss of livelihoods and the absence of welfare support mechanisms to help those affected have left many unable to afford basic services or pay their rent. The resulting rise in evictions and homelessness has forced many into dangerous or unsanitary conditions.²¹⁴

Tens of thousands of Venezuelans have as a result returned to their country—almost 70,000 between mid-March and the end of May 2020²¹⁵—resulting in significant health and protection concerns. Humanitarian organisations have reported that conditions for safe return are not being met, with returnees obliged to quarantine in unsanitary conditions after reaching Venezuela.²¹⁶ Returnees have also been publicly stigmatised by government officials as “biological weapons”, particularly as increasing numbers have resorted to entering the country clandestinely in response to border restrictions: President Nicolás Maduro accused those of entering

205 Mixed Migration Centre (2019) [Mixed Migration Review 2019](#)

206 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Latin America and the Caribbean: Quarter 4 – 2019](#)

207 Mixed Migration Centre (2019) [Waning Welcome: The growing challenges facing mixed migration flows from Venezuela](#)

208 Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (2020) [Special update on Quito Process V Technical Meeting on Human Mobility of Venezuelan Citizens in the Region](#)

209 Muñoz, C. & Tarociuk Broner, T. (2019) [Brazil grants asylum to 21,000 Venezuelans in a single day](#). Human Rights Watch.

210 El Tiempo (2020) [Duque ordena cerrar los pasos fronterizos con Venezuela](#)

211 International Crisis Group (2020) [Broken Ties, Frozen Borders: Colombia and Venezuela face Covid-19](#)

212 DW (2020) [Cuba cierra totalmente sus fronteras](#)

213 Idler, A. and Hochmüller, M. (2020) [Venezuelan migrants face crime, conflict and coronavirus at Colombia's closed border](#) The Conversation

214 RMRP (2020) [RMRP 2020 – Covid 19: May 2020 revision](#)

215 Semana (2020) [Migrantes que buscan regresar a Venezuela reciben atención en la frontera](#)

216 International Crisis Group (2020) [Broken Ties, Frozen Borders: Colombia and Venezuela face Covid-19](#)

illegally of “contaminating their communities” and “killing their families”.²¹⁷

Covid-19 brings new challenges

The regional strategy to the Venezuelan crisis has undergone substantial revision in response to the outbreak of Covid-19. Mandatory restrictions such as self-isolation and restrictions of movement in countries across the region, except for Nicaragua, have impacted particularly on Venezuelan refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers heavily dependent on informal livelihoods with few protections in place. In Colombia, the reverse migration of tens of thousands of Venezuelans back into Venezuela—also heavily exposed to devastating impacts from the virus—has highlighted the precarious socio-economic situation many face in host countries.

In response, the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela 2020, originally agreed in November 2019, was revised in May 2020 to meet the complex challenges arising from the pandemic. Recognising the particular challenges that Venezuelan refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers face in accessing essential services, the Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform advocates a “whole of society” approach to ensure the full inclusion of these groups in national Covid-19 response strategies. This requires a holistic programme of support spanning food assistance, shelter provision, adequate sanitation and protection.²¹⁸

Some countries in the region have been swift to respond to the challenges posed by Covid-19. Colombia had by early April 2020 developed a detailed six-point plan to ensure that Venezuelan refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers were included in its national pandemic strategy, with an emphasis on “humanitarian-sensitive border management, expanded access to healthcare, specialised assistance for vulnerable groups, targeted support for hard-hit cities, and improved coordination across all actors involved in the response.”²¹⁹ Nevertheless, many thousands in practice remain highly vulnerable, as illustrated by the continued movement of thousands of Venezuelans towards the border.

There are also signs that governments in the region may adopt more restrictive migration policies in response to the pandemic. In June 2020, for instance, senators in Chile reopened discussions on a proposed migration bill that would tighten restrictions on entry and residency for foreign nationals. The legislation was portrayed as a necessary response to an anticipated surge of migration to the country once the pandemic eased.²²⁰

Uncertain prospects

In late 2019, the Refugee and Migrant Response Plan predicted that the number of Venezuelan refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers would continue to rise throughout 2020 and reach 6.5 million globally by the end of the year.²²¹ This would make it, compared to the current situation in Syria, the largest refugee crisis in the world. The early months of 2020 appeared to confirm this upward trend, with IOM reporting that between 4,000 and 5,000 Venezuelans were still leaving the country every day.²²²

It remains to be seen how the outbreak of Covid-19 will affect these projections. In addition to the tens of thousands of Venezuelans driven by destitution to return, the restrictions on movement and border closures have also reduced movement out of Venezuela. At the same time, the insecurity, poverty and humanitarian shortages that until now have contributed to mass departures of millions of Venezuelans have not been addressed and are likely to deepen as a result of Covid-19. It is possible that at least some of the anticipated rise in refugee numbers could instead manifest as a sharp increase in internal displacement within Venezuela itself.²²³

217 Broner, T. & Page, K. (2020) [Stuck at Venezuela's border with Covid-19 all around](#). Human Rights Watch.

218 RMRP (2020) [RMRP 2020 – COVID 19: May 2020 revision](#).

219 Panayotatos, D. & Schmidke, R. (2020) [Searching for Home: How COVID-19 threatens progress for Venezuelan integration in Colombia](#). Refugees International.

220 Laing, A. (2020) [Chile eyes new migration law after report predicts it will rise once pandemic eases](#). Reuters.

221 RMRP (2019) [RMRP 2020 for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](#).

222 IOM (2020) [DTM Reporte 7 - Monitoreo de flujo de población venezolana en el Perú](#).

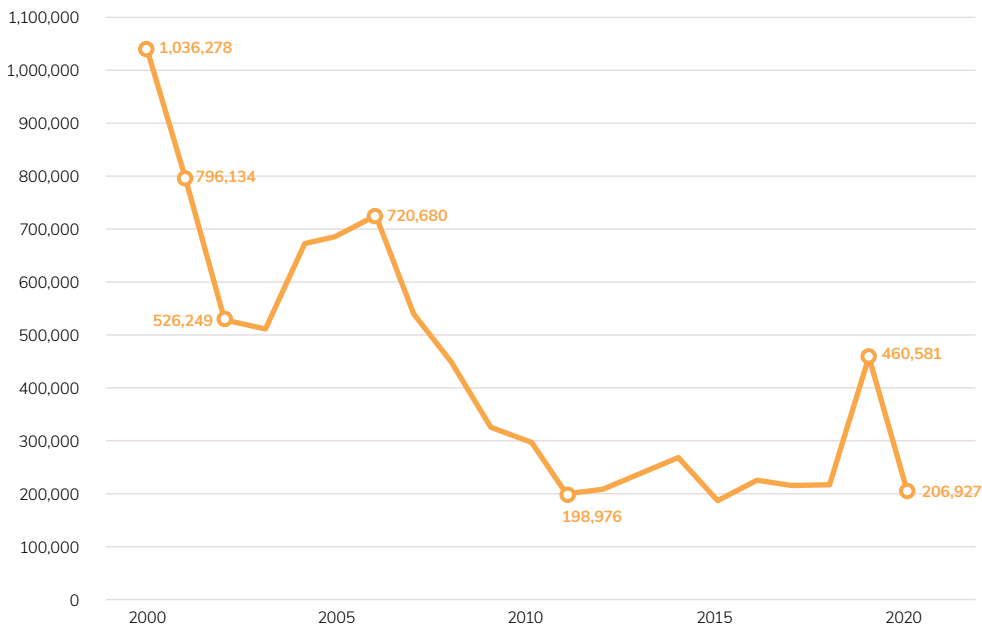
223 Miranda, A. (2020) [The impact of Covid-19 on the Venezuelan displacement crisis](#). IDMC.

US border crossings plummet

Since peaking in May 2019 with 132,856 apprehensions at the US-Mexico border—the highest single month figure recorded since March 2006—the number of people crossing into the US has steadily reduced. In the first half of 2020 there were 157,360 apprehensions, compared to 534,726 in the first half of 2019: a fall of 70.6 percent. This decline was evident even before the outbreak of Covid-19, though the pandemic and the US government’s restrictive response (see box below) has further reduced crossings. Monthly levels in 2020 fell from 30,236 in March to 16,045 in April and 21,498 in May before rising back to previous levels in June (30,300).²²⁴

Apprehensions at southwest border in fiscal 2020 have dropped sharply compared with previous years

Seven month (October-April) total apprehensions at southwest U.S. border, by fiscal year, 2000-2020



Note: Beginning in March 2020, monthly totals from U.S. Border Patrol include apprehensions and expulsions and are called encounters. Prior to March 2020, monthly totals include apprehensions only. Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Source: Adapted from Pew Research Center - [With U.S.-Mexico border closed, migrant apprehensions fell by nearly half in April](#)

224 U.S. Customs and Border Protection (2020) [Southwest Border Migration FY 2020](#).

Closing doors

The US has maintained its strategy of seeking to prevent refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from entering its territory through successive international agreements. The June 2019 US-Mexico Joint Declaration affirmed that the use of the Migration Protection Protocols agreed in January that year would be increased.

Under this agreement, asylum seekers in the US are transferred to cities on the Mexican side of the border while they wait for their cases to be considered in the US courts. Even before increased border restrictions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic came into effect, the monthly number of individuals transferred to Mexico under the agreement had steadily declined from a peak of 12,409 in August to 1,706 in February 2020.²²⁵

Under the July 2019 Asylum Cooperative Agreement (ACA) with **Guatemala** in July 2019, the US can deport non-Guatemalan refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers to Guatemala as a “safe third country” for them to seek asylum there.²²⁶ After an injunction on the agreement by the Guatemalan Constitutional Court was lifted in September 2019, deportations began in November and continued until March 2020 when the programme was suspended in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. By then, a total of at least 939 Honduran and Salvadoran asylum seekers had been transferred to Guatemala. The policy has been widely criticised by human rights groups on the basis that Guatemala, with its poorly functioning asylum framework, coupled with high levels of violence and corruption, cannot be reasonably designed as a safe third country. This was reflected in the very small proportion (2 per cent) of those deported to Guatemala who chose to remain to seek asylum there rather than return to their home countries, despite the substantial dangers many faced there.²²⁷

Deportees to Guatemala have typically been unable to access legal assistance or clear information on the process before leaving, with many unaware that by boarding their flights they forfeit any right to continue their claim for asylum in the US. On arrival in Guatemala, they reportedly had 72 hours to decide whether to lodge an asylum claim there or continue their journey back to their country of origin. Many fear the prospect of further violence in Guatemala as the same gangs that persecuted them in their home countries have established a presence there as well, leaving them at risk of being targeted again.

Though the transfer of non-Guatemalan nationals through the ACA has been suspended during the pandemic, hundreds of Guatemalans have continued to be deported throughout. Due a lack of proper testing, it is believed that many of those on flights may have brought back the virus, with one report in early May suggesting that deportees on recent flights made up 15 percent of confirmed cases in the country.²²⁸

In September 2019, the US also agreed ACAs with **El Salvador** and **Honduras**, though at the time of writing these have yet to come into effect. Critics of these agreements have argued that, like Guatemala, the limited asylum processing capacity and endemic violence of these countries similarly disqualifies them as safe third countries. In February 2020, Salvadoran officials stated that the country was not yet ready to receive asylum seekers.²²⁹

225 Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), Syracuse University (2020) [Details on MPP \(Remain in Mexico\) deportation proceedings.](#)

226 An ACA is a “safe third country” agreement establishing that, as a person could have safely applied for asylum in a country they crossed en route to the US, they do not have a right to request international protection in the US and can be “transferred” to said third country to lodge their asylum application, supposedly without breaching international law.

227 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Deportation with a Layover: Failure of protection under the US-Guatemala Asylum Cooperative Agreement.](#)

228 Carcomo, C. and O’Toole, M. (2020) [Migrants deported by U.S. make up more than 15% of Guatemala’s coronavirus cases.](#) Los Angeles Times

229 Al Jazeera (2020) [El Salvador says it is not ready to receive asylum seekers.](#)

Demographic fluctuations

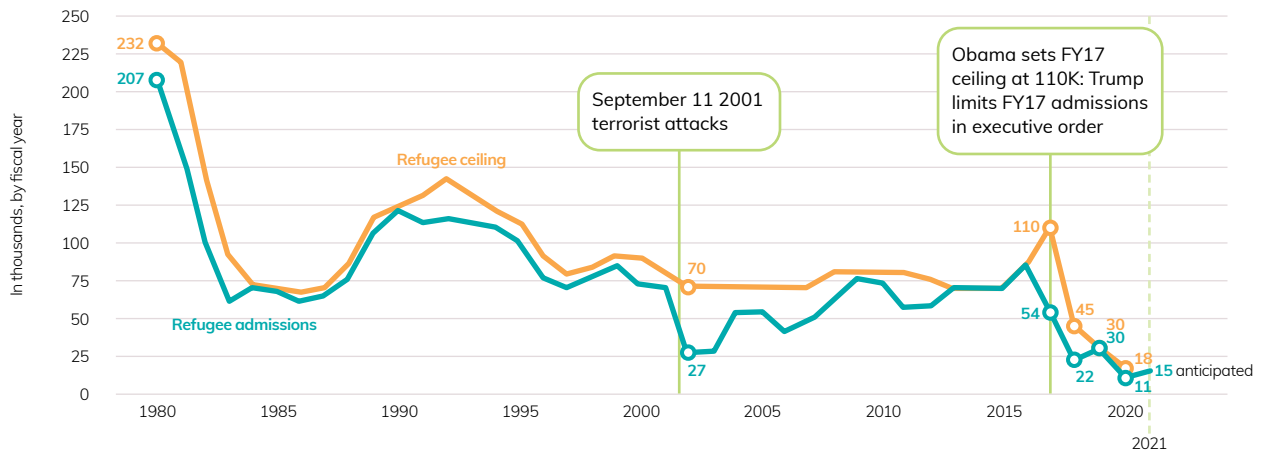
There have been shifts in the demographic profile of those attempting to cross the Mexico-US border. While Mexicans made up 98 percent of those apprehended by US authorities in 2000, when irregular migration to the US was at its peak, this proportion has since steadily declined. Fiscal year (FY) 2019 (October 2018–September 2019) was the first year where Mexicans were not the largest national group among those apprehended: at 166,458 they were outnumbered by both Guatemalans (264,168) and Hondurans (253,795, up from 76,513 in FY 2018).²³⁰ Together, the Northern Triangle countries (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) made up 71 percent of all apprehensions.²³¹

These trends appear to have reversed again in the most recent fiscal year, evidenced even before the effects of the pandemic were felt: the proportion of Mexicans increased substantially, reaching 53 percent of apprehensions in the period between October 2019 and April 2020, and 69 percent in the month of April 2020.²³²

A related change in FY 2019 was that, unlike previous years when individuals made up the majority of those apprehended, “family units” made up more than half (56 percent) of apprehensions in that fiscal year.²³³ The overwhelming majority of these groups were from Northern Triangle countries. The sharp decline in refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras since then has been accompanied by a reduction in the share of families crossing the border. In the first five months of FY 2020 (October 2019– February 2020), for example, the proportion of single adults was 68 percent, compared to 23 percent family units and 9 percent unaccompanied children. This trend has again become more evident in the wake of the pandemic: in April 2020, single adults made up 92 percent.²³⁴

Continued reduction of refugee access anticipated in USA

(2020/2021) Numbers in thousands.



Source: Adapted from Pew Research Center: [Key facts about refugees to the U.S.](#)

230 U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2020) [U.S. Border Patrol Nationwide Apprehensions by Citizenship and Sector \(FY2007 - FY 2019\)](#). Between October and August FY2020, the total fell to just 35,238 apprehensions.

231 Gramlich, J. & Noe-Bustamante, L. (2019) [What’s happening at the U.S.-Mexico border in 5 charts](#). Pew Research Center.

232 Noe-Bustamante, L. & Gramlich, J. (2020) [With U.S.-Mexico border closed, migrant apprehensions fell by nearly half in April](#). Pew Research Center.

233 Gramlich, J. and Noe-Bustamante, L. (2019) op. cit.

234 Noe-Bustamante, L. & Gramlich, J. (2020) op. cit.

Deportations to Mexico

Under the Migration Protection Protocols (also known as the “Remain in Mexico” programme) agreed between the US and Mexico in January 2019, the US can return non-Mexican asylum seekers to border areas in Mexico while their cases are considered. As of the end of August 2020, 66,638 people had been processed through this system.²³⁵ Critics have highlighted how it has undermined due process for legal asylum claims, with Human Rights Watch describing it as “a fundamental part of the Trump administration’s efforts to eviscerate the US asylum system in contradiction of longstanding US and international refugee law and practice.”²³⁶ The practice has resulted in the deportation of tens of thousands of Central American asylum seekers in Mexican border towns where they face high levels of theft, sexual violence and kidnapping, as well as limited access to health services and poor housing conditions.²³⁷ After reaching a peak in July 2019, the program has appeared to slow during 2020.²³⁸

2020, 69,210 Title 42 expulsions had taken place.²⁴¹

Human rights groups and lawyers have criticised the measures as effectively suspending the established rights and protections that refugees and asylum seekers enjoy under international law. By early May, just two people had been granted humanitarian protection at the border since the measures came into effect.²⁴² Besides its weak logic from a public health perspective—by then, the pandemic was sufficiently advanced that border containment was not nearly as effective as protocols to prevent community transmission, such as hand washing and face masks—the Title 42 emergency powers were also clearly discriminatory: their provisions targeted land crossings only, not airport arrivals, and do not apply to US citizens or permanent residents.²⁴³

Rights suspended amid Covid pandemic

On 21 March 2020, the Trump administration imposed new restrictions on refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing on provisions in legislation known as **Title 42**, the measures, which have been repeatedly extended, effectively allow migration officials to deport migrants on arrival, without assessing their international protection needs or granting them access to the asylum procedure. These powers enable border agents to intercept refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers and expedite their return immediately: expulsions were reportedly taking place within an average of 96 minutes.²³⁹ Since these restrictions were put in place, the vast majority of those apprehended have been returned through this process: by June 2020, 89 percent of those intercepted at the border were subjected to rapid expulsions.²⁴⁰ By the end of June

Mexico gets even tougher

For years, Mexico’s borders have become steadily less open to immigration from Central America, and its policy has hardened significantly since May 2019 when US President Donald Trump threatened to impose tariffs on Mexican imports until undocumented immigration was “remedied”.²⁴⁴ After negotiating a 90-day window, Mexico ramped up its border security and deployed thousands of soldiers to man highway checkpoints.

The number of deportations from Mexico has increased substantially in recent years, from 82,237 in 2017 and 115,686 in 2018 to 141,223 in 2019.²⁴⁵ Despite campaigning for a more humane migration stance prior to his election, there has been a hardening of Mexico’s policies under the current administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Thousands of Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans have been subjected to what is officially described as “assisted returns”, though critics have argued that these processes are usually

235 Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (2020) [Details on MPP \(Remain in Mexico\) deportation proceedings](#). Syracuse University.

236 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Q&A: Trump administration’s “Remain in Mexico” program](#).

237 Hernández, A. & Sieff, K. (2020) [Trump’s ‘Remain in Mexico’ program dwindles as more immigrants are flown to Guatemala or are quickly deported](#). Washington Post.

238 Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (2020) op. cit.

239 Miroff, N. (2020) [Under coronavirus immigration measures, U.S. is expelling border-crossers to Mexico in an average of 96 minutes](#). Washington Post.

240 Miroff, N. (2020) [Arrests along Mexico border jumped 40% last month, despite Trump administration’s immigration crackdown](#). Washington Post.

241 U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2020) [Nationwide enforcement encounters: Title 8 enforcement actions and Title 42 expulsions](#).

242 Miroff, N. (2020) [Under Trump border rules, U.S. has granted refuge to just two people since late March, records show](#). Washington Post.

243 Schacher, Y. & Beyrer, C. (2020) [Expelling Asylum Seekers is Not the Answer: U.S. Border Policy in the Time of COVID-19](#). Refugees International.

244 Gambino, L. (2019) [Trump announces tariffs on Mexico until ‘immigration remedied’](#). The Guardian.

245 Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas (2020) [Estadísticas Migratorias: Síntesis 2019](#); Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas (2019) [Estadísticas Migratorias: Síntesis 2018](#).

not voluntary and amount to deportations.²⁴⁶ Between 18 and 27 January 2020 alone, Mexican authorities deported 2,303 Hondurans to their country of origin.²⁴⁷

Crackdown on caravans

Since 2018, many refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from the Northern Triangle have travelled through Mexico to the US border in “caravans”, sometimes comprising thousands of people, to provide security and visibility during their journey through this hazardous route. While attracting considerable media attention, they also initially benefitted from a welcoming response from Mexican authorities. In January 2019, for example, more than 1,000 Hondurans and Salvadorans who arrived in Mexico were offered residency and other benefits in recognition of the humanitarian crisis in Central America.²⁴⁸

There has been a marked shift in official policy since then, in part due to the increasing strain on resources.²⁴⁹ The Mexican government’s move from a relatively open-door migration policy to a more militarised approach of detention and deportation was evident in January 2020 when a caravan seeking to cross from Guatemala was dispersed by riot police using tear gas.²⁵⁰ Hundreds of those detained were subsequently deported to Honduras.

Deportations in response to Covid-19

Between January and April 2020, Mexico has undertaken 22,043 deportations.²⁵¹ Some of these expulsions were explicitly justified in response to the pandemic: through April, for instance, authorities almost emptied official migrant shelters and returned more than 3,600 Guatemalans, Hondurans, and Salvadorans to their countries of origin, with the stated aim of preventing the spread of the virus.²⁵²

Migration from Central America continues

Violence, organised crime, and corruption continue to be important drivers of migration towards North America from the Northern Triangle states, even as immigration policies in the Mexico and the US become more restrictive. A study of Central American migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers published in February 2020 found that 61.9 percent of those surveyed “had been exposed to a violent situation in the two years prior to leaving their home country”. Many respondents reported having a relative violently killed (42.5 percent), forcibly disappeared (16.2 percent) or kidnapped (9.2 percent) in this period before their departure.²⁵³ There is also increasing evidence that environmental stress is driving migration in the region. In Guatemala, protracted drought has created acute food scarcity among farming communities, with the number of under-fives in the country suffering malnutrition rising by almost 24 percent.²⁵⁴

Economic pulls

The search for economic opportunities in North America (as well as related issues like family reunification) is still a major factor in the decision of many to migrate. In a 2019 survey of some 2,000 Central American migrants in the US, 74 percent of respondents reported economic considerations as a principal reason for their migration, along with family reunification (43 percent) and violence or insecurity (41 percent).²⁵⁵ In this light, Covid-19 and its associated national lockdowns has resulted in widespread job losses among Central American migrants that may discourage some from migrating: an IOM survey of current and prospective Central American migrants living in Central America and Mexico, conducted in June 2020, found that 57 percent of those who had been intending to migrate had delayed or cancelled these plans because of the outbreak, while 21 percent of those already living abroad as migrants wished to return to their home countries as a result of the pandemic.²⁵⁶

246 Kahn, C. (2020) [Migrants in Mexico face crackdown, but officials say they're being 'rescued'](#). NPR.

247 Government of Mexico (2020) [Realiza INM retorno asistido de más de 2 mil personas migrantes hondureñas](#).

248 García, J. & Reina, E. (2019), [México abre las puertas a la caravana migrante](#). El País.

249 Bonello, D. (2019) [Trump's border policy takes its toll on Mexico where migrant caravans are turned away by overwhelmed locals](#). Telegraph.

250 McDonnell, P. & Linthicum, K. (2020) [By turning back caravans, Mexico is acting as Trump's border wall, critics say](#). Los Angeles Times.

251 Government of Mexico (2020) [Eventos de personas extranjeras devueltas por el INM Enero – Abril de 2020](#).

252 Reuters (2020) [Mexico all but empties official migrant centres in bid to contain coronavirus](#).

253 MSF (2020) [No Way Out: The humanitarian crisis for migrants and asylum seekers trapped between the United States, Mexico and the Northern Triangle of Central America](#).

254 Moloney, A. (2020) [Guatemala's children bear brunt of prolonged drought and rising heat](#). Reuters.

255 IADB (2019) [Tras los Pasos del Migrante: Perspectivas y experiencias de la migración de El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras en Estados Unidos](#).

256 IOM (2020) [Effects of Covid-19 on Migrants: Main findings – Survey in Central America and Mexico](#).

Cubans, Haitians, Africans and Asians head north

As traditional routes to Europe have become more challenging, an increasing number of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from Africa and Asia are now moving through the Americas.²⁵⁷ After flying to Brazil or Ecuador, many travel onwards through Panama from South America and up through Costa Rica through the Northern Triangle towards Mexico and the US. In early 2019, following a period when the movement of such extra-regional migrants between them was largely unregulated, Panama and Costa Rica agreed to work together to ensure a *flujo controlado* (“controlled flow”). This involves a regulated but relatively open system for arrivals to be processed before continuing their journey north towards Nicaragua.²⁵⁸ However, reports emerged that in response to the Covid pandemic, more than 1,700 people—predominantly from Haiti, Congo, Bangladesh and Yemen—had been quarantined by authorities in a camp in the town of La Peñita in Panama for over 50 days.²⁵⁹ In addition, some 2,000 others were at Lajas Blancas, in Panama’s southern Darién region, and more than 500 at Gualaca in the north close to Costa Rica, in cramped and challenging conditions.²⁶⁰ In June, despite the *flujo controlado* agreement, a number of Haitians found themselves stranded after Costa Rica barred their entry, citing the suspension of the programme in light of Covid-19. Panama urged Costa Rica to accept them into their territory.²⁶¹

Transiting Honduras

As well as being a significant sending country of origin due to its internal challenges, Honduras has also become an important transit route for refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers heading north, with a record 29,197 travelling through the country in 2019. Predominantly from Cuba, Haiti and African countries such as Cameroon, DRC, and Eritrea, growing numbers are journeying through Central America en route to the US-Mexico border.²⁶² Many found themselves stranded in Honduras as a result of border restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁶³ In June 2020, a caravan of around 300 Haitian and African refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers was reported to be crossing through Honduras.²⁶⁴

257 Yates, C. (2019) [As more migrants from Africa and Asia arrive in Latin America, governments seek orderly and controlled pathways](#). Migration Policy Institute.

258 Winters, N. & Reichl, E. (2020) [Pay and go? Transit migration regimes and migrant navigation in Central America](#). Border Criminologies, University of Oxford Faculty of Law.

259 UN (2020) [Quarantine halts migrants in Panama](#).

260 La Prensa Latina (2020) [Coronavirus pandemic traps 2,000 migrants in Darien, some already ill](#).

261 Forbes (2020) [Panamá pide a Costa Rica recibir a migrantes irregulares](#).

262 OCHA (2020) [Latin America and the Caribbean: Weekly situation update \(28 December 2019 – 5 January 2020\)](#); Narea, N. (2019) [More migrants from Africa are trying to reach the US through Mexico](#). Vox.

263 Palencia, G. (2020) [African, Haitian migrants in Honduras defy border closure in attempt to reach U.S.](#) Reuters.

264 Reuters (2020) [Inmigrantes africanos y haitianos marchan en caravana por Honduras hacia EEUU](#).

Europe

Overview

Europe's approach to migration management was problematic even before the Covid-19 outbreak, with the European Union (EU) widely criticised for tolerating and even promoting human rights violations that would have been unthinkable only a few years before.²⁶⁵ Illegal pushbacks by Croatia, in particular, often accompanied by assault and theft, continue to be reported without any substantive calls from the EU to curb the violence. Human rights groups have accused European governments of being complicit in these abuses.²⁶⁶ Similarly, the EU failed to condemn Greece's aggressive response in February and March 2020 to refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers attempting to enter from Turkey, which resulted in at least three deaths.²⁶⁷

These issues have been brought into even sharper relief since the early months of 2020 and the implementation of lockdowns across Europe in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This triggered a series of border closures by states within the Schengen area as countries sought to restrict entry into their territories in the name of public health.²⁶⁸ From the beginning of March, numerous countries across Europe suspended or significantly curtailed asylum procedures.²⁶⁹ In early April, Italy and Malta also declared their ports "unsafe" and prevented any boats from reaching their shores.²⁷⁰ Human rights activists have accused some governments of using the pandemic as a pretext to clamp down on migration, particularly as nationalist politicians have actively sought to link migration and freedom of movement with the spread of the virus.²⁷¹

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum

In January 2020, following discussions the previous year, the EU announced the development of a New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Despite hopes that this might usher in a more humane approach to migration management and more equitable burden sharing between different European countries, there were signs as the year progressed that the emphasis would remain on third-party containment and border strengthening.²⁷² Humanitarian groups urged the EU to focus on establishing a rights-based migration strategy spanning resettlement, integration and shared responsibilities.²⁷³

Spain—like Greece, Italy and Malta—is one of the frontline countries for arriving refugees, migrants and asylum seekers due to its southern location. In negotiations around the text for the new agreement, Madrid called for other member states to commit to a distribution of arrivals, including those rescued at sea, through mandatory quotas.²⁷⁴ Hungary, Poland, and other Eastern European countries strongly oppose the inclusion of mandatory quotas and redistribution of asylum seekers.²⁷⁵

The outbreak of Covid-19 contributed to the delay on the pact's formulation, with the announcement of the proposal pushed back to the summer before being delayed again. This was in part because of the lack of consensus between different EU member states on what its terms should be. However, the financial and logistical pressures resulting from the pandemic also played a role, with governments deciding to delay its finalisation until after the EU's long-term budget, including its pandemic recovery plan, were agreed.²⁷⁶

265 Mixed Migration Centre (2019) [Mixed Migration Review 2019](#).

266 Amnesty International (2019) [Croatia: EU complicit in violence and abuse by police against refugees and migrants](#).

267 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Greece: Violence Against Asylum Seekers at Border](#)

268 Berthelet, P. (2020) [The Schengen zone in the face of coronavirus](#). The Conversation.

269 European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2020) [Information sheet 8 April 2020: Covid-19 measures related to asylum and migration across Europe](#).

270 Tondo, L. (2020) ['We give you 30 minutes': Malta turns migrant boat away with directions to Italy](#). The Guardian.

271 Trilling D. (2020) [Migrants aren't spreading coronavirus – but nationalists are blaming them anyway](#). The Guardian; Reidy, E. (2020) [The Covid-19 excuse? How migration policies are hardening around the globe](#). New Humanitarian.

272 Reidy, E. (2020) [Briefing: In search of a more humane EU migration and asylum policy](#). New Humanitarian.

273 Red Cross (2020) [The new Pact on Migration and Asylum](#).

274 De Miguel, B. & Martín, M. (2020) [Spain rejects EU migration plan for not including relocation quotas](#). El País.

275 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Europe – Quarter 2 2020](#).

276 Barigazzi, J. (2020) [EU migration reform plan postponed until after budget deal](#) Politico.

When the pact was finally unveiled on 23 September—negotiations between EU member states and in the European parliament still lie ahead—it was met with widespread criticism from human rights organisations. Of particular concern was the move away from shared quotas for refugee resettlement to a more flexible system that would allow states who were resistant to accepting refugees to undertake other commitments in lieu, such as supporting security at the EU’s external borders or returning migrants who did not qualify for asylum. Critics argued that this would undermine the principle of solidarity within the EU by shifting the focus to returns and deportations rather than the protection of those in need of asylum. Another area of controversy is the planned acceleration of processing times at the EU’s borders, reduced to a maximum of five days, a move that could place further stress on vulnerable arrivals. On the other hand, there has also been some tentative optimism around calls for greater harmonisation of asylum procedures and acknowledgement of the failures of the current system.²⁷⁷

Mixed migration rates mostly decline

In 2019, around 123,700 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers entered Europe from one of the Mediterranean routes, a 13 percent decline from the 141,500 who arrived in 2018 and 33 percent less than the 185,100 in 2017, continuing a year-on-year decline in new arrivals since the peak of 1,032,400 in 2015.²⁷⁸ The number continued to fall in the first half of 2020, with just 27,338 arrivals between 1 January and 29 June.²⁷⁹

The Covid effect

Though migration was relatively limited even before this—with Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, reporting that irregular entry into Europe in 2019 was at its lowest since 2013 due to the decline in Central and Western Mediterranean crossings—it has declined even further in the wake of restrictions on movement imposed in response to the pandemic. Though the number of irregular arrivals into Europe in January and February 2020 was in fact 27 percent higher than

the same period in 2019, according to Frontex data,²⁸⁰ border closures and restrictions on movement imposed from March meant that numbers declined dramatically. In April 2020 only around 900 irregular crossings were detected compared to almost 6,000 the month before, while the number of asylum applications fell 87 percent from pre-Covid-19 levels in January and February to just 8,730—the lowest levels in more than a decade.²⁸¹

By the second half of 2020, however, mixed migration flows had begun to pick up again, with Frontex reporting that the number of irregular arrivals between January and the end of July was only down 15 percent from the same period in 2019, despite “record lows” in the wake of the pandemic.²⁸²

Upticks on Central Med route

Though the total number entering Europe as a whole has declined in the last few years, the trends along different routes have varied substantially. Italy, by far the most popular route into Europe in 2017 with almost two-thirds of recorded arrivals that year, saw numbers fall sharply in 2018 and 2019 before rising again in the first half of 2020. Indeed, the Central Mediterranean is the only route that saw mixed migration flows increase between the first and second quarter of 2020. Spain, on the other hand, in 2018 replaced Italy as the most widely used route into Europe but was overtaken by Greece the following year, with some 74,600 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers entering from Turkey during 2019. This means that 60 percent of new arrivals in Europe in 2019 came through Greece, compared to 20 percent (36,300) in 2017—a threefold increase in the proportion and more than double the net total.²⁸³

During 2020, on the other hand, the numbers entering Europe through Greece have steadily fallen: after effectively coming to a halt in April, they had risen to 984 by August, still only a fraction of the 9,334 arrivals in August 2019.²⁸⁴ As a result, during this period the Eastern Mediterranean route has been the least travelled entry point into Europe, while the Central Mediterranean route—after falling behind the other routes into Europe—has become the most active with 5,326 arrivals in August, followed by the Western Mediterranean route with 2,817 arrivals the same month.²⁸⁵

Demographic shifts

The demographic makeup of mixed migration in 2019 also varied significantly across different routes. While

277 Chadwick, L. (2020) [What is the EU’s new migration pact and how has it been received?](#) Euronews; Reidy, E. (2020) ‘[No more Morias: New EU migration policy met with scepticism](#)’, New Humanitarian.

278 UNHCR (2020) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#).

279 UNHCR (2020) [Mediterranean situation](#).

280 Frontex (2020) [Migratory situation in February – Detections down from previous month](#).

281 Frontex (2020) [Irregular migration into EU at lowest level since 2013](#); European Asylum Support Office (2020) [Record low number of asylum applications lodged in EU](#); European Asylum Support Office (2020) [EASO Special Report: Asylum trends and Covid-19](#).

282 Frontex (2020) [Situation at EU external borders – Arrivals picking up, still down for the year](#).

283 UNHCR (2020) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#).

284 Ibid.

285 Ibid.

across Europe as a whole the five countries contributing the largest share of new arrivals were Afghanistan (23 percent), Syria (16 percent), Morocco (7 percent), Algeria (5 percent) and Guinea (5 percent), the overwhelming majority of Afghan and Syrian refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers came through Greece, while those from Morocco, Algeria and Guinea entered into Spain.²⁸⁶ In 2018, reflecting the fact that Spain was the most widely used route that year, the composition of new arrivals was markedly different, with the top five sending countries being Guinea (10 percent), Morocco (10 percent), Mali (7 percent), Syria (6 percent) and Afghanistan (5 percent).²⁸⁷

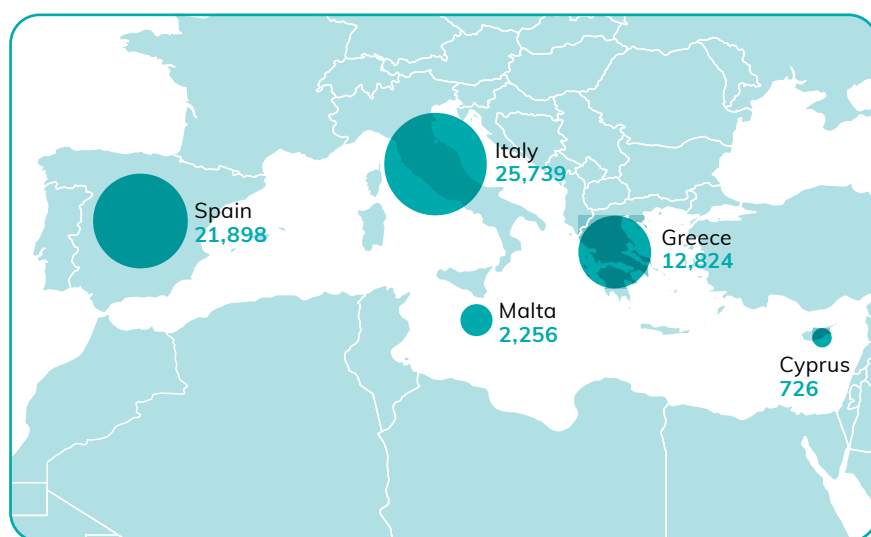
However, the dynamics in the early months of 2020 have so far suggested a different pattern, in part due to the reduction of movement along the Eastern Mediterranean route. For instance, while the net number of arrivals generally has declined, proportionally some nationalities appear to be more represented than others: Tunisians, for example, made up a much larger share in the first half of 2020 than in 2019 due to the increasing importance of the Central Mediterranean route during this time.

Cities offer sanctuary to unaccompanied minors

An EU initiative to enable the resettlement of hundreds of unaccompanied minors in other European countries has had a mixed response from member states, with only 11 countries agreeing to welcome some 1,600 as refugees in their territories as of August 2020.²⁸⁸ This is despite the extreme vulnerability they face in overcrowded detention facilities. Strikingly, however, early in the year a number of European cities publicly offered to welcome them, many going against the stance of their central governments: Amsterdam, for instance, offered sanctuary despite the Netherlands refusing to accept any.²⁸⁹ Protests against the government's stance has been decidedly urban in character since then, with demonstrations in cities across the country since April attempting to pressure a policy shift. By June, around a third of municipalities were reportedly in favour of the Netherlands providing refugee to unaccompanied children.²⁹⁰

Mediterranean new arrivals

from January to October 6th 2020



Source: UNHCR <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

Total arrivals

63,497 Last updated 14 Oct 2020

Sea arrivals in 2020

Includes refugees and migrants arriving by sea to Italy, Greece, Spain, Cyprus and Malta

58,335 Last updated 14 Oct 2020

Land arrivals in 2020

Includes refugees and migrants arriving by land to Greece and Spain.

5,162 Last updated 11 Oct 2020

Dead & missing in 2020 (estimate)

563 Last updated 12 Oct 2020

286 UNHCR (2020) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#).

287 UNHCR (2019) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2018 \(Mediterranean\)](#).

288 Mpoke Bigg, M. (2020) [Explainer: Relocation of unaccompanied children from Greece to other EU countries](#). UNHCR.

289 Rankin, J. (2020) [Cities lobby EU to offer shelter to migrant children from Greece](#). The Guardian.

290 Rankin, J. (2020) [Dutch government under growing pressure to take in child refugees](#). The Guardian.

Tensions rise between Greece and Turkey

The total number of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers entering Greece in 2019 increased for the second year running, from 36,310 in 2017 and 50,508 in 2018 to 74,613 in 2019, with around four in every five of these (59,726) arriving by sea. Nevertheless, the total in 2019 levels was just 9 percent of the peak in 2015, when 861,630 entries into Greece were detected, the overwhelming majority (856,723) by sea. The number of arrivals in 2020 has also fallen dramatically as flows along the route have slowed dramatically: as of 27 September 2020, 12,824 arrivals had been detected, 9,115 of them by sea.²⁹¹

Though Syrians made up more than half (55 percent) of sea arrivals to Greece in 2015 and continued to be the most represented nationality in 2016 and 2017, their share has nevertheless declined.²⁹² In the latter half of 2018 Afghans emerged as the largest group, a trend that has continued in 2019, representing 47 percent of sea arrivals in the first quarter (January-March) and 43 percent at the year's end (October-December). The proportion of Syrians fluctuated considerably during the year, however, rising from 12 percent in the first quarter to 31 percent in the final quarter of 2019.²⁹³

Re-opening the gates

Since it came into effect in March 2016, the EU-Turkey deal—an agreement allowing for the return of those arriving in Greece irregularly in return for financial concessions, humanitarian assistance and resettlement of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey in Europe—has dramatically reduced the volume of irregular migration into Europe through this route. Nevertheless, the agreement has come under increasing strain, with Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan repeatedly threatening to renege on the deal in response to political tensions. In September 2019, he announced that the Greek-Turkish border would be re-opened if his government's proposal for an expanded “safe zone” in northern Syria did not receive stronger international backing.²⁹⁴

In February 2020, following the killing of 33 Turkish troops in Idlib province in an airstrike by Syrian forces, Erdoğan announced: “We opened the doors”.²⁹⁵ In the days after, a steady flow of buses from Istanbul took thousands of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants to the border with Greece, with IOM reporting that by the end of the month at least 13,000 people had gathered at various crossing points.²⁹⁶ Greek security forces employed tear gas, water cannon and live ammunition to push back those attempting to cross.²⁹⁷ Human rights groups reported widespread abuses by Greek security forces and unidentified armed men, including physical attacks, sexual assault, theft and summary deportations, with two men killed and a woman missing, presumed dead, after being shot by security forces.²⁹⁸ Similar reports have continued in the ensuing months, with reports emerging in May that Greek authorities had been rounding up asylum seekers already in the country and deporting them illegally to Turkey.²⁹⁹

On 8 March, Erdoğan called on Greece to follow Turkey's lead and allow refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers to continue their journey into other EU countries.³⁰⁰

By the middle of March 2020, in response to the rapid spread of the coronavirus, Turkey closed its north-western border and the number of attempted crossings into Greece dramatically reduced. By May, however, tensions between Greece and Turkey had heightened again in the wake of remarks by Turkish officials suggesting that movement to the border might resume once the pandemic was under control.³⁰¹

Sea route still preferred

Even with the temporary relaxation of migration controls in Turkey in early 2020 and the subsequent movement of thousands of asylum seekers, migrants and refugees to the Greek border, the majority continue to reach Greece by sea: of the 10,133 arrivals recorded by UNHCR from the beginning of January to the end of April 2020, only around one in five (2,076) had reached Greece by land. While the Eastern Mediterranean route remained the most commonly used route into Europe during this

291 UNHCR (2020) [Mediterranean situation](#)

292 Mixed Migration Centre (2019) [Mixed Migration Review 2019](#).

293 Save the Children (2019) [Refugees and migrants at the Western Balkans Route – Regional overview January-March 2019](#).

294 Molana-Allen, L. (2020) [Turkey threatens to 'open gates' for Syrian refugees to leave and move to the West if it doesn't get safe zone](#)

295 Al Jazeera (2020) [Erdoğan vows to keep doors open for refugees heading to Europe](#).

296 <https://www.iom.int/news/more-13000-migrants-reported-along-turkish-greek-border>

297 Schmitz, F., Kalaitzi, A. & Karacas, B. (2020) [Migrants accuse Greece of forced deportations](#) DW

298 Amnesty International (2020) [Greece/Turkey: Asylum-seekers and migrants killed and abused at borders](#); [Human Rights Watch \(2020\) Greece: Events of 2019](#)

299 Schmitz, F., Kalaitzi, A. and Karacas, B. (2020)

300 Erkoyun, E. (2020) [Erdoğan to discuss migrant crisis with EU, urges Greece to “open your gates”](#). Reuters.

301 Al Jazeera (2020) [Turkey, Greece spat over border policy and treatment of refugees](#).

period, the outbreak of Covid-19 and the rollout of more restrictive migration policies in response dramatically curtailed the numbers entering, with just 64 new arrivals in April.³⁰²

Covid as pretext

Greece has also been accused by human rights groups of using the pandemic as a pretext to restrict asylum claims. While the government suspended asylum applications for a month on 1 March in response to the influx of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers to its borders, it subsequently extended this suspension until May 18 on the basis of preventing the spread of the virus. During this time, some 2,000 irregular new arrivals in Greece were confined in “wholly unsanitary conditions”, according to Human Rights Watch, before being transferred and detained indefinitely in overcrowded, poorly maintained holding centres on the Greek mainland.³⁰³ Despite their relocation being justified on public health grounds, detainees have been held in close quarters with inadequate access to clean water, sanitation, soap and other needs, placing them at greater risk of contracting the virus and without testing or a clear end to their quarantine period.³⁰⁴ While lockdown restrictions across Greece have steadily lifted, with tourist flights resuming from 1 July, the lockdown imposed on refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers was repeatedly extended, and remained in place until at least late July 2020.³⁰⁵

Camp dangers

The situation has exacerbated the cramped and deteriorating living conditions in the camps, with limited access to health services, clear water or sanitation creating a ready environment for the virus to spread. This has occurred against a backdrop of growing social tensions between refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers and local residents as the numbers held on the islands has steadily increased.³⁰⁶ One contributing factor to the devastating fires that broke out in Moria camp in September 2020, rendering thousands homeless, was overcrowding: though originally designed to accommodate fewer than 3,000 residents, some 13,000 people were living there when the blaze occurred.³⁰⁷

Reduced protections

Even before developments in early 2020 intensified the situation at its border with Turkey, Greece had responded to the uptick in arrivals during 2019 with increasing restrictions, including legislation in October that weakened protections for asylum seekers while permitting authorities to detain them for longer periods. Over the summer, as the environment for refugees in Turkey became more hostile, the number of crossings into Greece rose significantly. As government policy at this point was still to contain arrivals on the islands, overcrowding and lack of resources in the camps intensified: according to Human Rights Watch, by the end of the year some 33,400 people were living in camps designed to accommodate just 6,200.³⁰⁸

In March 2020, a new law was passed that reduced the welfare period for recognised refugees in Greece from six months to 30 days. As a result, on 1 June 9,000 refugees exited from the country’s reception system, with another 11,000 scheduled to leave in the near future. While the legislation has been justified as necessary to relieve pressure on overcrowded facilities, aid agencies have expressed concerns that the new system could push refugees into vulnerability and destitution.³⁰⁹

A hostile ‘shield’

Reports of pushbacks and beatings by Greek security forces at the border with Turkey persisted throughout 2019, and in January 2020 Greek officials announced plans to build a floating barrier in the Aegean Sea to prevent arrivals.³¹⁰ The situation escalated from the end of February 2020 in the aftermath of Erdoğan’s announcement that refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers could travel freely to the border (see “Re-opening the gates” box above).

This year has seen a steady militarisation of Greece’s borders. In May, it was reported that the Greek government was sending another

302 UNHCR (2020) [Europe situations: Data and trends – Arrivals and displaced populations April 20 figures](#).

303 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Greece restarts suspended asylum procedure](#).

304 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Greece: Nearly 2,000 new arrivals detained in overcrowded, mainland camps](#).

305 MacGregor, M. (2020) [Greece extends migrant camp lockdown again amid criticism](#), InfoMigrants.

306 Higginbottom, J. (2020) [‘It’s a powder keg ready to explode’: In Greek village, tensions simmer between refugees and locals](#), CNBC.

307 Moschopoulos, M. (2020) [The ashes of Moria refugee camp could poison European politics](#), Al Jazeera.

308 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Greece – events of 2019](#).

309 UNHCR (2020) [Greece must ensure safety net and integration opportunities for refugees – UNHCR](#).

310 BBC (2020) [Greek plan to stop migrant boats with floating barriers](#).

400 military and security personnel to the Evros border region, in addition to the 1,000 already stationed there, with plans for another 800 to be dispatched in the weeks after. It was also working on expanding the existing fence between Greece and Turkey.³¹¹ The EU has consistently supported Greece's actions during this period, with Frontex establishing a rapid border intervention force at the beginning of March.³¹² On 3 March, European commission president Ursula von der Leyen praised Greece as Europe's "shield" and announced some €700 million in financial assistance for Greece to strengthen migration management, infrastructure and returns at the border.³¹³ Human rights groups called on the EU to condemn the violence and work with Greece to develop a more humane migration response in line with international law.³¹⁴

According to an investigation by *The New York Times* published in August 2020, Greek authorities have secretly been escalating the practice of forced returns, with at least 1,072 predominantly Syrian refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers forced onto makeshift vessels or abandoned on their own boats with the engines disabled. These clandestine expulsions were reportedly not only of those intercepted at sea but also involved foreign nationals detained on Greek soil, including documented residents. The Greek government has denied these accusations.³¹⁵

Balkans route still busy

Continuing an upward trend in 2018, the Balkans route remained the busiest migration corridor into Europe during 2019. By the last quarter of the year, an estimated 128,277 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers were based in Balkan countries: while the majority (112,300) of these were in Greece, significant numbers were also based in Bosnia and Herzegovina (8,973) and Serbia (5,833). Smaller numbers are also located in Bulgaria (601). Romania (460) is also now emerging as a significant migration route, with some 1,215 registered applicants for international protection in October–December 2019, almost as many as the total recorded between January

and September 2019 and double the number registered during the last quarter of 2018.³¹⁶

Bosnia and Herzegovina: an alternative route through the Balkans

Since 2018, Bosnia and Herzegovina has become a key transit point for those travelling through the region towards Central Europe. As border security on the borders of Hungary and North Macedonia has tightened, an alternative route through Albania and Montenegro to Bosnia and Herzegovina has developed, with others also entering from Serbia via Bulgaria and North Macedonia. While just 755 irregular arrivals were recorded in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2017, this figure increased to 24,067 in 2018 and 29,196 in 2019.³¹⁷ The first two months of 2020 saw 36 percent more arrivals recorded than in the same period the previous year.³¹⁸ Among other developments, there has been a significant increase in the number of people using the Balkan route to travel on overland through Slovenia to Italy.³¹⁹

This situation has intensified pressure on humanitarian support in the country, with reception centres stretched beyond capacity. By early 2020, on the eve of the Covid-19 pandemic, as many as 2,500 migrants were unable to access official accommodation, with many left homeless as a result.³²⁰ This situation has become even more acute since the outbreak: according to field research by CARE, almost three-quarters of refugees and migrants in the northern city of Tuzla lack access to clean drinking water. For those outside the camps, many of whom are sleeping on the streets, access to food, water and other essentials is even more constrained as lockdown restrictions have made it harder for humanitarian organisations to reach them.³²¹

311 Carassava, A. (2020) [Greece deploys forces to build fence on Turkish border](#). VOA.

312 Frontex (2020) [Frontex to launch rapid border intervention at Greece's external borders](#).

313 MSF (2020) [Greece, the 'shield' of Europe, and EU leaders push migrants into danger](#).

314 HRW (2020) [Greece/EU: Respect rights, ease suffering at borders](#).

315 New York Times (2020) [Taking hard line, Greece turns back migrants by abandoning them at sea](#); Middle East Monitor (2020) [Greece secretly expels over 1,000 refugees, abandoning them at sea](#).

316 Jovanovic, K. (2020) [Refugees and Migrants at the Western Balkans Route – Regional Overview: October – December 2019](#). Save the Children.

317 UNHCR (2020) [Bosnia and Herzegovina – 31 December 2019](#).

318 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Europe – Quarter 1 2020](#).

319 ANSA (2020) [More than 3,000 Balkan Route migrants in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Italy](#). InfoMigrants.

320 IOM (2020) [Covid-19 emergency shelter provided for homeless migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#).

321 CARE (2020) [Stranded and forgotten: Bosnia's migrants and refugees left to themselves](#).

Forced encampment condemned

In response to the pandemic, local authorities in Una-Sana canton announced the forcible resettlement of thousands of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in the area in a tent encampment in the remote village of Lipa. With limited provision of clean water, sanitation and health care, the move was condemned by Amnesty International as a discriminatory and “inhumane” measure that would put already vulnerable populations at even greater risk of contracting the virus.³²² In the context of severe overcrowding, camp residents have been forced to live in unsanitary conditions where protective measures such as social distancing are almost impossible. They are also more exposed to other threats, such as sexual violence.³²³

Abuses by Croatian authorities...

For the majority of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a transit country en route to other European destinations, with Croatia the next step in their journey. The most commonly attempted entry point along the more than 900 kilometres of border between the countries is the north-west area of Bihac and Velika Kladusa.³²⁴ Since the increase in migration along this route, there have been numerous reports of systematic abuses by Croatian security forces at the border. Those who manage to complete the difficult journey into Croatia are routinely taken back illegally into Bosnia before they are able to claim asylum and abandoned, often after being beaten and stripped of their clothes and possessions.³²⁵

...including reports of torture and robbery

This policy of pushbacks appeared to escalate in early 2020, with the Danish Refugee Council receiving reports of forcible returns from 1,765 people in February 2020—the highest monthly number recorded since May 2019. The large majority (80 percent) of these experienced theft or destruction of property at the hands of Croatian security forces, while almost half (49 percent) suffered physical abuse or assault.³²⁶ Reported abuses have continued since, with a group of Afghan and Pakistani asylum seekers allegedly tortured and humiliated by Croatian police in May before being forced back across the border, with a number suffering long-term injuries.³²⁷

Similar reports earlier that month claimed that more than 30 asylum seekers were robbed, assaulted and had crosses spray-painted on their heads by Croatian police as a “cure” for Covid-19.³²⁸

Amnesty International has highlighted how a culture of denial and impunity for security officials, encouraged by the Croatian government’s refusal to acknowledge or investigate these abuses, has been further enabled by the EU’s failure to condemn the violence at the border. According to Massimo Moratti, the deputy director of Amnesty’s Europe office, “their silence is allowing, and even encouraging, the perpetrators of this abuse to continue without consequences.”³²⁹

Higher barriers in Central Europe

Hungary’s endless ‘crisis’...

Since 2015, a number of key Central European countries have adopted highly restrictive measures to prevent potential arrivals crossing their borders. One of the earliest and most notable proponents of this approach was Hungary, whose government under Viktor Orbán first announced a “crisis situation due to mass immigration” in September 2015 and has repeatedly renewed it since: its announcement in March 2020 that the crisis situation would be continued was the eighth time the measure had been extended.³³⁰ Despite the often alarmist official rhetoric around migration, attempted entries into Hungary were low throughout 2019, though January 2020 saw a sharp increase with some 3,400 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers seeking to cross the border from Serbia, compared to just a few hundred every month during 2019.³³¹

...leaves little room for asylum

Hungary has previously been criticised by the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatovic, for its “practically systemic rejection of asylum applications”.³³² This is reflected in the fact that Hungary had the lowest number of positive first instance asylum applications relative to its population of any EU country in 2019, with just 0.06 granted for every 10,000 inhabitants. By way of comparison Greece, the highest ranking that year, granted 16 positive first instance applications for every 10,000 inhabitants.³³³

322 Amnesty International (2020) [Bosnia: Decision to confine thousands of migrants into camp inhumane and puts lives at risk](#).

323 CARE (2020) [Stranded and forgotten: Bosnia’s migrants and refugees left to themselves](#).

324 Jovanovic, K. (2020) [Refugees and Migrants at the Western Balkans Route – Regional Overview: October – December 2019](#), Save the Children.

325 Kingsley, P. (2020) [Europe’s migration crisis has ebbed. Croatia wants to keep it that way](#), New York Times.

326 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Europe – Quarter 1 2020](#).

327 Amnesty International (2020) [Croatia: Fresh evidence of police abuse and torture of migrants and asylum-seekers](#).

328 Tondo, L. (2020) [Crosses on our heads to ‘cure’ Covid-19: refugees report abuse by Croatian police](#), The Guardian.

329 Amnesty International (2020) [Croatia: Fresh evidence of police abuse and torture of migrants and asylum-seekers](#).

330 Balkan Insight (2020) [Pandemic-hit Hungary harps on about ‘migrant crisis’](#).

331 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Europe – Quarter 1 2020](#).

332 Council of Europe (2019) [Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe Dunja Mijatović: Report following her visit to Hungary from 4 to 8 February 2019](#).

333 Sturge, G. (2020) [Asylum statistics](#), UK House of Commons Library briefing paper.

Human rights groups have also accused the Hungarian government of “weaponising” the pandemic to further its position on migration. Senior Hungarian officials have sought to draw a direct link between irregular migration and the spread of the virus.³³⁴ On 1 March 2020, the Hungarian government announced the suspension of entry into its two transit zones on the basis that asylum seekers seeking to enter from Serbia were from high-risk countries such as Iran, despite the fact that the majority had been in Serbia for months or years. Created in 2015, these controversial zones were in May 2020 deemed by the EU’s Court of Justice to amount to unlawful detention. After the ruling, Hungarian authorities moved around 300 people into semi-open facilities and announced the transit zones would be closed. However, the government stated that it disagreed with the judgement.³³⁵

Slovenia’s fences

Hungary is not alone in its stance on migration. Slovenia has developed similarly restrictive policies, including extensive fence construction along its border with Croatia, and in August 2019 announced it would be increasing this further following a jump in the numbers of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers arriving in the first half of the year compared to the same period in 2018.³³⁶ There have also been reports of vigilante “home guards” patrolling the border to prevent refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers crossing into Slovenia.³³⁷ In June 2020, Slovenia reportedly sent some 1,000 additional troops to its border with Croatia in response to fears that the lifting of the lockdown would see a surge in attempted crossings.³³⁸

Migration to Italy plummets

Tougher stance

Irregular migration along the Central Mediterranean route to Italy has declined dramatically as Italian authorities have adopted an increasingly hostile stance to migrant crossings. While in 2017 Italy was by far the most popular entry route into Europe, with some 119,369 arrivals (65 percent of the total into Europe recorded that year), they fell to just 11,471 (9 percent) in 2019.³³⁹ However, activity along this route has increased considerably in 2020, with some 14,014 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers travelling this route between 1 January and 31 July 2020, compared to 3,867 during the same period in 2019. The increase was especially evident in the summer months, with 7,065 arrivals in July 2020 compared to 1,088 in July 2019.³⁴⁰

The primary countries of origin among those arriving over the course of 2019 were Tunisia (23 percent), Pakistan (10 percent), Côte d’Ivoire (10 percent), Algeria (9 percent) and Iraq (8 percent).³⁴¹ It is notable that the demographics of arrivals from month to month fluctuated significantly over the course of the year and into 2020. For example, in September 2019 an estimated 850 Tunisians arrived in Italy compared to 237 Algerians, but in January 2020 only 68 Tunisians entered compared to 249 Algerians.³⁴² However, an extraordinary increase in the number of Tunisians journeying along the route in June and July meant that the most-represented country of origin over the first seven months of 2020 was Tunisia (40.4 percent), followed by Bangladesh (15.6 percent)³⁴³

Dangerous seas

The large majority of those entering the EU irregularly continue to do so by sea rather than land. These dangerous crossings have resulted in many thousands of deaths in recent years: peaking in 2016, with 3,262 dead and missing that year, but declining year on year thereafter with 1,117 dead and missing in 2019, down from 1,827 in 2018.³⁴⁴ Despite the substantial reduction in the number of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers crossing the Central Mediterranean to Italy since 2017, it remains by far the most deadly route and in 2019 accounted for 828 dead and missing, almost three quarters of the total that year.³⁴⁵

334 Gall, L. (2020) [Hungary weaponises coronavirus to stoke xenophobia](#), Human Rights Watch.

335 European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2020) [Hungary: Abolishment of transit zone following CJEU ruling](#)

336 Reuters (2019) [Slovenia erects more border fence to curb migrant inflow](#).

337 Stojanovic, D. (2019), [Vigilantes in Slovenia patrol borders to keep out migrants](#), AP.

338 InfoMigrants (2020) [Slovenia sends extra police to fortify border against migrants](#).

339 UNHCR (2020) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#).

340 UNHCR (2020) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard – July 2020](#); UNHCR (2020) [Mediterranean situation: Italy](#).

341 UNHCR (2020) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#).

342 UNHCR (2020) [Italy sea arrivals dashboard \(May 2020\)](#).

343 UNHCR (2020) [Mediterranean situation: Italy](#).

344 IOM (2020) [Missing Migrants: Tracking deaths along migratory routes](#).

345 Ibid.

Mediterranean dead and missing as a percentage of total arrivals

from January to October 6th 2020

Previous years	Arrivals*	Dead & missing	Proportion (%)
2020 (up to early October)	60,011	562	0.93%
2019	123,663	1,319	1.06%
2018	141,472	2,277	1.6%
2017	185,139	3,139	1.69%
2016	373,652	5,096	1.36%
2015	1,032,408	3,771	0.36%
2014	225,455	3,538	1.56%

*Arrivals include sea arrivals to Italy, Cyprus and Malta, both sea and land arrivals to Greece and Spain.

Source: UNHCR <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

Human rights groups have argued that the EU is also complicit in many of these deaths, particularly in its rollback of life-saving naval assistance since March 2019 (see box below).

Operation Irini replaces Sophia, dropping migrant rescue mandate

In March 2019, the EU's issued a six-month suspension of the naval operations of its humanitarian rescue programme, Operation Sophia, that remained in place when Sophia itself was extended in September 2019 until its closure was formally announced in February 2020. It was replaced with Operation Irini, launched on 31 March 2020 with a focus on enforcing the arms embargo to Libya. There is no mention in its mandate of migrant rescue and though its naval vessels are obliged under maritime law to rescue boats in distress, data on where those on board are disembarked will reportedly remain confidential, raising fears that refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers may be returned to Libya.³⁴⁶ At the same time, the criminalisation of NGO rescue vessels in Italian waters under Salvini during 2019 and the subsequent curtailment of operations in early 2020 amidst the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that unofficial rescue has also reduced. The EU has been accused of effectively "outsourcing responsibility" for its humanitarian obligations to Libya and other actors.³⁴⁷

This was exacerbated by the Italian government's crackdown on independent rescue ships operating in its waters, a stance that has softened to some extent since the hardline politician Matteo Salvini was ousted from his position as deputy prime minister and interior minister in September 2019. However, particularly after Italy and then Malta declared their ports unsafe due to Covid-19, rescue operations were largely curtailed for some time.

Salvini's strictures

After Salvini joined the government in June 2018, Italy's policy towards refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers became markedly more hostile. Salvini, who had campaigned before the 2018 election with a pledge to deport up to 500,000 migrants over the next five years, oversaw a range of hostile measures during his tenure that sought to erode migrant protections and undermine asylum procedures.³⁴⁸ Anti-migrant legislation passed in September 2018 and formally enshrined into law two months later appeared to dramatically reduce the number of asylum applications accepted, with just 150 approvals in January 2019 compared to 2,091 in January 2018.³⁴⁹

One of Salvini's most significant anti-migrant measures was a June 2019 decree effectively criminalising sea rescue operations in Italian waters.³⁵⁰ The same month, the captain of a rescue vessel, Sea-Watch 3, was arrested and prosecuted on charges of aiding undocumented migration.³⁵¹ Another rescue vessel, Open Arms, was stranded for days in August 2019 when Italian authorities refused to allow it to dock before it was finally allowed

346 CEPS (2020) [Operation Irini in Libya: Part of the solution, or part of the problem?](#)

347 Farahat, A. and Markard, N. (2020) [Places of Safety in the Mediterranean: The EU's policy of outsourcing responsibility](#). Heinrich Böll Foundation.

348 Giuffrida, A. (2018) [Italian government approves Salvini bill targeting migrants](#) The Guardian

349 Tondo, L. (2019) [Italy rejects record number of asylum applications](#). The Guardian

350 Salvini himself now faces prosecution related to this policy. On 3 October he appeared in a Rome court on charges of kidnapping related to a July 2019 incident when, as interior minister, he refused to allow 131 refugees and migrants—including 15 unaccompanied children—to disembark in Sicily from the Gregoretti coast guard ship for five days. Widespread coverage of this case includes: Pietromarchi, V. (2020) [Italy's Salvini goes on trial, accused of 'kidnapping' refugees](#). Al Jazeera.

351 Al Jazeera (2019) [Rescue vessel Sea-Watch captain questioned in Italy over migrants](#).

into the port at Lampedusa.³⁵² Even before the decree, however, rescue vessels had faced persistent obstruction from Italian authorities. In December 2018, for example, Médecins Sans Frontières announced that its rescue ship *Aquarius* had been forced to cease operations permanently due to prolonged pressure from Italy and other European states.³⁵³

Power play backfires

In August 2019 Salvini put forward a motion of no confidence in Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte in the hope of triggering a snap election. This gamble ended instead with Conte forming an alternative coalition, bringing an end to Salvini's reign as deputy. He was replaced by Luciana Lamorgese, an experienced migration specialist and civil servant. Her appointment was welcomed by activists who hoped it would signal the beginning of a more humane approach to migration in Italy.³⁵⁴

Softer stance...

In the wake of Salvini's departure, Italian authorities appeared to soften their stance on sea rescue. In November 2019, the Spanish boat *Open Arms* was allowed to dock with 73 people rescued at sea, and at the beginning of February 2020, after repeated requests to disembark were refused by Malta as well as Italy, it was allowed entry to the Sicilian harbour of Pollazzo with 363 migrants it had rescued.³⁵⁵ Also in February 2020, the boats *Ocean Viking* and *Sea Watch 3* were allowed into ports in Sicily with more than 450 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers on board between them. In both cases, passengers and crew members were immediately quarantined to prevent potential spread of Covid-19.³⁵⁶ Despite the delays preceding these dockings, they nevertheless represent a shift from Salvini's consistent hostility to sea rescue operations.

...but not for long

Then in October 2019, shortly after agreeing a deal with four other European countries for the shared distribution of migrants rescued at sea, the Italian government announced a list of 13 "safe countries" that would enable asylum procedures to be fast tracked to allow for speedier expulsions of nationals from those countries if their applications for asylum in Italy were rejected—a measure interpreted by some as intended to dispel accusations of "softness" from Salvini's supporters. In January 2020, Human Rights Watch called on Rome to move beyond "tweaks" and undertake "deep reform" of

the system inherited from Salvini, including an end to fines on rescue ships, the restoration of humanitarian residency permits and reducing limits on detention prior to deportation.³⁵⁷

Amnesty for the undocumented

In May 2020, the Italian government announced a temporary amnesty for undocumented migrants as part of a broader national stimulus package. With this measure, agricultural and care workers have the opportunity to apply for a temporary six-month residency to be employed legally in these sectors. But while some praised the move as a step forward for the 560,000 or more migrants working without papers in the country, activists have also criticised it as self-serving: the policy, intended to boost manpower in key sectors facing seasonal labour shortages, is driven by economic pragmatism rather than human rights concerns and will only benefit around a third (200,000) of Italy's undocumented migrants.³⁵⁸

Pandemic prompts pushbacks and port closures

In early April 2020, Italy signalled that in light of the spread of Covid-19, its ports could no longer be deemed safe for arrivals and therefore all vessels, including rescue boats, would be refused entry. At the time, the German boat *Alan Kurdi* was just a few kilometres from the Italian island of Lampedusa, with 150 rescued survivors on board. By then, it was the only rescue vessel still active in the Central Mediterranean as other humanitarian organisations operating in the area had been forced to suspend their efforts due to the pandemic.³⁵⁹ All those on board were then transferred by Italian authorities to another ship to be quarantined, while the *Alan Kurdi* was subsequently impounded due to "irregularities".³⁶⁰ Those on board another rescue boat, the Spanish *Aita Mari*, were also quarantined in the ferry in April.³⁶¹ In early July, the rescue ship *Ocean Viking* was finally granted entry to Sicily after being stranded since late June with 180 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers on board.³⁶²

Despite these measures, boats have continued to reach Italy, in particular the island of Lampedusa, where

352 Al Jazeera (2019) [Open Arms rescue ship faces \\$1m fine from Spain](#).

353 BBC (2018) [MSF ship Aquarius ends migrant rescues in Mediterranean](#).

354 Tondo, L. (2019) [Matteo Salvini replaced by migration specialist in new Italy coalition](#), The Guardian.

355 InfoMigrants (2019) [Open Arms rescues 73 migrants, some severely injured](#); Wallis, E. (2020) [Open Arms disembarks 363 people in Italy](#), InfoMigrants; Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Europe – Quarter 1 2020](#).

356 D'Ignati, S. (2020) [How coronavirus hits migrants and asylum seekers in Italy](#), The New Humanitarian.

357 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Italy: Revoke abusive anti-asylum decrees](#).

358 D'Agostino, L. (2020) ['Cynical': Critics slam Italy's amnesty for undocumented migrants](#), Al Jazeera.

359 Tondo, L. (2020) [Italy declares own ports 'unsafe' to stop migrants arriving](#), The Guardian.

360 MacGregor, M. (2020) [Italy impounds migrant rescue ship Alan Kurdi](#), InfoMigrants.

361 VOA (2020) [Rescued migrants to quarantine on ferry off Italy](#).

362 Al Jazeera (2020) [Italy clears rescue ship to bring 180 migrants to Sicily](#).

facilities are now overstretched. On 30 August, the arrival of a vessel carrying almost 400 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers triggered demonstrations. Far-right groups operating on the island have sought to exploit fears around Covid-19 to present them as a public health risk.³⁶³

Malta follows suit...

On 9 April 2020, two days after Italy's declaration, Malta also announced that its ports were "unsafe" and would therefore be preventing any arrivals. This meant that migrant boats en route from Libya could be stranded without being able to dock in either country.³⁶⁴ Migration to the island has risen significantly since 2017, when it had almost no detected entries (23), to an estimated 3,400 arrivals in 2019.³⁶⁵

...with deadly consequences

The humanitarian impact on refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers crossing the Central Mediterranean has been considerable. In mid-April, shortly after the ban, Maltese authorities allegedly forced a vessel (with 101 people on board) at gunpoint to continue on to Italy. Around the same time, a private ship apparently acting on orders from Maltese authorities forced a vessel with 51 passengers back to Libya. According to survivor testimonies, 12 people on board had died by the time they reached Libya again: three drowned after attempting to be rescued by a vessel that ignored them, four more died of thirst after a plane that spotted them failed to report their presence to authorities, two died during the interception and three perished during the journey back, when the remaining migrants were reportedly locked in the kitchen with just a few bottles of water.³⁶⁶ Others rescued towards the end of the month were confined in privately owned tourist ferries hired by the government to prevent them from seeking asylum in Malta.³⁶⁷ The 425 people on board were finally allowed to disembark by authorities on 7 June after more than a month at sea.³⁶⁸ The long delays in responding to migrant boats in distress—one dinghy with 95 passengers was left adrift for more than 30 hours before Maltese authorities responded to its call for help—appear to be part of an intentional strategy of deterrence.³⁶⁹

These incidents are part of a broader hardening of Malta's approach to border management that have

seen hundreds detained offshore on ferries or pushed back illegally to Libya, frequently with the involvement of private vessels commissioned to carry out these actions. Reports emerged at the end of August that the Maltese government would be paying around €1 million a month to charter a ferry to house migrants offshore, suggesting that its practice of detention at sea will be continued into the future.³⁷⁰ Like Italy, Malta has also signed an agreement with Libya to cooperate on migration.³⁷¹

Cyprus denies entry, too

The number of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers entering Cyprus has risen, with 1,700 arrivals in 2019.³⁷² As a result, on the eve of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Cyprus had the highest number of asylum seekers per capita of any country in the EU.³⁷³ Shortly after declaring lockdown in March 2020, Greek Cypriot vessels intercepted a vessel with 175 Syrians on board and forced it to head north where the passengers were rescued by Turkish Cypriot authorities after the vessel capsized. However, they were subsequently kept in detention, prompting human rights groups to call for their immediate release amid concerns they would be deported to mainland Turkey.³⁷⁴

A new norm in Europe?

The incident described above in Cyprus, with an official vessel actively preventing a disembarkation in its waters, is part of a broader context where several European states are preventing boats from entering their waters through various means. These standoffs are frequently in violation of international law and place refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers at sea in even greater peril. In September 2020, for instance, UN agencies issued a statement calling on governments to allow the immediate disembarkation of 27 refugees who had been on board a commercial Danish vessel, the Maersk Etienne, for more than a month.³⁷⁵ The private tanker had responded to requests from Maltese authorities to rescue the 27, but was then denied entry by Malta and other European countries. As of early September, Denmark was in talks with Tunisia to negotiate entry for the ship.³⁷⁶

363 D'Ignotti, S. (2020) [Italy's Lampedusa: Back on the migration front line](#), NewHumanitarian.

364 Martin, I. (2020) [How coronavirus sparked a fresh stand-off in the Mediterranean](#), Times of Malta

365 UNHCR (2020) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#).

366 Tondo, L. (2020) [Exclusive: 12 die as Malta uses private ships to push migrants back to Libya](#), The Guardian.

367 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Malta: Disembark rescued people](#).

368 DW (2020) [Malta lets migrants ashore after weeks in limbo](#).

369 Pianigiani, G. (2020) [Migrants adrift off Malta called for help. Then they waited. And waited](#), New York Times.

370 The Shift (2020) [Prime Minister to spend €1m a month to detain migrants on ship](#).

371 Amnesty International (2020) [Malta: Illegal tactics mar another year of suffering in central Mediterranean](#).

372 UNHCR (2020) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#).

373 Stevis-Gridneff, M. (2020) [Asylum seekers find a new route to Europe, flowing into a divided Cyprus](#) New York Times.

374 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Turkish Cypriot authorities: Release detained Syrian asylum seekers](#).

375 UNHCR (2020) [ICS, UNHCR and IOM call on States to end humanitarian crisis onboard ship in the Mediterranean](#)

376 Porter, J. (2020) [Denmark in talks with Tunisia to accept Maersk Etienne migrants](#) Lloyd's List

While there have been many reports of NGO and rescue boats being left in limbo, this was the latest in a number of incidents involving commercial vessels which, having rescued migrant boats in line with international maritime law, struggled to be permitted entry to dock in Italy or Malta. In May, the German-owned Marina spent close to a week with almost 80 rescued passengers on board before it was able to dock and in July a Lebanese cargo ship was left to care for around 50 people for several days before they were allowed to disembark.³⁷⁷

Iberian Peninsula

Arrivals to Spain

The number of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers entering Spain rose from 28,300 in 2017 to 65,400 (46 percent) in 2018—the highest of any route that year—before falling to 32,500 in 2019. Spain was still, after Greece, the second most significant route into Europe, with almost three times the total recorded arrivals of Italy during 2019. The primary countries of origin among those entering Spain were Morocco (25 percent), Algeria (16 percent), Guinea (15 percent), Mali (10 percent), Côte d'Ivoire (9 percent) and Senegal (7 percent).³⁷⁸

The importance of maritime routes into Spain has increased substantially since 2015, when the number of arrivals by land (11,624) was more than double those by sea (5,312), according to UNHCR data. The number of entries by land fell the following year but has remained relatively constant since, with 6,814 entries in 2018 and 6,345 in 2019. The number of sea arrivals, on the other hand, has been much more volatile: rising from 8,162 in 2016 to 22,103 in 2017 before peaking at 58,569 in 2018 and falling back to 26,168 in 2019.

The number of arrivals into Spain in the first nine months of 2020 was just over 19,000 (17,698 by sea; 1,395 by land).³⁷⁹ The most significant entry point during this period was Andalusia (7,102) and the Canary Islands (6,116), followed by the eastern coast, the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, and the Balearic Islands.³⁸⁰

Ceuta and Melilla

The two Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, located on the coast of North Africa and surrounded by Morocco, are the only land borders between Africa and the EU. Every year thousands of refugees, migrants, and asylum

seekers attempt to enter by scaling the security fences or swimming along the shoreline. These often take the form of mass attempts where hundreds scale the fences at the same time, with small numbers sometimes managing to secure entry. In 2019, for instance, 52 people entered Melilla in May and another 50 in July, while 155 managed to break through the barbed wire into Ceuta in August—reportedly the first time this had happened in more than a year.³⁸¹

Between January and September 2020, there were a total of 1,271 arrivals in Melilla and another 532 in Ceuta. The demographics of these two groups is substantially different: while the majority of those entering Ceuta in the first five months of 2020 were from Morocco (68 percent) and Algeria (26 percent), the predominant countries of origin among those arriving in Melilla were Syria (19 percent) and Tunisia (17 percent), followed by Morocco (12 percent), Egypt (11 percent) and Algeria (10 percent).³⁸²

Judicial green light for “hot returns”?

Spanish authorities have increasingly been undertaking “hot returns” of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers arriving in Ceuta or Melilla—effectively returning them to Moroccan territory immediately without allowing them the opportunity to claim asylum. There are concerns this practice will increase following a ruling by the European Court of Human Rights on 13 February 2020 concerning the case of two men—a Malian and an Ivorian—who, after scaling the border wall to Melilla in August 2014, were handed over to Moroccan authorities without being offered legal assistance or the chance to explain their circumstances. Though the court initially ruled in 2017 that the pair’s human rights had been violated, following an appeal by the Spanish government, the court overturned its previous decision and instead found in Spain’s favour, determining that the men had “placed themselves in an unlawful situation” by entering “as part of a large group and at an unauthorised location”. It concluded that “the lack of individual removal decisions could be attributed to the fact that the applicants—assuming that they had wished to assert rights under the [European Human Rights] Convention—had not made use of the official entry procedures existing for that purpose, and that it had thus been a consequence of their own conduct.”³⁸³

377 UNHCR (2020) [ICS, UNHCR and IOM call on States to end humanitarian crisis onboard ship in the Mediterranean](#)

378 UNHCR (2020) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#)

379 UNHCR (2020) [Mediterranean situation: Spain](#)

380 Ibid.

381 DW (2019) [Migrants force entry into Spain's Melilla enclaves](#); The Local (2019) [Dozens of migrants force entry into Spain's Melilla enclave](#); The Local (2019) [Ceuta: 155 migrants force entry into Spanish enclave](#)

382 UNHCR (2020) [Spain: Sea and land arrivals 1 January – 31 May 2020](#)

383 European Court of Human Rights (2020) [Spain did not breach the Convention in returning migrants to Morocco who had attempted to cross the fences of the Melilla enclave](#).

The decision was widely criticised by activists who argued that it overlooked the reality at the border, including the fact that Moroccan authorities prevent refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from reaching official border crossings and that Spanish authorities also did not have these procedures in place at the time.³⁸⁴ There are concerns that the ruling will not only enable Spain to continue its practice of express deportations—658 of these “hot returns” from Ceuta and Melilla took place in 2018—but also set a precedent for other EU countries to exploit.³⁸⁵

While Spanish authorities on the mainland emptied immigration detention centres in response to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, recognising the dangers of continuing their confinement in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, there were concerns that similar measures had not been implemented in Spain’s North African enclaves. In Melilla, detainees were reportedly being held in cramped facilities with insufficient protective equipment and limited access to information.³⁸⁶

Canary Islands arrivals soar...

As Spanish authorities have sought to close maritime routes to the southern mainland through a cooperation arrangement with Morocco, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers have increasingly depended on the more dangerous route to Spain’s Canary Islands, which lie off the coast of northwest Africa, to escape this surveillance. This has exposed those using the alternative route to even greater dangers. While arrivals to the Spanish mainland have reduced significantly from 2019, the number travelling to the Canary Islands has surged to the highest level in more than a decade.³⁸⁷

...prompting deportation uptick

While there has been considerable focus on human rights abuses in the Central and Eastern Mediterranean, there has been less attention on violations along the Western Mediterranean route. This includes the deportation of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers from the Canary Islands to Mauritania under a 2003 readmission agreement. This is despite the fact that many of those deported under this arrangement appear not to have travelled through Mauritania before reaching Spanish territory. These deportations appear to be increasing in frequency as the number of arrivals in the Canary Islands rises: though the total for 2019 was just over 2,700, more than half of these arrived in the last quarter of the year. Besides evidence that many basic elements of due process have been disregarded, denying deportees the right to claim asylum in Spain, reports suggest that many of those sent to Mauritania are subsequently sent back to their country of origin. This means that Spain is potentially engaging in a form of indirect *refoulement*.³⁸⁸

Portugal becomes more popular

While Portugal receives only a fraction of the number of arrivals of neighbouring Spain, there are signs that it is becoming a popular alternative destination for refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers wishing to enter Europe. In response to the interception of 69 irregular migrants since December 2019, in August 2020 Portugal and Morocco signed an agreement to collaborate on curbing undocumented migration between the two countries.³⁸⁹

Portugal’s response to Covid-19 has been remarkably inclusive. As the pandemic took hold, authorities granted temporary citizenship rights to migrants and asylum seekers in the country to allow them access to social security and health services for the duration of the crisis.³⁹⁰

384 International Justice Resource Center (2020) [European Court of Human Rights allows Spain’s ‘pushback’ of undocumented African migrants](#).

385 Jones, S. (2020) [European court under fire for backing Spain’s express deportations](#). The Guardian.

386 European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2020) [Spain: Release of people in immigration detention but rights still at risk](#).

387 Brito, R. (2020) [Migrants trying to reach Europe pushed to deadly Atlantic](#). AP.

388 Garver-Affeldt, J. (2020) [“Hot returns” and the cold shoulder: New developments in deterrence along the Western Mediterranean Route](#). Mixed Migration Centre.

389 Sousa, J. (2020) [Portugal and Morocco reach agreement to strengthen legal migration between the two countries](#). Jornal Económico.

390 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Europe – Quarter 1 2020](#).

Attempted crossings from Calais to the UK increase

For the hundreds of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers living in camps in the northern French city of Calais, the situation has become increasingly desperate during 2020, particularly because of Covid-19. Against a backdrop of police harassment, evictions and discrimination, access to sanitation, clean water and other basic services continues to be constrained, placing many homeless refugees and migrants at further risk.³⁹¹

There has been an uptick in crossings from Calais to the United Kingdom (UK) in 2020, with more than 4,000 people estimated to have reached British shores by early August, mostly on small boats. The increase has created growing tensions between France and the UK, particularly in the wake of suggestions by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson that the Royal Navy might be enlisted to prevent arrivals—a move that the mayor of Calais condemned as a “provocation”. Activists have called on the UK to open up legal pathways into the UK for refugees and asylum seekers, arguing that this would be much more effective in ending irregular arrivals than a militarised response.³⁹²

391 Louarn, A-D. (2020) [“In Calais, at least 1,200 migrants are on the streets, twice as many as last summer”](#). InfoMigrants.

392 Grierson, J. & Willsher, K. (2020) [More than 4,000 have crossed Channel to UK in small boats this year](#) The Guardian; Forrest, A. (2020) [Calais mayor says Boris Johnson needs to “calm down” over migrant crossings, as 70% of Britons back deploying navy](#). Independent.

Asia

Overview

The ongoing humanitarian crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar have contributed to large-scale displacement both within their borders and across the region. The majority of those in these flows, even those who have managed to successfully flee their home countries, still face discrimination and insecurity. This is one reason why secondary migration is common among these groups; examples include the journeys of Afghans in Iran overland to Turkey, en route to Europe, or the hazardous sea crossings of Rohingya from Bangladesh towards Malaysia.

The outbreak of Covid-19, has highlighted the precarious environment not only for refugees and asylum seekers fleeing violence and persecution, but also the millions of migrant labourers from countries such as India, Nepal, and the Philippines working abroad, particularly in the Gulf, as well as in significant destination countries within Asia such as Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Their sudden loss of employment and the negative policies towards foreign workers in many host countries since March 2020 have pushed substantial numbers to return, with around 1 million migrants returning to South Asia alone.³⁹³ In some cases the response of their own governments and local communities has not been supportive, even though the long-term impact in places where remittances have been a vital economic source for the families of migrants elsewhere could be substantial.

Protection gaps widen for migrant workers

Shortly after Covid-19 was officially declared a pandemic, the UN Human Rights Office called on governments across Asia and the Pacific to prioritise the protection of migrants during the crisis. While praising positive actions by various countries, such as the establishment of specialist clinics for migrants and the temporary suspension of measures such as deportations for those in need of medical care, it also highlighted the negative impact of forced returns, unsanitary detention facilities and increased surveillance on human rights as well as health. Among other measures,

it called on states to ensure a “firewall” between public health and immigration enforcement to allow migrants to access medical care without fears of arrest or deportation, the extension of residence permits in light of border closures, and an immediate end to the forced return of irregular migrants for the duration of the pandemic. It also emphasised the importance of positive messaging around the value and contribution of migrant workers to their host countries at a time when many were confronted with rising stigma and xenophobia as a result of the pandemic.³⁹⁴

Even apparently inclusive policies towards migrant workers may overlook the most marginalised. **Thailand**, for instance, rolled out a welfare package for both its national and foreign workers as the pandemic hit, but the requirements to qualify (such as having a registered Thai bank account) mean that in practice millions of migrants with acute needs are unable to access these benefits.³⁹⁵

Protection gaps for migrant workers have not only arisen in host countries but have also resulted from policy shortcomings in origin countries, too. One example of this is **Nepal**, where, despite the essential role of foreign remittances in the national economy—accounting for more than a quarter of its GDP in 2019³⁹⁶—authorities have been slow to roll out protections and safeguards to assist Nepali citizens abroad. In April, shortly after the government announced a blanket ban on all entries to the country, including Nepali migrants working abroad, the Supreme Court issued an interim order in April requiring the government to enable their return and deliver support to those stranded. This was followed up in June with a ruling ordering the government to repatriate some 25,000 Nepali citizens who had lost their jobs abroad could not afford to pay for their return.³⁹⁷

393 Nebehay, S. (2020) [Migrant workers need support, jobs at home after pandemic disruption: ILO](#), Reuters.

394 OHCHR (2020) [UN Human Rights Office urges Asia-Pacific States to release detained migrants, suspend forced returns amid COVID-19 crisis](#).

395 Sandford, S. (2020) [Thailand's migrant workers struggle to qualify for aid during pandemic](#) VOA

396 World Bank (2019) [Personal remittances, received \(% of GDP\) – Nepal](#)

397 Sharma, G. (2020) [Court orders Nepal to pay for return of migrants stranded by coronavirus](#) Reuters

Peace deal fails to stem Afghan displacement

The impact of the conflict in Afghanistan, now almost two decades long, continues to be felt in high levels of displacement across the country. Some 461,000 people were newly displaced as a result of conflict in 2019, an increase from 372,000, in 2018, bringing the total number of IDPs at the end of the year to 2,993,000.³⁹⁸ Despite a peace agreement brokered between the US and the Taliban in February 2020 as a first step towards intra-Afghan peace negotiations, fighting in fact increased in the months after.³⁹⁹ This has brought further displacement: in July, for instance, almost 10,000 civilians were displaced as a result of clashes between government forces and Taliban fighters in the northeast of the country.⁴⁰⁰

Disasters also uproot many

Natural disasters have also played a major role in uprooting communities, causing some 117,000 new displacements in 2019.⁴⁰¹ The impacts of these events can be devastating: for example, in just one incident, flash floods in Parwan on 26 August 2020 killed more than 100 people and destroyed some 500 houses, leaving many homeless.⁴⁰²

With no immediate end in sight for the conflict and the population still contending with the fallout of a disastrous 2018/19 drought that displaced hundreds of thousands of people, the future in Afghanistan was already looking bleak at the beginning of 2020: UNOCHA's Humanitarian Needs Overview for the coming year described it as "the deadliest conflict on earth" and anticipated that 14.3 million people would be in a state of serious food insecurity.⁴⁰³ This humanitarian crisis has only deepened since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. By July, the Afghan Red Cross was warning of a looming "catastrophe" as a result of the spread of the virus, with the country's poorly equipped hospitals struggling to respond to the growing numbers of infected.⁴⁰⁴ Decades of conflict and displacement have left the country especially vulnerable to the spread of the disease.⁴⁰⁵

Returns on the rise

Instability and precarious living conditions in neighbouring countries have contributed to the steady return of Afghans living abroad in recent years: during 2019, some 440,000 returned from Iran and another 25,300 from Pakistan.⁴⁰⁶ This was significantly lower than the previous year, when 775,000 and 46,000 returned from Iran and Pakistan respectively—the largest number since IOM started recording the number of returns in 2012.⁴⁰⁷ Most of those returning find themselves in a state of protracted internal displacement as their former homes are no longer accessible or secure, with many relocating to urban areas elsewhere. Displacement, for instance, is a key factor in the growth of the capital, Kabul, with more than three times the number of people living there now than in 2001.⁴⁰⁸

The impact of Covid-19 and its accompanying economic devastation appears to have escalated the number of returnees from Iran. In the first half of 2020, some 362,000 Afghans had returned from Iran, far higher numbers than the less than 1,900 returning from Pakistan in the same period, where the border with Afghanistan remained largely closed in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak.⁴⁰⁹ As Iran was at the time one of the global hotspots for Covid-19, there were concerns that mass migration back to Afghanistan could result in the virus being imported across the border.⁴¹⁰ At the same time, returnees have reported widespread stigmatisation and discrimination from local communities.⁴¹¹

Returnees are especially vulnerable due to their limited access to services and lack of ready access to livelihood options in Afghanistan.⁴¹² Economic pressures have therefore pushed many to attempt to re-enter Iran in search of work.⁴¹³ This may push them to travel on increasingly hazardous routes and also exposes them to the threat of violence at the hands of Iranian border guards—a predicament exemplified by the torture and death of dozens of Afghans in May, described in the next section.

398 IDMC (2020) [Afghanistan](#)

399 SIGAR (2020) [SIGAR Quarterly Report April 30, 2020](#)

400 RFERL (2020) [UN says more than 100,000 Afghans displaced by conflict this year](#)

401 IDMC (2020) [Afghanistan](#)

402 BBC (2020) [Afghanistan flash floods kill dozens and destroy 500 homes](#)

403 OCHA (2019) [Humanitarian Needs Overview: Afghanistan – Humanitarian Programme Cycle 2020](#)

404 Reuters (2020) [Afghanistan faces 'catastrophe' as Covid-19 cases grow: Red Crescent](#)

405 Wilke, C. & Khalid Naseemi, M. (2020) [Afghanistan's Covid-19 crisis has been fuelled by armed conflict](#). The Conversation.

406 OCHA (2019) [Afghanistan: Snapshot of population movements \(January – December 2019\)](#)

407 IOM and UNHCR (2019) [Returns to Afghanistan 2018](#); Radio Liberty (2019) [Afghan migrants returning from Iran hit record high in 2018](#)

408 IDMC (2020) [The Invisible Minority](#)

409 IOM (2020) [Return of undocumented Afghans: Weekly situation report 28 June – 4 July 2020](#)

410 Makoi, A. M. & Beaumont, P. (2020) [Afghanistan braces for coronavirus surge as migrants pour back from Iran](#). The Guardian.

411 Global Protection Cluster (2020) [Afghanistan: Covid-19 situation report 5 May 2020](#)

412 IOM (2020) [Coronavirus threatens to push Afghan returnees into deeper poverty](#)

413 George, S. (2020) [Afghanistan and Iran investigate deaths of 16 Afghan migrants near border](#). Washington Post.

Mistreatment of Afghans in Iran...

Beginning with the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1978 and continuing through successive conflicts and instability since, hundreds of thousands of Afghans have migrated to Iran. A large number, even those resident in the country for decades, still lack legal status and are frequently subjected to discrimination, harassment and exploitation. In addition to almost 1 million refugees, there are an estimated 2.5 million other Afghans in the country, including registered residents and undocumented migrants.

...worsens as Covid takes hold

The situation of Afghans in Iran has long been characterised by insecurity and discrimination, but their situation has become even more precarious since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated impacts on Iran's economy, with many Afghan workers losing their livelihood as a result of lockdown. In this context, a number of widely publicised abuses against Afghan migrants by officials have highlighted a broader pattern of mistreatment. This included an incident on 1 May when Iranian border guards are alleged to have forced a group of Afghan migrants into a river at gunpoint, resulting in at least 29 deaths, with others going missing.⁴¹⁴

While the Iranian government committed to a joint investigation on the incident, authorities responded to widespread protests by Afghan migrants against the killings with increased deportations. For example, in the week of 5-11 July alone, 6,321 Afghans were deported (along with 4,283 voluntary returns) amidst a reported increase of cross-border movement back into Iran.⁴¹⁵ Afghans have also been targeted with beatings and torture in what are widely seen as police reprisals for the recent unrest, with a number having died in the violence. Video footage emerged in early June of security forces shooting at a vehicle full of Afghans, with three killed and five others injured in the ensuing blaze.⁴¹⁶ The attack fuelled further protests and a social media campaign inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement, "Afghan Lives Matter", with hashtags including #StopKillingAfghans and #Iamburning.⁴¹⁷

Moving on to Europe

During 2019, the number of Afghans migrating towards Europe was on the rise, driven in part by the deteriorating economic situation in Iran in the wake of US sanctions.⁴¹⁸

Across Europe as a whole, 23 percent of arrivals during 2019 were from Afghanistan, making it by some margin the most represented nationality among new refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in the EU as a whole. Syrians, the next largest nationality, only accounted for 16 percent.⁴¹⁹ It was predicted at the time that this increase would continue, with the total number of arrivals in 2020 forecast to double that of the previous year.⁴²⁰ However, the unexpected impact of Covid-19 and increasingly restrictive controls has resulted in a very different picture. Just 3,197 Afghans entered the EU between January and the end of July 2020, a reflection of the dramatic curtailment of migration along the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey used by almost all Afghan refugees, migrants and asylum seekers.⁴²¹

Unwelcome in Turkey and Greece

Besides their precarious situation in Iran, the dynamic of large-scale Afghan migration has also been attributed to the very different situation they face in Turkey compared to Syrians. The latter, while facing many difficulties, nevertheless benefit from a "temporary protection" status that Afghans residing irregularly in the country lack. With hundreds of thousands living or moving through Turkey at any time, Afghans make up the second largest group of foreign nationals and have been arriving in increasing numbers in 2018 and 2019. Those arriving in Turkey, often after a long and dangerous journey through Iran, then face limited access to essential services, poor living conditions, restrictions on freedom of movement and a high risk of deportation.⁴²² Predominantly young, male and single, rather than in family units as is the case with many Syrians, with few opportunities to incentivise them to remain there, most Afghans in Turkey aim to continue on into the EU.⁴²³

Many of those who have attempted to enter into Greece during 2020, however, have found themselves subjected to violent pushbacks by security forces or detained in unsanitary conditions in overcrowded camps. Though the majority of deportations of Afghan nationals to Afghanistan are from Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, Afghans also continue to be returned from EU countries, despite credible protection concerns.⁴²⁴ On February 2020, for instance, some 31 Afghan nationals were returned from Germany on what was the 32nd deportation flight to Kabul since December 2016, bringing the total number of Afghans deported from the country to 868.⁴²⁵

414 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Victims of Iran-Afghan border drowning deserve justice](#).

415 IOM (2020) [Return of undocumented Afghans: Weekly situation report 05 – 11 July 2020](#).

416 Salaam Times (2020) [Tehran ramps up purge of migrants after Afghans vow justice for drowned workers](#).

417 Bezhan, F. (2020) ["Afghan Lives Matter": Gruesome deaths of Afghan migrants in Iran unleash outrage](#). Radio Liberty.

418 Guarascio, F. (2019) [EU sees spike in Afghan migrants as many leave sanctions-stricken Iran](#). Reuters.

419 UNHCR (2020) [Refugee and migrant arrivals to Europe in 2019 \(Mediterranean\)](#).

420 MacGregor, M. (2019) [Afghan migrants to Europe could double in 2020](#). InfoMigrants.

421 UNHCR (2020) [Mediterranean situation](#).

422 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Destination Unknown: Afghans on the move in Turkey](#).

423 Hermann, R. (2020) [Opinion: Afghan refugees not welcome](#). DW.

424 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia – Quarter 4 2020](#).

425 Sanderson, S. (2020) [Germany departs Afghan migrants amid recent surge of violence](#). InfoMigrants.

The Rohingya crisis continues

Almost a million Rohingya, members of a long-persecuted minority based in Myanmar, now live in **Bangladesh**. While thousands had already been forced to move there over the last few decades, the large majority were forcibly displaced from August 2017 when a sustained campaign of anti-Rohingya violence by the Burmese military forced around 745,000 people across the border from **Myanmar** into Bangladesh. As of May 2020, the total refugee population in Bangladesh was estimated at 860,243, over half (52 percent) of whom are children.⁴²⁶

World's biggest refugee settlement

The majority of these are located in camps in Cox's Bazar, including the largest refugee settlement in the world, Kutupalong, with more than 600,000 people concentrated into just 13 square kilometres. In this context, there have been concerns that Covid-19 could spread easily and with devastating effect through a population already struggling with overcrowding, malnutrition, and limited access to even basic health care. From early April 2020, Kutupalong was largely closed off and restrictions on movement imposed within the camp. The first confirmed case of the virus came in May.⁴²⁷ Reports of heavy-handed measures by authorities to contain its spread, social stigma as well as a rumour that camp residents who tested positive could be killed, have contributed to fears around testing among camp residents. As a result, the number of Rohingya accessing medical care appeared to have declined.⁴²⁸ The situation has been aggravated by a prolonged internet shutdown in the camps, first imposed in September 2019, that has obstructed awareness raising around the pandemic and was still in place months after the outbreak began.⁴²⁹ However, some Rohingya refugees have been volunteering as health workers to engage and support residents in preventing and treating the disease.⁴³⁰

Stranded on “the floating island”

Bhasan Char, also known as “the floating island”, is an empty stretch of land formed two decades ago by shifting silt around 30 kilometres off the coast of Bangladesh. Given its extreme vulnerability to rising sea levels, cyclones, and other natural hazards, as well as its isolated location far from the mainland, until now it has remained uninhabited. However, following the arrival of hundreds of thousands of newly displaced Rohingya in 2017, the Bangladeshi government developed plans to

create a camp for some 100,000 refugees there, building warehouses, roads and flood-prevention embankments in anticipation of their resettlement. Human rights groups criticised the proposal, highlighting the lack of basic services that would likely be available and the vulnerability of the island to natural disasters.⁴³¹

In the first months of 2020, the plans had yet to be implemented. However, the belated rescue of two trawlers in late April with more than 300 Rohingya refugees on board was followed by authorities disembarking them on Bhasan Char. Though this move was initially justified as a necessary quarantining measure, months on they were still on the island, with limited access to services, water or other basic needs and at risk of monsoon storms. Activists have accused authorities of using Covid-19 as a pretext to detain refugees on the island.⁴³²

Dire conditions, harassment in Myanmar

Though the Bangladeshi government accepts that safe return of refugees to Myanmar is currently not possible, given the real threat of persecution in their home country, there have been periodic attempts to return some camp residents. In August 2019, plans agreed with the Myanmar government to repatriate 3,450 Rohingya were announced, but none of those identified as eligible for return presented themselves to authorities.⁴³³

This is not surprising, given the difficult conditions that Rohingya within Myanmar continue to face. Numbering around 600,000, their citizenship unrecognised, around 140,000 are currently residing in camps or camp-like conditions in Rakhine state.⁴³⁴ Their situation is especially dire, with deteriorating shelter, limited provision of education and inadequate health care. Residents have reported that local security forces have been exploiting the coronavirus pandemic to escalate the harassment and mistreatment of Rohingya in the camps. While Rohingya have received very little in the way of masks or other equipment, they face physical punishment or extortion by soldiers if they are unable to comply with mask-wearing requirements.⁴³⁵

More clashes in Rakhine

Rohingya and other communities continue to be affected by violence in Rakhine state, with reports in early February 2020 that around 1,100 civilians from Rohingya and ethnic Rakhine villages had been displaced in the northwest of the country as a result of military operations

426 UNHCR (2020) [Rohingya refugee response – Bangladesh: Operational Dashboard \(31 May 2020\)](#); OCHA (2019) [Rohingya refugee crisis](#).

427 Ebbighausen, R. (2020) [Bangladesh: Coronavirus reaches largest refugee camp in the world](#), DW.

428 Hammadi, S. (2020) [Rohingya refugees need protection of their rights now more than ever](#), Amnesty International.

429 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Bangladesh: Internet ban risks Rohingya lives](#); Ratcliffe, R. & Ahmed, R. (2020) [Bangladesh urged to lift Rohingya internet ban as Covid-19 rumours swirl](#), The Guardian.

430 Rahman, A.T. & Yeasmine, I. (2020) [Refugee health workers lead Covid-19 battle in Bangladesh camps](#), UNHCR.

431 Cowper-Smith, Y. (2020) [The Bhasan Char Relocation Project – Implications for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh](#), Sentinel Project.

432 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Bangladesh: Move Rohingya from dangerous silt island](#).

433 Robertson, P. (2019) [Two years on: No home for the Rohingya](#), Human Rights Watch.

434 UNHCR (2020) [Myanmar: 2019 year-end results](#).

435 Hardman, N. and Singh, P.-P. (2020) [Pandemic adds new threat for Rohingyas in Myanmar](#), Human Rights Watch.

in the area.⁴³⁶ However, despite their official persecution and stateless status, Rohingya are still prohibited from leaving the country due to their lack of documentation and restrictions on their freedom of movement. For instance, a group of around 70 Rohingya, including children, arrested in Yangon province en route to Malaysia in February 2020 were subsequently put on trial.⁴³⁷

ICJ rules against Myanmar in genocide case

In January 2020, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued “provisional measures” on Myanmar calling on the government to take immediate steps in accordance with the 1948 Genocide Convention. Human rights groups argued that Myanmar, to meaningfully comply with the ICJ ruling, needs to not only focus on the immediate issue of police and military violence but also reform the country’s climate of repression towards Rohingya.⁴³⁸ Indeed, conflict-related violence and displacement continued shortly after the court order was issued, with Rohingya and ethnic Rakhine uprooted in Rakhine state in February. Any long-term solution to the Rohingya displacement crisis depends on the ability of the almost 1 million refugees in Bangladesh to safely and voluntarily return to their homes in Myanmar, but there is little evidence at present that these conditions will be met in the near future.

Covid prompts border closure

In mid-April, Myanmar closed its border with Bangladesh in response to the pandemic. Thousands of Rohingya fleeing violence were subsequently believed to be stranded at the border, unable to reunite with their families in Bangladesh.⁴³⁹ While the Myanmar military announced a four-month ceasefire in May in response to the pandemic, Rakhine and Chin states—where the conflict is escalating—were specifically excluded.⁴⁴⁰ Throughout the pandemic, the Burmese military has continued to target civilians in Rakhine state through indiscriminate airstrikes and villages burnt to the ground. A protracted internet blackout, originally imposed in 2019, has meant that many residents have limited awareness of the pandemic or information on how to minimise the spread of the virus.⁴⁴¹

Dangers at sea

Some 2,200 Rohingya have been apprehended by Myanmar authorities between 2015 and 2019 attempting to leave by sea, with those caught frequently prosecuted for violations of Myanmar’s immigration law.⁴⁴² Many Rohingya sea crossings occur as secondary migration from Bangladesh to Malaysia. On 15 November 2019, for instance, around 120 Rohingya refugees were rescued by Bangladeshi coast guards on their way to Malaysia.⁴⁴³ The increasing reluctance of Thailand and Malaysia to allow entry has added to the dangers of those making the journey. As many as 1,400 Rohingya were stranded at sea in the first half of 2020, sometimes for weeks or months, in a state of protracted humanitarian crisis that by July was estimated to have cost at least 130 lives.⁴⁴⁴ The situation echoes the Andaman Sea Crisis in 2015, when as many as 8,000 Rohingya and Bangladeshis were left by their smugglers at sea and refused entry by different countries, with Covid-19 now creating further complications.⁴⁴⁵

Aceh welcomes stranded Rohingya...

A notable exception to the often-unwelcoming attitude of countries to Rohingya boats is the semi-autonomous Indonesian province of Aceh, where a longstanding culture of welcome to refugees has been evidenced in the treatment of recent arrivals. At the end of June 2020, for instance, 99 Rohingya were aided by local fishermen and subsequently received food, clothing and support from the community.⁴⁴⁶ More recently, in early September, local residents again gave their support when almost 300 Rohingya were rescued after a gruelling six months at sea—the largest single arrival since 2015. Having been turned away by both Thailand and Malaysia, those on board had reportedly been held by traffickers seeking to extract more ransom.⁴⁴⁷ In September, Indonesia called on ASEAN to resolve the crisis, and urged Myanmar to take concrete steps to ensure Rohingya could return safely and voluntarily to their country.⁴⁴⁸

...but Malaysia turns a cold shoulder

As of the end of August 2020 there were 101,530 registered Rohingya refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia,⁴⁴⁹ though the true number is likely higher. While the government was vocally supportive of Rohingya as their persecution in Myanmar intensified in 2015,

436 OHCHR (2020) [UN experts concerned at surge in civilian casualties in northwest Myanmar after internet shutdown](#).

437 Radio Free Asia (2020) [Some 70 more Rohingya go on trial for trying to leave Myanmar for Malaysia](#).

438 Singh, P (2020) [Myanmar’s directives not enough to protect Rohingya](#). Human Rights Watch; Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia – Quarter 2 2020](#).

439 France24 (2020) [Bangladesh braces for possible surge in Rohingya arrivals](#).

440 Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia – Quarter 2 2020](#).

441 Amnesty International (2020) [Myanmar: Indiscriminate airstrikes kill civilians as Rakhine conflict worsens](#).

442 Radio Free Asia (2020) [More than 2,200 Rohingya caught trying to leave Myanmar by sea since 2015: Detainee list](#).

443 Siegfried, K. (2019) [The refugee brief – 15 November 2019](#).

444 Amnesty International (2020) [Malaysia: Stop plans to cane Rohingya refugees and release those already imprisoned](#); European Commission (2020) [Rescued Rohingya grateful for local support after 120 days stranded at sea](#).

445 Gleeson, M. (2020) [The Andaman Sea Crisis: Five years on](#), Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law.

446 Walden, M. & Jones, B. (2020) [Why Aceh is a rare place of welcome for Rohingya refugees](#). The Conversation.

447 BBC (2020) [Rohingya crisis: Nearly 300 refugees land in Indonesia after months at sea](#).

448 Septiari, D. (2020) [Indonesia appeals for end to Rohingya crisis](#). Jakarta Post.

449 UNHCR (2020) [Figures at a glance in Malaysia](#).

its stance has since hardened as xenophobia against the community has risen. It has continuously prevented Rohingya arrivals through violent pushbacks of boats, sometimes carrying hundreds of men, women and children: from 1 May to 12 June 2020 alone, Malaysian authorities reportedly blocked at least 22 boats carrying Rohingya.⁴⁵⁰

While Malaysian authorities allowed a boat in early April 2020 with 202 passengers on board to disembark, some 31 Rohingya men on board were subsequently prosecuted for “immigration offenses” and sentenced to seven months in prison, with at least 20 of those convicted also sentenced to lashings.⁴⁵¹ Another boat in Malaysian waters around the same time was forced to return towards Bangladesh where it was rescued by national coast guards in mid-April with 396 survivors, though around 30 others had died during the weeks-long journey.⁴⁵²

Amid border restrictions in response to Covid-19, no other Rohingya were allowed entry over the next two months until a boat with 269 Rohingya on board reached Langkawi island in June after weeks at sea. Malaysian coast guards had reportedly intended to push the boat back, but after some of the passengers jumped into the sea and it became clear the vessel was damaged, they were permitted to land. Those on board were all subsequently detained. The boat is believed to have had 500 passengers when it left Bangladesh, suggesting hundreds died during the journey.⁴⁵³ Despite this, reports emerged suggesting that Malaysian authorities had considered sending these arrivals back to sea on another boat, though these plans were not implemented.⁴⁵⁴ In July, another boat with as many as 300 Rohingya on board was reported to be off the coast of Koh Adang in Thailand.⁴⁵⁵ Human rights groups have called for Malaysia and neighbouring Thailand to urgently amend their current policies of pushback to prevent further disasters, and in particular not to use Covid-19 as an excuse to block arrivals.⁴⁵⁶

...as anti-Rohingya sentiment grows

Malaysia has also implemented a range of hostile measures that have made life for Rohingyas already resident in the country considerably harder. This has attributed to rising anti-Rohingya sentiment that has

been aggravated further by the Covid-19 crisis. Official discrimination, such as the government’s stipulation that the resumption of congregational worship as lockdown lifted would be available only to Malaysian citizens, has been echoed by hate groups who sought to exploit anxieties by disseminating anti-Rohingya material.⁴⁵⁷ A succession of online petitions calling for the forced removal of Rohingya from the country has been launched online, with some attracting thousands of signatories.⁴⁵⁸

Amidst rising xenophobia, authorities also implemented a crackdown on undocumented refugees and migrants, with 586 foreigners—including many Rohingya—detained following a raid on 1 May in Kuala Lumpur. The move was justified by officials as a public health measure to contain the spread of the coronavirus.⁴⁵⁹ Further raids later that month saw more than 1,300 other refugees and migrants, predominantly from Myanmar, Indonesia, India, and Bangladesh, arrested for lacking documentation.⁴⁶⁰ This heavy-handed approach contrasted sharply with the apparent willingness of authorities to work with UNHCR in the early stages of the pandemic to reassure refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers that they could access testing and treatment without fear of arrest.⁴⁶¹ Critics pointed out that, in an increasingly fearful climate, many might now be scared to access testing for the virus, raising the risk that its spread could continue undetected.⁴⁶²

Migrant workers struggle post-lockdown

Covid-19 has deprived millions of migrant workers of employment, with profound implications across Southeast Asia. This includes countries such as **Singapore** with sizeable migrant populations from across the region. The outbreak has served to highlight the longstanding inequalities experienced by the country’s foreign workforce, with hundreds of thousands contained in cramped and unhygienic dormitories where preventative measures like social distancing are almost impossible. While Singapore’s government received praise for its swift response to the pandemic, its migrant population continued to live and work in conditions that enabled the virus to spread.⁴⁶³ By July, some 90 percent

450 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Malaysia/Thailand: Allow Rohingya refugees ashore](#).

451 Amnesty International (2020) [Malaysia: Stop plans to cane Rohingya refugees and release those already imprisoned](#).

452 Ellis-Petersen, H. & Rahman, S. (2020) [Bangladesh rescues hundreds of Rohingya drifting at sea for nearly two months](#). The Guardian.

453 BBC (2020) [Malaysia detains 270 Rohingya refugees who had drifted at sea for weeks](#).

454 Amnesty International (2020) [Malaysia: “Heinous” plan to send Rohingya people back to sea](#).

455 European Commission (2020) [Rescued Rohingya grateful for local support after 120 days stranded at sea](#).

456 Amnesty International (2020) [Covid-19 no excuse to sacrifice Rohingya lives at sea](#)

457 Sukhani, P. (2020) [The shifting politics of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia](#) The Diplomat

458 HRW (2020) [Joint letter re: End violent threats and anti-Rohingya campaign](#)

459 Ahmed, K. (2020) [Malaysia cites Covid-19 for rounding up hundreds of migrants](#) The Guardian

460 UCA News (2020) [Malaysia crackdown raises fears over rights abuses](#); Pinandita, A. (2020) [421 Indonesians arrested in Malaysian immigration raid](#) Jakarta Post

461 UNHCR (2020) [UNHCR-GoM joint action to prevent, manage Covid-19 infections among refugees](#).

462 Fishbein, E. (2020) [Fear and uncertainty for refugees in Malaysia as xenophobia escalates](#). New Humanitarian.

463 Ratcliffe, R. (2020) [“We’re in a prison”: Singapore’s migrant workers suffer as Covid-19 surges back](#). The Guardian.

of the country's cases were concentrated in migrant dormitories⁴⁶⁴—a situation that highlights the importance of integrating migrant populations into national response plans to the pandemic.

Between rocks and hard places...

Many countries in the region are sending countries with a large proportion of their population working abroad. They are now confronted with the stark choice of remaining in their host countries with little or no livelihood opportunities or returning to an uncertain future in their countries of origin. Those who opt to go back typically face extended quarantine, often in insecure and unsanitary settings, and even stigmatisation by their communities. Their difficulties have been compounded by blanket quarantines, forced returns, entry bans, and other heavy-handed responses by some states.⁴⁶⁵

...in the Philippines...

In the Philippines, for example, an estimated 10 million people (a tenth of the population as a whole) are migrant workers overseas, with 1 million Filipinos leaving their home country in search of work every year.⁴⁶⁶ In the wake of Covid-19, tens of thousands have been forced to return after losing their jobs. The government in Manila estimates that by the end of 2020, around 300,000 expatriate workers are likely to have returned as a result of the pandemic.⁴⁶⁷ With many Filipino households dependent on family members working outside the country—remittances account for around 10 percent of national GDP—the economic fallout could prove devastating.⁴⁶⁸

...Nepal...

The same is true in Nepal, where remittances from migrant workers living abroad have played a critical role in the domestic economy. The return of thousands of workers as a result of Covid-19 is likely to have profound and wide-ranging effects. While many Nepali migrants, like other foreign workers, have contended with repressive measures such as detention or mass quarantine in host countries in the Gulf, they have also had to contend with an unwelcoming and unsupportive stance from their own government. Following a blanket ban at the end of March on all entries, including Nepali citizens,⁴⁶⁹ returning migrants have since been required to quarantine in hazardous facilities where the risk of virus transmission is high. The humanitarian crisis facing

returning Nepali migrant workers was especially evident in India, where thousands were stranded as a result of border closures imposed in late March that lasted two months. Besides the loss of their livelihoods, Nepali migrants reported stigma due to widespread fears that they might be carrying Covid-19.⁴⁷⁰ Many also found that the discrimination persisted even once they had crossed back into Nepal, with local communities also viewing returnees as potential vectors of the virus.⁴⁷¹ Another challenge that many returning migrants have faced is the widespread problem of “wage theft”, with employers reportedly exploiting the disruption of the pandemic to withhold earnings from foreign workers forced to return to their country of origin.⁴⁷²

...and Thailand

The more than 4 million migrant workers in Thailand, of whom only 2.8 million are officially registered, face acute challenges in the wake of Covid-19. While some 200,000 are estimated to have left in the days before border closures were imposed,⁴⁷³ the majority remain in the country with little in the way of assistance despite their disproportionate exposure to the economic and health impacts of the pandemic. While the government has rolled out financial support packages for Thai citizens whose income has been affected, many migrant workers are excluded from these benefits.⁴⁷⁴ Though the social security benefits announced in the wake of the lockdown were extended to foreign workers as well as Thais, the requirements—such as having a registered bank account and a six month record of payments to the government fund—mean that in practice millions of the most marginalised migrant workers will be unable to access this support.⁴⁷⁵ In July, as the country began to emerge from restrictions, authorities announced that migrant workers in the construction and food industries would be allowed to return to Thailand provided they underwent a 14 day quarantine on arrival.⁴⁷⁶

One unintended consequence of border closures is an increase in irregular migration and the use of human smugglers to enter Thailand illegally. While some 90,000 migrants returned to Cambodia just before a lockdown was imposed, the lack of livelihood opportunities in their home country and mounting debt has since then pushed many to attempt to return to Thailand in search of work as farm labourers. Around 2 million Cambodians are

464 The Straits Times (2020) [Most migrant workers expected to be cleared on coronavirus by end-July](#).

465 OHCHR (2020) [UN Human Rights Office urges Asia-Pacific States to release detained migrants, suspend forced returns amid Covid-19 crisis](#).

466 ILO (undated) [Labour migration in the Philippines](#).

467 Liao, K. (2020) [Emergency returns: Covid-19 and the repatriation of Filipino migrant workers](#), Centre on Migration, Policy and Society.

468 Manlangit, M. (2020) [The hurting heroes: The Covid-19 crisis and overseas Filipino workers](#), Diplomat.

469 Prasain, N. & Shrestha, P. (2020) [Government bans entry of all passengers, including Nepalis, from midnight](#), Kathmandu Post.

470 Hashim, A. (2020) [The ticking time bomb of Nepal's returning migrant workers](#), Al Jazeera.

471 Annapurna Express (2020) [The sorry state of quarantine facilities](#).

472 Mandal, C. (2020) [Set up a mechanism for ensuring migrant workers wages, labour rights activists say](#), The Kathmandu Post.

473 IOM Thailand (undated) [Labour migration](#); Hall, A. (2020) [Thailand's migrant workers at risk during pandemic](#), Asia Times.

474 Promchertchoo, P. (2020) [Migrant workers left out in Thailand's fight against Covid-19](#), Channel News Asia.

475 Sandford, S. (2020) [Thailand's migrant workers struggle to qualify for aid during pandemic](#), VOA.

476 Bangkok Post (2020) [Migrant workers permitted to return but must undergo 14-day quarantine](#).

thought to be living and working in Thailand, often in poorly paid and exploitative employment.⁴⁷⁷

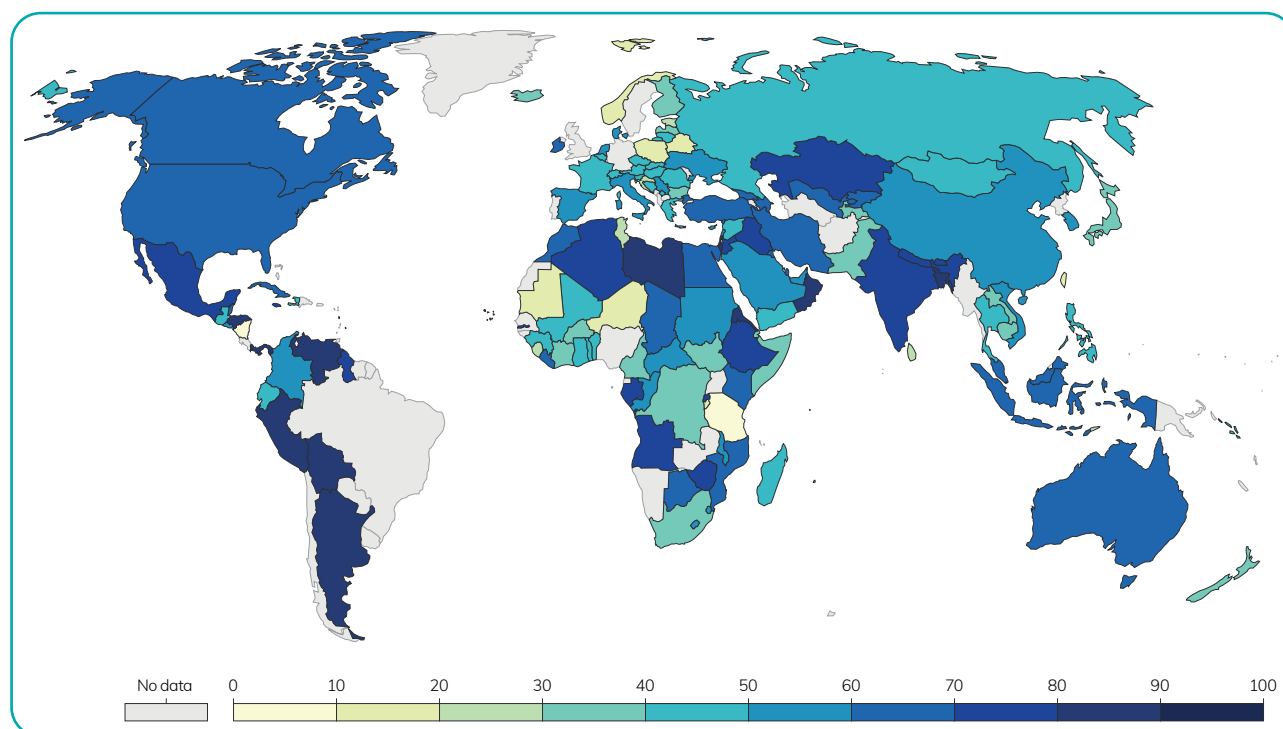
India's reverse migration

For many years, India has steadily urbanised as millions of rural residents have moved to towns and cities, sometimes hundreds or even thousands of miles from their place of birth, to find employment. This process was dramatically reversed when strict lockdown restrictions were suddenly imposed in the country on 24 March 2020. The impact of the lockdown, ranging from job losses to food insecurity, was highlighted by the departure of millions of migrant workers from cities across India back to their home villages, many by foot. This reverse urban-to-rural movement has been described by many commentators as the largest mass migration in India's history since Partition in 1947.⁴⁷⁸ The uncertainty around the actual number of migrants displaced by the crisis is in itself a reflection of their lack of visibility and marginalisation in public life, despite the crucial role they play in sustaining the vitality of India's cities.⁴⁷⁹

India passes controversial nationality law

India's new Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), passed in December 2019, allows fast-track nationality rights for Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jains, Parsis, and Sikhs from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who arrived in India before the end of 2014 to become Indian citizens. The CAA triggered protests across the country and contributed to a wave of anti-Muslim violence in Delhi in February 2020. It has also had especially troubling implications for Bangladeshi migrants in the country. There have been reports of reverse migration of Bangladeshis from India to escape potential persecution under the new legislation.⁴⁸⁰ It also threatens to further erode protections for the country's Rohingya refugees, the large majority of whom are Muslim and who even before the passage of the CAA faced the threat of deportation to Myanmar, despite the dangers there.⁴⁸¹

India implemented one of the most stringent responses to Covid-19



Note: This is a composite measure based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, rescaled to a value from 0 to 100 (100 = strictest). If policies vary at the subnational level, the index is shown as the response level of the strictest sub-region. Source: Blavatnik School of Government / University of Oxford.

<https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/coronavirus-government-response-tracker>

Source: Hale, Webster, Petherick, Phillips, and Kira (2020). Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker – Last updated 17 October, 12:30. (London time). Note: This index simply records the number and strictness of government policies, and should not be interpreted as 'scoring' the appropriateness or effectiveness of a country's response. OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

477 Blomberg, M. (2020) [Closed borders give rise to new wave of trafficking in Cambodia](#), Reuters.

478 Ellis-Petersen, H. & Chaurasia, M. (2020) [India racked by greatest exodus since partition due to coronavirus](#), The Guardian.

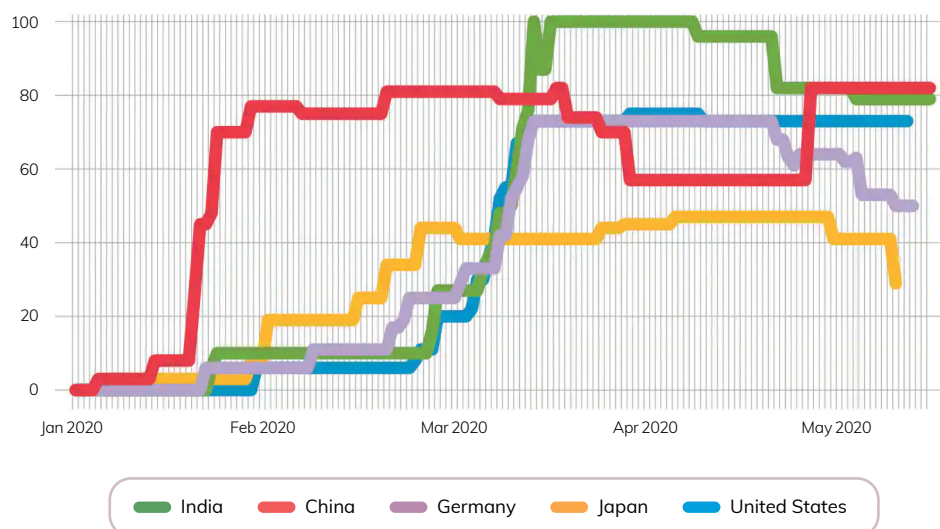
479 Indian Express (2020) [Explained: How many migrant workers displaced? A range of estimates](#).

480 MMC (2020) [Quarterly Mixed Migration Update: Asia – Q1 2020](#).

481 Human Rights Watch (2019) [India: Citizenship Bill discriminates against Muslims](#)

India's lockdown was one of the most stringent globally

Vertical axis: stringency index ranking countries as compiled by Oxford University



Note: Data taken from 31 May 2020. Individual countries' data may be several days older.

Source: Adapted from Hindustan Times - [Migrant crisis may hurt incomes in poorer states](#).

Source: Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker. More at github.com/OxCGRT/covid-policy-tracker or bsg.ox.ac.uk/covidtracker

The long-term implications of this reverse migration, particularly once the pandemic has abated, are unclear. While some research has suggested that a significant proportion of those who made the difficult journey back to their villages—enduring acute hardship, hunger and uncertainty along the way—would not choose to return to the cities they left once the pandemic was over,⁴⁸² a rapid assessment study of more than 4,800 households across the country conducted in June and July found that 29 percent of migrant workers who had left their cities of work had already returned, with another 45 percent intending to do so, driven in part by the absence of economic opportunities in their villages.⁴⁸³

Australia stands firm on asylum

One of the most controversial aspects of Australia's migration policy is its detention of asylum seekers arriving without visas by boat in offshore facilities in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. Beginning in July 2013, this strategy was designed to act as a deterrent and to encourage asylum seekers to return to their countries of origin. Over 3,000 asylum seekers have been transferred to these offshore centres over the last seven years. (More than 700

have since been resettled in the United States and another 1,200 transferred to Australia for medical treatment, where they remain on temporary visas or confined in holding centres.)⁴⁸⁴

This offshoring policy elicited widespread criticism, with activists describing it as not only harsh and dehumanising, but also illegal: under international law, detention of immigrants should be temporary and justifiable, rather than a punishment in its own right.⁴⁸⁵ The Urgent Medical Treatment Bill (also known as the "Medevac Bill"), passed in March 2019 to allow doctors working in offshore facilities to approve the transfer of sick detainees to Australia for treatment, was repealed the following December after significant resistance from politicians who argued that it would undermine national security. The repeal was widely condemned for removing an essential lifeline for asylum seekers in Australia's offshore processing system, many of whom suffered serious health issues: this was reflected in the fact that a total of 12 asylum seekers had died in detention before Medevac was passed.⁴⁸⁶

Within Australia, a "legacy caseload" of some 30,000 asylum seekers continues to suffer the effects of the country's hostile policies, including

482 Srivastava, R. & Nagaraj, A. (2020) [No way back: Indian workers shun city jobs after lockdown ordeal](#). Reuters.

483 The Week (2020) [Two-thirds of migrants have returned to cities or wish to do so: Survey](#).

484 Pearson, E. (2020) [Seven years of suffering for Australia's asylum seekers, refugees](#). Human Rights Watch.

485 Ibid.

486 Walton, K. (2019) ["Dark day": Australia repeals medical evacuation for refugees](#). Al Jazeera.

inadequate procedural safeguards, the withdrawal of free legal assistance and a broader climate of xenophobia.⁴⁸⁷

Incomplete closure

While the notorious detention facilities in PNG and Nauru have been closed, refugees and asylum seekers there—who numbered just over 360 in July 2020—continue to face profound challenges and uncertainty there. In Nauru, the last asylum seeker was released from detention in the centre and all are now living in the community, albeit with few options to access education or employment and unable to leave the 21 square kilometres island except through assisted voluntary return or resettlement. In Papua New Guinea, in August 2019 the government offered to relocate those living on Manus Island to Port Moresby and by March 2020 only four refugees remained on Manus.⁴⁸⁸ However, 52 asylum seekers whom Papuan authorities regarded as not being refugees were arrested and held in the Australian-funded Bomana immigration centre. The deplorable living conditions there, described by one detainee as “designed to torture”,⁴⁸⁹ pressured the majority of those imprisoned there to agree to return to their countries of origin: the last 18 were released in January 2020, reportedly in poor physical and mental health.⁴⁹⁰ The situation of the others resettled in the capital is still precarious: for instance, two violent attacks by armed locals against refugees were reported in February and March 2020.⁴⁹¹

High rate of asylum rejection

The challenges facing asylum seekers in Australia’s unwelcoming policy environment are not confined to sea arrivals. Indeed, in recent years the large majority of asylum seekers in Australia have been arriving by air as a policy of pushbacks and “assisted returns” has curbed the number of sea arrivals. A large number continue to arrive by plane with visas, however, before seeking asylum: between July 2014 and August 2019, 95,943 air arrivals claimed asylum.⁴⁹² Of those whose cases have already been reviewed, more than 84 percent had their claims rejected. Authorities have argued

that the high number of rejections reflects the prevalence of human trafficking in many cases, with people brought in by criminal networks and unscrupulous labour recruitment companies to be exploited as cheap labour.⁴⁹³ However, as the Refugee Council of Australia has previously highlighted, “human trafficking and smuggling thrives on restrictive border and asylum policies”. In other words, the lack of accessible, legitimate protection channels in Australia for those fleeing persecution forces many to pursue irregular routes into the country.⁴⁹⁴

Covid concerns

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought added urgency to the health issues of asylum seekers in Australia. In an open letter to Prime Minister Scott Morrison in March 2020 asylum seekers described themselves as “sitting ducks” for the virus, prompting more than 1,100 doctors to call on the government to urgently release detainees from overcrowded centres into community-managed accommodation to protect them from infection.⁴⁹⁵ In April 2020, a seriously ill refugee in detention in Australia filed a court case seeking his release into community accommodation to prevent him contracting the virus.⁴⁹⁶ However, months later the government had still failed to respond to these calls, with the Australian Human Rights Commission reporting in July that the number of people in Australia’s detention centres had in fact risen since the pandemic was officially declared in March.⁴⁹⁷ Meanwhile, more than 1 million people living in the country on temporary visas, including refugees and asylum seekers, have been excluded from Australia’s national programme of welfare and assistance rolled out in response to the crisis.⁴⁹⁸

487 UNHCR (undated) [Monitoring asylum in Australia](#).

488 Refugee Council in Australia (2020) [Offshore processing statistics](#)

489 Chandler, J. (2019) [“Designed to torture”: asylum seeker chooses Iranian prison over PNG detention centre](#) The Guardian

490 Taylor, J. (2020) [Last asylum seekers held in Papua New Guinea detention centre released](#). The Guardian

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Photo credit: Marie Kanger Born / Shutterstock. Chicago, Illinois, US

Demonstrators at the *Families Belong Together* rally protest the plight of migrant children separated from their families at the border due to recent harsher US immigration rules. Conflicts between federal policies and municipal policies lie at the heart of the Sanctuary City movement involving hundreds of cities and some whole states in the US as well as other municipalities in Europe and other parts of the world



Photo credit: Rob Crandall / Shutterstock. Dubai, United Arab Emirates

South Asian immigrant contract labourers from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan work at the construction site of Burj Khalifa, on Sheikh Zayed Road. Some countries in the Gulf States in particular have a huge proportion of their workforce (sometimes 90 percent) coming from overseas as international regular labour migrants - they often face tough restrictive laws on their freedoms, poor and abusive conditions and with no path to family reunification or citizenship.



Section 2

The migrants' world

Some quantitative and qualitative insights into the migrant and refugee's urban world.

This section explores the urban experiences and urban context of those using irregular pathways in mixed migration flows. It consists of interviews with front line practitioners, as well as eight one-page stories spoken in their own words as the “urban voice” of migrants and refugees from cities around the world. An extensive section with quantitative graphics and text are drawn from MMC’s unique 4Mi primary data-gathering programme. This mix of the lived experiences of migrants and refugees, expert commentary, and statistical findings aims to situate those in mixed flows in the urban context at the heart of this year’s review.

Sarafina:¹

“As soon as you have the money, you leave.”



I have been in Bamako for about 10 or 11 months. I'm from Liberia and came to Mali via Dakar where I stayed for almost a year. Bamako was just a stepping-stone on my way north but I could not continue my journey, so I found myself here. I am doing my best to return to Dakar, but with the coronavirus it is not easy. Right now, I heard everywhere is open but I am waiting a little because I don't have money. I left my home country due to many problems. Sometimes, in your family there are many problems. Sometimes, you don't have money and you see other people leaving. So I decided to search for a place to make myself happy.

I am here with my three children. I gave birth to one here. I organised the travel all by myself, coming to Bamako by bus from Dakar. The travel was not difficult, the only difficulty is the people at the checkpoints who take some money from you. They will ask for 1,000 or 2,000 CFA francs (\$1.8 or \$3.6); it doesn't matter if you have documents or not. Coming from Senegal to here was expensive. I paid for two places, one seat for 25,000 CFA francs (\$45) and another for 30,000 (\$54). I was planning to go elsewhere but it did not work.

When I came here to Bamako, I went to IOM [the UN's migration agency] and I explained that I planned to travel further north, but IOM said that this was difficult, so I did not go. The reason I remained here in Bamako was that I was pregnant when I wanted to return to Dakar. I had to wait to deliver the baby. I have one room with my children at a local shelter and, *Alhamdulillah* [praise be to God], we can live and eat here. We are many different migrants here; some are from Sierra Leone, others from Guinea-Conakry. The ones that came from my country, they left a long time ago. I have my papers, my children's papers, and the things we came with from Dakar.

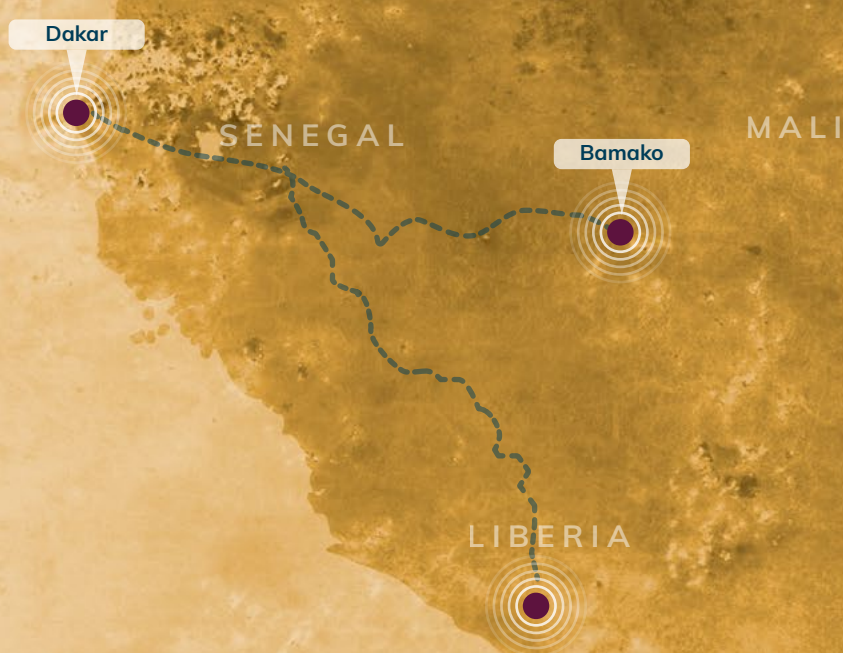
In Bamako, when you have your identity [papers], you can move around. When the police catch you, they want to know who you are, where you come from. When you show your ID, they understand, and they leave you alone. Many foreigners are here, but when they come,

they don't stay in Mali. They only use it as a transit point. When they have enough money, they move on to another country. Many foreigners think that this place is very hot! As soon as you have the money, you leave.

I feel safe in the name of Allah, but I am just tired now of being here. We came here, we heard a lot of stories. The people said: "Don't let the children go out alone because there are some people..." You know everywhere in the world they have bad people and good people. So, we are very careful. But I do not experience discrimination. When I go to the mosque the people there are all God's people, so they are my people too.

Here in Bamako, it is easy and cheap to get a place to sleep. People do things for Allah's sake. It is a more traditional society. In Dakar, getting a place to sleep is very expensive. The people there, they behave like they are European. In Liberia, they behave like they are American, they are proud. Here, when you have problems, there are many organisations to help you. They look into your problem, they take care of you, they feed you and give you some clothes. When I was pregnant, the local shelter helped me, they took me to the hospital, and I received all the care I needed.

I had a problem with a man from Liberia. I met him in Dakar and we came to Bamako together. Here he started to bring problems, problems, problems. But he left and the problems are over now. I am taking care of my children and my baby. I have three girls. The local shelter is helping me to survive. I eat, I have a shelter but I don't have money. I am not working. My children are not going to school since we came to this place. I don't want to stay here. Bamako, *Alhamdulillah*, is good but the sun is too hot. I do not want to go somewhere else anymore, I want to return to Dakar. When I was in Senegal having money was easier. I see people that can help me. Here in Bamako it is difficult. I do not speak Bambara. There is no money. To go to Dakar, I need money and the borders to be open. That is my problem.



1 In this year's MMR, 'Urban Voices' presents seven stories from migrants and refugees living in cities drawn from detailed individual interviews conducted by MMC. They often illustrate the non-linear nature of so many migrant and refugee journeys – characterised by the twists and turns in many migrants' erratic lives. They serve to offer evidence towards a new concept recently introduced in migration studies of **circumstantial migration** to describe how "migration trajectories and experiences unfold in unpredictable ways under the influence of micro-level context and coincidence." [Carling, J. and Haugen (2020) *Circumstantial migration: how Gambian journeys to China enrich migration theory*. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies.] MMC did not record the names of respondents and all names in this 'urban voices' series are aliases.



Asif:

“I feel I am part of the city.”

I've been living here in Turin [Torino] ever since I left Pakistan five years ago. I left because I wanted to study more and also there are no job opportunities in Pakistan and few universities. In Pakistan I completed a three-year diploma in medical engineering. There is a political war [in Pakistan]... There should be job opportunities and a better justice system. It is very corrupt, the police and everyone. I don't think it will change.

I came alone to Italy, by plane. I don't think my family will join me. My documents are not supporting the kind of facility that I can manage with my family here, so I have to struggle a little bit more. If I find another job that is well-paid then I will see if I'm able to bring my family here.

I came here on a study visa, there were no fees for that. I applied directly through the university in Turin and they offered me a place. I'm a student here now on and off, but after three years I haven't finished my degree because I have to work as well and I have health problems, so that's why I applied for refugee status. Now I have documents, and I applied for a resident's permit this month. I applied a little late because the offices were closed because of coronavirus. They did not give me any information about when I will get the permit. They are taking too long to make it, it's very slow.

I applied for a humanitarian visa here. At the police station, you have to say that you are a refugee and you want to seek asylum, and after some time you have to explain how you came here and what was the problem of living in your country. You must explain your situation and they will decide. I have explained my health situation and they considered it.

I am living in a camp, so there are other refugees and migrants and Pakistanis. In the city, I was in like a student hostel. It was a good place, I think, better than elsewhere.

In Turin, there are lots of people [from different places] living here, many people doing business, and refugees, so I don't feel that they think they are rejected by the city. They are well accepted. I feel I am part of the city. I came here as a student and I've never felt I came to a place with racism. The people of Turin are accepting. The students at the university helped us with things like getting houses. In the libraries people like me can get every facility Italians are getting and other students will help you if you have any problems with the education or if you didn't understand the questions.

In the public places I have been I don't feel like an outsider. You can also go to clubs; there are some places where the students get free entry, so I have gone to some clubs. And there are some organisations that help foreigners, finding apartments and so on. If I ask an Italian how to get somewhere, they will show me the way or even go with me so I find it. In Pakistan, in my city, people are good but sometimes they get angry.

The other good things here are the justice system and job opportunities. And the education. Like when I applied as a refugee, they registered me in a school [in Italian language]. I think here the system is really good. As a refugee I think the health system is also very good. If you are a refugee, you don't have to pay anything. I'm in a medical situation where I have to go for treatment every week and all the doctors are very kind. And considering the situation of the health system, and for the Italians who have a job, they have to pay, but refugees don't have to pay.

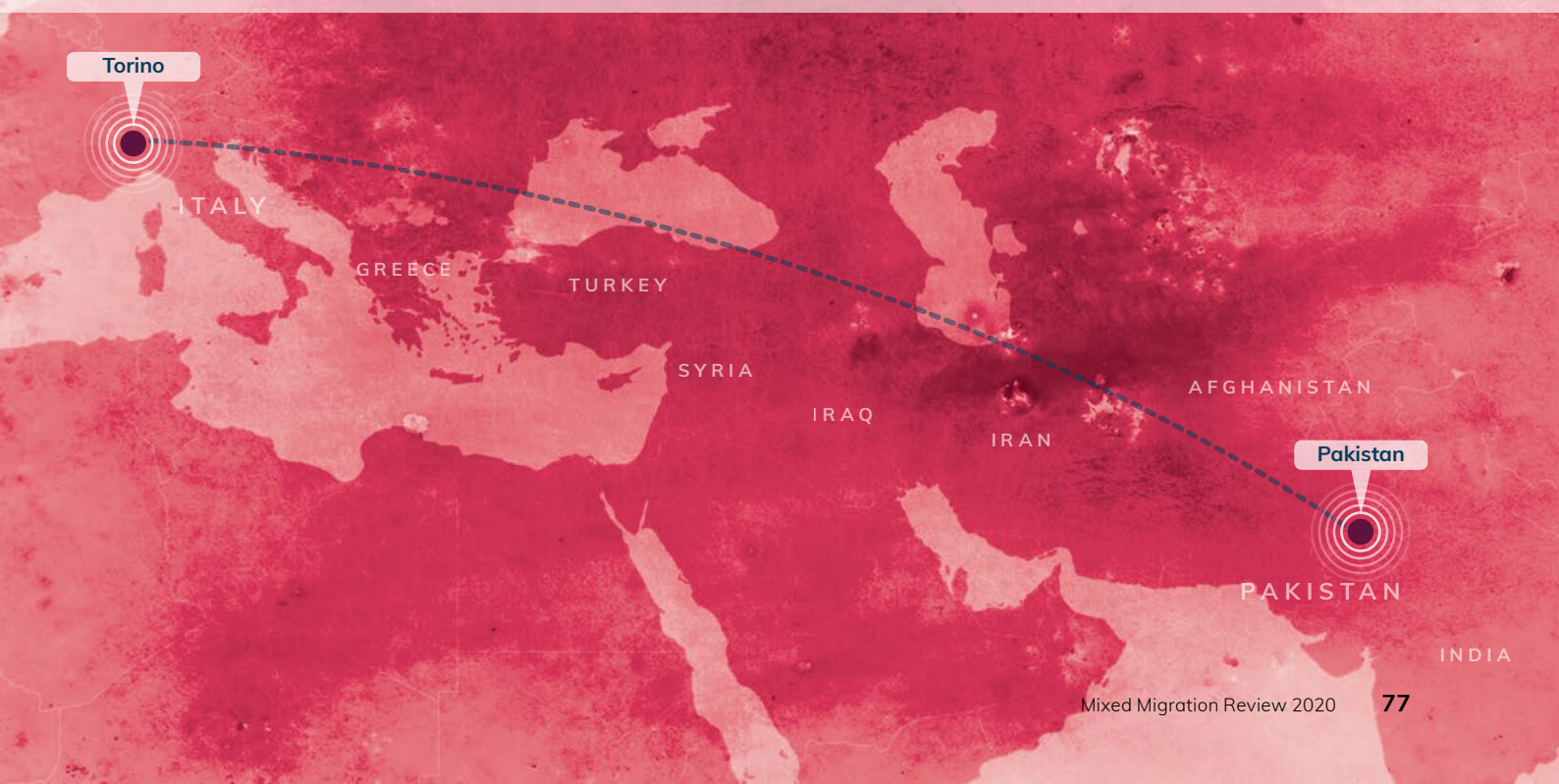
There are a lot of good memories here. Every New Year I watch the fireworks [in the city's main square] and the people are happy. I think the whole city goes there to celebrate the new year. That is a wonderful experience for me.

Personally I don't have any problems with security or my safety. My experience has been really good. But I have a little bit of a problem with the visa and other stuff: you apply for a resident's permit and you have to wait, wait, wait.

I was working, but now I'm not able to work because of my health. I was working as a mechanical designer. I had six months of training and then I got a contract, but then I was not feeling so good because of my health. The doctors said that if you are not well then how can you work here? Economically, now I'm not so good. I get some pocket money, like €90 per month, a travel card and food. That's how I'm surviving here. It's changed a lot because if I'm not able to work, they also take care of me. They help me when I have to go to hospital.

If my health improves maybe I will find another job here in Turin, or in a factory outside the city, and get an apartment and try to survive. Then I will be very, very happy.

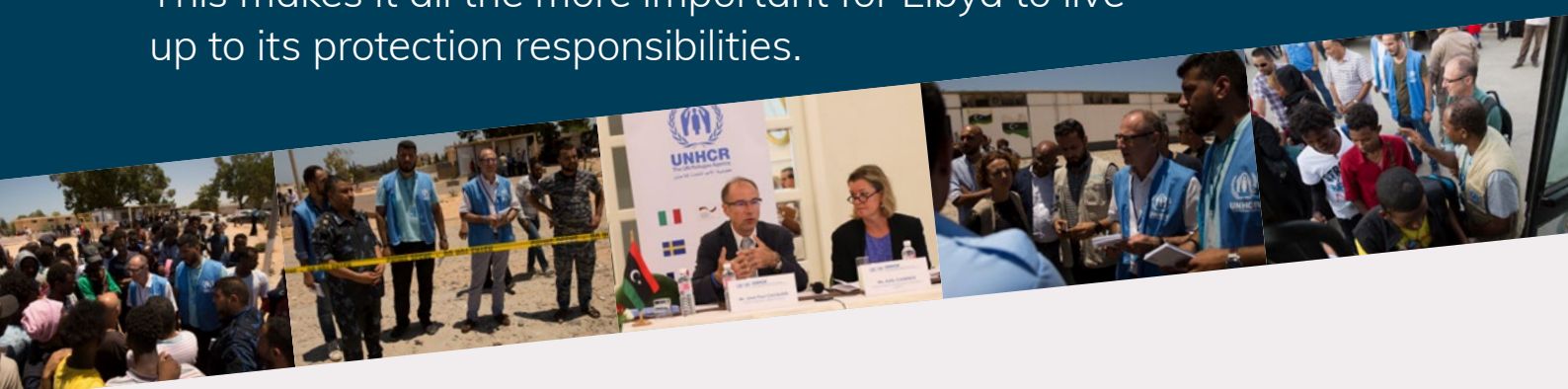
One day maybe I would like to move back to Pakistan because my family is there. But for now, I would like to stay in Turin. If I find another job or work in another city, I would have to go there, but right now I have no plan to leave Turin. Right now, I am a little bit sick so I'm going to the hospital and that's also what is keeping me here.



Interview

The corridor fallacy

The belief that most refugees and migrants in Libya see the country as a stepping-stone to the supposedly greener pastures of Europe is largely false, explains **Jean-Paul Cavalieri**. Urban job opportunities—and the known perils of trying to cross the Mediterranean—have made Libya a destination country of choice for many, even if Covid-19 is changing that dynamic. This makes it all the more important for Libya to live up to its protection responsibilities.



Jean-Paul Cavalieri joined the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in 1991. As well as a stint at the agency's Division of International Protection in its Geneva headquarters, he has worked in Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Russia, Lebanon and Morocco. Since April 2019 he has been head of UNHCR's Libya operation.

About 85 percent of Libyans live in urban areas, including Tripoli, Benghazi, Misrata, and Bayda. Is this also where you are finding most of the asylum seekers, migrants, and other people of concern to UNHCR?

Yes. There are about 48,000 registered asylum seekers and refugees with UNHCR across Libya, and almost all of them are living in urban centres, big or not, half of them in Tripoli and the other half in some of the cities that you mentioned, including Misrata, Zawiya, and Zuwarah to the west, but also Benghazi to the east and other cities. They are primarily in the northern part of the country. That's partly because we have very limited access to southern areas, due to the armed conflict and the threat of terrorism. Libya has always been a crossroad between the [global] north and south, between Europe and Africa. The south of the country is partly occupied by a desert landscape, most of the big

cities are along the Mediterranean coast, where most of the economic activity is taking place.

Despite the war, it appears people are still coming to and moving through Libya. Given that the number of people arriving in Italy is much smaller than before, does this mean there is a kind of traffic jam in Libyan cities of people in limbo?

To clarify the big picture: there is a tendency to see Libya simply as a "migration corridor" between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. There may be such a perception in Europe, but it is not accurate. Libya, first and foremost, was and still is a destination country for foreign workers, for migrants who come here to make a living and to send remittances back to their families. Under the Gaddafi regime, there were up to 2 million migrant workers in Libya. Now the numbers are obviously much less, but relatively stable, according

to the UN's International Organisation for Migration (IOM), with about 654,000 migrant workers in Libya. Most of them come here to work and to stay. And as far as UNHCR is concerned, and until the Covid-19 crisis erupted, we were registering about 1,000 new asylum seekers per month.

I'm assuming asylum seekers don't come to Libya for work but to pass through the country on their way to Europe. Is that correct?

No, asylum seekers and refugees are people who are fleeing persecution or armed conflict in their countries of origin and, for those who opt to reach Libya, the reason is primarily based on job opportunities available in this country. Half of the asylum seekers registered with UNHCR are from the Middle East, countries like Syria, Yemen, places like Palestine, and also Iraq, of course, and the other half are from sub-Saharan Africa: Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia—these are the largest nationalities. When I speak to them, they tell me clearly that they fled their homes because of armed conflict or generalised violence in their countries of origin, but now that they reached Libya, most of them would be happy just to stay and work here. Why? Because it's an oil-rich country that needs manpower to help the economy function. If you drive in Tripoli, you will see dozens, hundreds of sub-Saharan Africans sitting in certain places and squares, waiting for pickup trucks to come and collect them for day labour, to work on construction sites or cleaning garbage in the streets. They also work in the service industry, in the kitchens of restaurants, cooking, washing dishes, etc. Those with qualifications may work as craftsmen, nurses and even doctors in hospitals: the Libyan economy is in demand of manpower, both qualified and unqualified.

So, people don't necessarily envisage undertaking perilous onward movement, putting their life at risk on the sea. They would be very much, for most of them again, happy to just stay and work in Libya. Now, it's becoming complicated because of the conflict, but even then, the trend is for people to try and stay here.

“ There's a perception that all 650,000 foreigners in Libya are waiting for just one thing: crossing to Europe. That's not what we see. The very large majority of migrants want to be able to stay here and work. ”

So, the widely held perception is that every foreigner in Libyan cities is hoping to get to Europe is false?

Exactly, the perception from Europe may be sometimes that all 650,000 foreigners in Libya are waiting for just one thing: crossing to Europe. That's not what we see. The very large majority of migrants want to be able to

stay and work. Even refugees, when they manage to find work, even if they are not formally recognised as refugees by the government (because Libya, like many of the countries in North Africa, is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention), as long as they have work and they are not otherwise harassed or in danger, don't contemplate taking the risk to cross the Med because it's both costly and extremely dangerous. It's important to counter the vision or the misperception of Libya being just a “migration corridor”.

“ Covid-19 and the mitigating measures have dealt a big blow to the economy. Some asylum seekers and refugees have, from one day to another, lost their livelihoods. ”

However, Covid-19 and the mitigating measures, including the curfew and related movement restrictions, have dealt a big blow on the economy. What we see almost every day when we speak to asylum seekers and refugees are people who, from one day to another, have lost all of their means of livelihoods. They used to work on a daily basis, albeit in precarious conditions, and most were able to make a living for themselves and their family. But now they have lost that. These are people who are mainly day labourers. If they don't work today, they don't eat tonight. By losing this livelihood, they become desperate for food. And with time, some people who did not earlier contemplate leaving Libya, are now considering this option. They run the risk of putting themselves into the hands of criminal networks, plus the danger of the sea journey itself, and then if they are intercepted or rescued at sea, they are almost systematically transferred to detention centres and kept in arbitrary detention, without judicial review. Other negative coping mechanisms for the most socially or economically vulnerable migrants and refugees include early marriage, child labour or prostitution. This is why it is important to enhance humanitarian programmes to assist asylum-seekers and refugees in urban areas and support their resilience.

Is there a typical profile, in terms of protection needs, of the migrants and refugees in Libya?

Among the 654,000 foreign workers in Libya are 48,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR, who are in need of international protection. Some asylum seekers come to register with UNHCR soon after having entered the country. Others reside in Libya for years before approaching UNHCR. It depends on the resilience mechanism of each refugee household. Recently, a Syrian refugee family, who had been living and working in Libya for several years, approached UNHCR after their child was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Through UNHCR, they seek medical help and, possibly a durable solution outside Libya if the

Interview

Jean-Paul Cavalieri

treatment is not available here, which UNHCR is looking into. Each individual story is different.

“ The armed conflict and the absence of law and order is creating a vacuum, in which criminal smuggling and trafficking networks proliferate. ”

Libya has become notorious internationally because of the harsh treatment migrants and refugees face. But it seems as if there is a two-tier system, where some foreigners are brutalised and detained but others are free to work and are not affected.

Migrants and asylum-seekers are particularly in danger if they intend or feel compelled to cross the Mediterranean. First of all, because they run the risk of falling into the hands of traffickers who might just kidnap them for ransom. Secondly, in case the smugglers put them in a boat, they run the risk of perishing at sea or they may be intercepted or rescued by the Libyan Coast Guard. They will be consequently transferred to a detention centre, without judicial oversight and at risk of abuse by armed militia managing these centres. Migrants and asylum seekers who stay and work in Libya are generally not prosecuted by the authorities. However, because of the armed conflict and the situation of lawlessness, they are at risk of being robbed or attacked by criminal gangs, who take advantage of the chaos created by the war to commit crimes, against migrants and asylum seekers but also against Libyan nationals and despite the efforts of the government, notably the Ministry of Interior, to try and re-establish law and order.

Libya is at war, and so there must also be a lot of internally displaced people. Is UNHCR working with the internally displaced too?

There are nearly 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Libya, half of whom were displaced since the armed conflict started, with the offensive on Tripoli, which started on April 4, 2019. The dramatic plea of IDPs in Libya is unfortunately sometimes overlooked by the international community. UNHCR is very much engaged together with other UN agencies, in coordination with the national authorities, in providing assistance to the most vulnerable IDP households as well as to the communities hosting them. It is important to recognise that the first service providers for IDPs in Libya are the Libyans themselves, the Libyan families, the Libyan people, who open their houses. UNHCR has about 100 national Libyan staff and 27 percent of them are themselves displaced, with their families, due to the conflict. So that's affecting absolutely everybody, unfortunately. Libya is a rich oil country, but you find people who are at the bottom of the social ladder,

and these are people who definitely need UNHCR's assistance, who need the international community's assistance. The war has affected employment, trade, and almost cut off oil exports and revenues. So, you find people in very dire circumstances among the IDPs.

For those who want to transit Libya to go to Europe, as the conditions in Libya are known to be so precarious and abusive, why aren't other routes being used?

It's a very good question and that's one that we have to keep asking ourselves. I may give you some elements of answers, but we should keep revisiting them month after month, as the situation is evolving. Part of the answer has to do with the armed conflict. Because of the armed conflict, the borders in the south are not properly managed. The armed conflict and the absence of law and order is also creating a vacuum, in which criminal smuggling and trafficking networks proliferate. These are criminal business models, which compete against one another, offering their "services" to potential "clients".

“ Migrants and refugees who are intercepted or rescued at sea should not be returned to Libya. Libya is not a safe port of disembarkation. ”

If we compare Tripoli and other Libyan cities with cities elsewhere in the world, particularly the Arab world, what kind of facilities would a migrant or asylum seeker have access to? Do they have access to normal city services, health, education, protection, legal protection, etc.?

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers encounter challenges in terms of access to essential services, partly due to the armed conflict, but also because of their irregular status. The majority of refugee children have access to school. But access often depends upon the origin of refugees. Refugees from the Middle East have easier access to schools, largely because of being Arabic speakers. In some situations, school directors are more open to foreigners, while in others they insist that correct residency documentation is produced. So it is important to conduct awareness to the basic right of children to education, which we do, in partnership with our sister agency UNICEF.

For hospitals, I would say it's the same. There are public hospitals which insist on legal residency documentation as a pre-condition for admission, while others are more open. In case of non-admission, we may have no choice but to refer people to a private clinic and cover the cost of secondary medical care. One should also realise that social infrastructure in many cities in Libya

is overstretched by the influx of displaced Libyans. So, it is important for UNHCR to work with the national and local authorities, and support the capacity of public hospitals and schools, with a view to promoting an inclusive approach.

Of the 654,000 migrants, are most of them irregular or do a large proportion of those have papers that permit them to work?

The very large majority are working here in an irregular situation. They are tolerated, but because of the absence of proper residency permits, they remain vulnerable to exploitation by their employers. Libya concluded labour migration agreements with Niger and with Chad in 2019, which is positive, but does not cover all the nationalities that are represented in Libya among migrants who effectively work in this country and are part of the economy. To the extent that these people, be they migrants or refugees, are present and work in Libya, it is in the interest of the Libyan authorities to regularise this situation. It is a matter of national security: the Libyan authorities should know how many foreigners are in Libya, who they are and where they are located, without depending upon IOM or UNHCR to provide statistics. It is also a matter of well-managed economy, to avoid tax evasion by employers. And of course, it is a matter of legal protection for those migrants and refugees who provide their workforce and who help the economy function.

“ Refugees should not be detained for seeking international protection. ”

Will Libyan cities in the foreseeable future provide a good location for migrants to live and work and be well integrated, part of a multi-national community? Or are there powerful forces that, apart from the war, mitigate against Libya being a good country for integrated migration?

Libya is not a country of asylum, because of the armed conflict and because of the systematic arbitrary detention practice upon disembarkation. That is why UNHCR's public stand is that people, be they migrants or refugees, who are intercepted or rescued at sea, should not be returned to Libya. Libya is not a safe port of disembarkation. A number of things need to happen. First of all, the war needs to end. And then Libya needs to establish a proper judicial review mechanism to oversee detention, which is now taking place in an arbitrary manner. Of course, as far as refugees are concerned, they should not be in detention in the first place. Refugees should not be detained for seeking international protection. The other thing that needs to happen relates to labour migration. Libya, which relies so heavily on a foreign labour force for large portions

of its economy, needs to take into consideration the situation of hundreds of thousands of people in the country who are effectively employed and needed for the economy. That's where I think the UN can add value in helping the Libyan authorities come up with a proper legal framework.

“ The view that the global South is unable to provide protection is factually incorrect and intellectually arrogant. ”

Finally, I think it is important for Europeans to resist the view, which sometimes I hear from Western journalists, that the global South is not able to provide protection, which is factually incorrect and, arguably, intellectually arrogant. Countries in the MENA region are hosting the bulk of refugees from that region, but also refugees from other regions, and they have amply demonstrated that they are able to provide protection, with of course differences from country to country. We are there in Libya, but I think North Africa has to be part of the solution. If asylum is a reality in the southern part of sub-Saharan Africa, then I think it is the role of the international community to support North African countries to develop protection space. European countries can help to show solidarity, also by providing more resettlement opportunities for durable solutions for vulnerable refugees on this side of the Mediterranean. This is in the spirit of the Global Compact for Refugees, which calls for a fairer sharing of responsibilities around the world.

Azara: “I would like to go back.”



I have lived in Kuala Lumpur for one-and-a-half years. I came here from Rakhine state in Myanmar to reunite with my husband who had come here earlier. We had a baby a year ago.

I set off on my own, but on the way here I saw some people from my village who were also coming to Malaysia, so we travelled together. First, we went to Thailand by boat, then from Thailand we went to Malaysia, and I came to Kuala Lumpur by bus.

We used smugglers to get here. The journey was very difficult. They asked us for 7,000 Malaysia ringgits (\$1,700) per person before the journey. On the way, we were kept at a camp where the smugglers called our family members back home and asked for money. Everyone was in the same situation.

When I first arrived in Kuala Lumpur, I was very scared. There were a lot of new people in this new place. But the longer I stay, the less fear. I see Kuala Lumpur as my second home because it is better than my home country. I can live here more freely. I can eat whatever I want to eat, I can take care of my baby, there no medical barriers, I can go to clinics if I want. Kuala Lumpur is also a nice place with a city lifestyle, there are many items for shopping. In Rakhine, Rohingya are persecuted, they are facing harassment and are unsafe.

Rohingya people live in many different parts of Kuala Lumpur. In the place where we are living, there are a lot of Rohingya around. It is not in the city centre, but that is only one bus trip away. There are markets around our place, but I never went to any shopping malls here.

We rent a two-room apartment here. Because it is very expensive, my family share the flat with another family. At the moment, we did not see any one catching Covid-19 in our place yet. I got tested for Covid-19 and it was negative.

I haven't experienced any discrimination here. If I go to clinics to get checked up, I will have an interpreter. There is no discrimination in the markets as well. But I heard that since Covid-19, there are hate speeches against us, asking us to go home because they hate Rohingya.

I myself don't work. I depend on my husband. He works in the construction sector. Normally he gets paid monthly, but sometimes his pay is delayed for two months. With the Covid-19 pandemic, his boss asked him not to come to work again, so he moved to other construction sites to look for work, without much success. We haven't paid our rent for so many months. If it continues, the landlord will drive us out. We also cannot send any money back home. I know a lot of people are in our situation. Since the start of Covid-19, I received some food packages from many NGOs, but they are not enough for my whole family. Sometimes we need milk powder for the baby. My baby cries a lot.

We did not get support from other community members. They all have their own family and they have to care about their own family. Other migrant communities are living separately from Rohingya people here.

I don't have any [residency] document here. I applied for the UNHCR asylum process, but it did not start yet. I know two people who got arrested. They are now still in detention centres. My husband is very scared of being arrested and he is not going out, even for work. He also does not have any documentation, like work permit or residence permit. There are policemen everywhere in the markets and supermarkets.

We have some friends and relatives from Rakhine state who want to move here as well. Previously, I wanted to bring my family to come here, because at that time, nothing happened to us. But now I am not willing to bring them here anymore since many local people are not happy with us. The smuggling costs are higher too.

I have two dreams: First, I want my children to get education. Refugee children in Malaysia cannot go to the government's schools, they can only study in community schools with not good education. Second, I hope there would be no more arrests, so that people can live freely here.

We have no intention of moving to another place. My husband speaks a bit of Malay so we may just stay here. I sometimes dream of going back to Rakhine state when the situation gets better. Only if there is no more killing, no persecution, no displacement, and only if I could live like other ethnic groups in Myanmar, I would like to go back.

I would like to thank Malaysian government who hosts us here, where we can live better than Rakhine state. I just wish there would be no arrests and that my children could get a good education here.



Jean-Baptiste: “I depend on myself.”



The main reason we left Congo was the war. When rebels tried to capture Goma, the city where I was born and raised and lived with my parents and siblings, we spent two weeks inside our houses. A lot of our friends died. There was a lot of looting, every day people come to your house. If you had no money, they would kill you. The war also meant that we could not get jobs. I finished my studies, but it was difficult to get a job. I thought Nairobi would be a better place for work and also there is more security. I love Goma so much. If the war would stop, security improved, and job opportunities came up, I would go back.

I travelled alone and arrived in Nairobi April 2019. I used a temporary Congolese passport to travel via Rwanda and Uganda but couldn't use it to enter Kenya. I contacted some Kenyan friends who linked me to a smuggler in Kenya. This way, I was able to enter the country. I also did not have the \$50 that was required as visa payment for Congolese nationals. I consider myself very lucky because I had no issues crossing the borders. A lot of people complain they have had difficulties. Throughout my journey, I used buses. It was quite expensive because I spent about \$80 for the trip. I didn't have enough money for everything so I prioritised paying the transport, so I could not afford the food I wanted.

Initially I stayed with a friend and later managed to get my own place. My family later joined me the same year and stayed at my house, but I later moved elsewhere within the same neighbourhood.

When I first got here, it was really hard because I didn't have documents and the police would ask me for money. Several times, I was locked up in jail. I did get asylum documents later. The process is difficult and took quite some time but eventually we got our papers. I felt very bad during the process to the point that I wanted to return home, it took so long. Unfortunately I was robbed some time back, so I need to get them replaced.

I depend on myself. I have never received any assistance from anyone or group. I am employed at a church where I play the piano thrice a week. Leaving from home to work is expensive; I spend close to 200 Kenyan shillings (almost \$2) on transport. When I'm not working there, I teach people the piano where I stay, or I go to where they are. In the future,

I would like to establish a music school and teach our traditional music because Kenyans love Congolese music. From the earnings I get, I am able to support my family. My parents also work when they get some opportunities here and there.

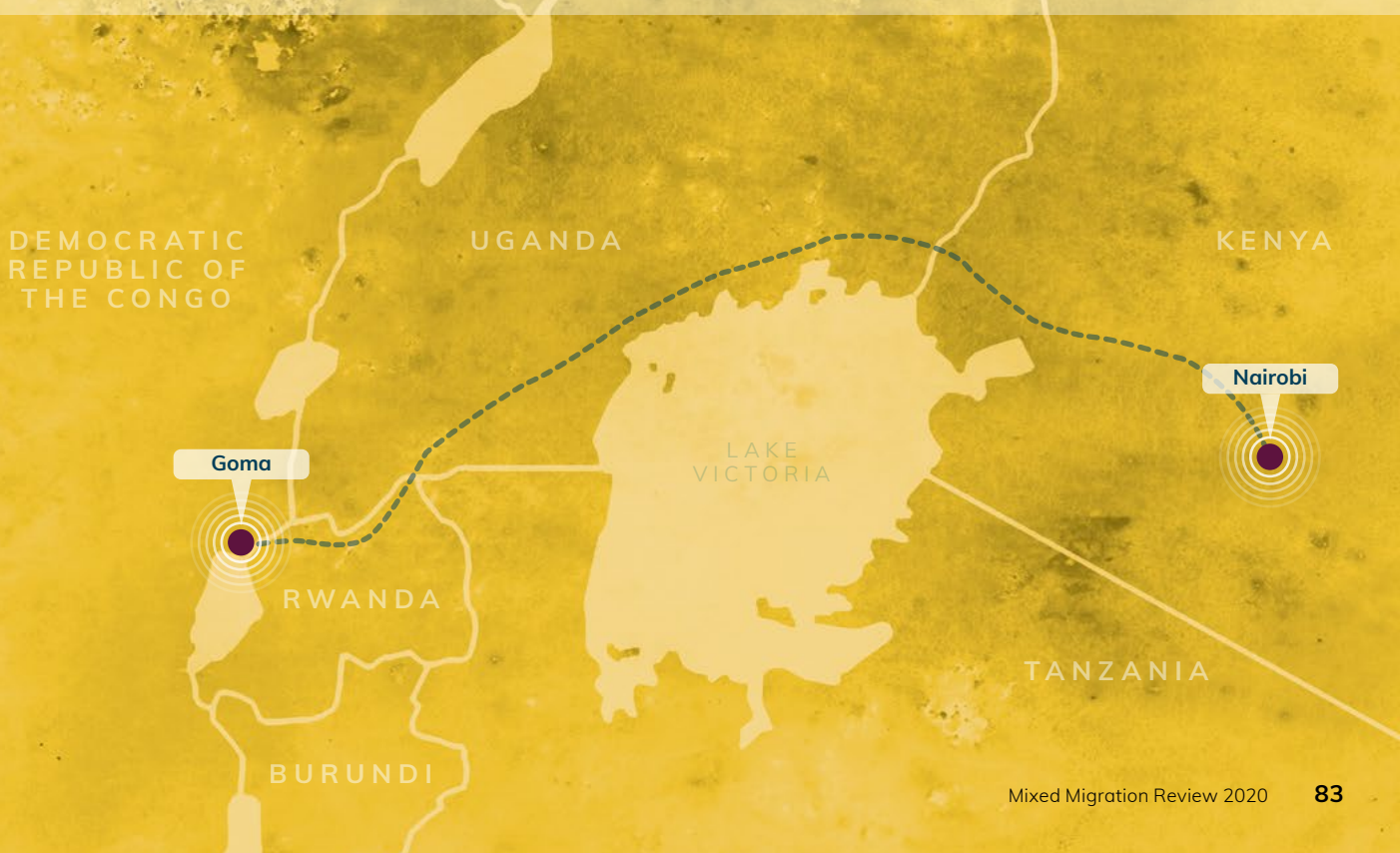
Kenyans are welcoming of foreigners in general. You even see Congolese-Kenyan couples. I have very many Kenyan friends among the people I teach music to. Many Kenyans have been very accepting of the Congolese community here, but some are not, especially when they learn about one's status, and also when it comes to work. So, I usually don't talk about my status.

When I was learning English at an institution some days back, the people there were talking badly about refugees. I felt discriminated because they didn't seem to understand why I left my home. Even the time we were applying for asylum, I felt discriminated because of the nature of the process. It took so long. Some Kenyans have openly told me I am not like other Congolese, especially the Banyamulenge because they are proud, and that I am much nicer. So it is possible other foreigners are being treated differently.

I feel Nairobi is a safe place especially compared to Goma. There you cannot be outside past 7 pm. Here, you can work until midnight. I think all these issues in Nairobi (theft, robbery, break-ins, etc) are common to any place.

The money is very good here compared to Goma. It is also much easier to find a job, although work permits are hard to get. But once you have one, you can get a good job. The living conditions compared to Goma are also much better. Although we could get food while in Goma, it is much easier to access here. Security is better here as well. I think education in Kenya and Nairobi is much better than in Congo so it would be a great advantage to my siblings.

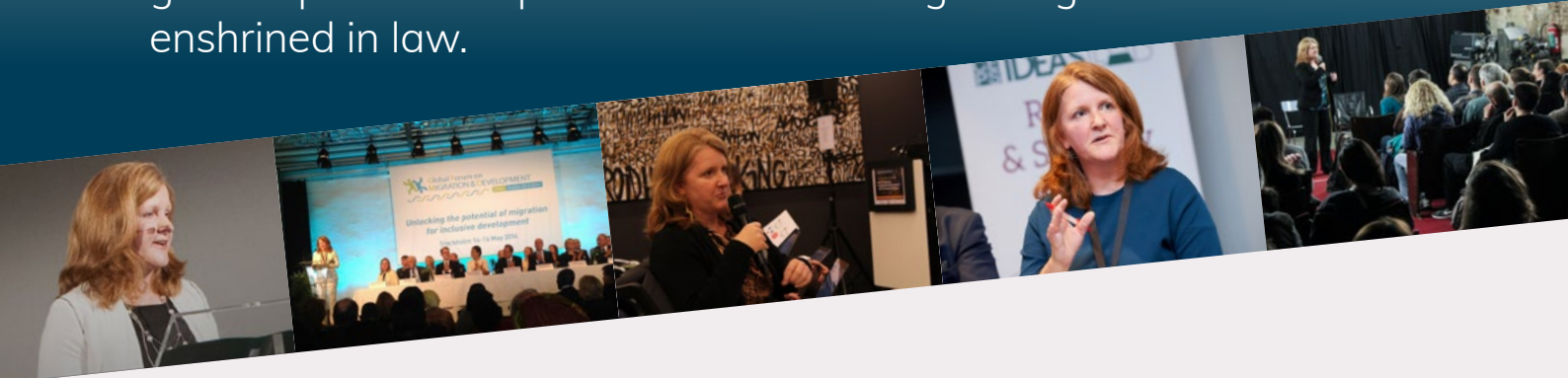
The only reason my family and I are still here is because we are waiting for an opportunity to go to Canada. I believe Canada has good schools and that's why I really want to go there. I'm just waiting for an opportunity to go and pursue my music career.



Interview

Rights without papers

That regularising undocumented migrants has begun to shed its taboo status as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and is now being openly discussed in several European countries is a development welcomed by **Michele LeVoy**, who hopes to see greater practical implementation of a range of rights that are enshrined in law.



Michele LeVoy is the director of the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), a network of nearly 170 organisations defending the human rights of undocumented migrants. She serves on several boards and advisory committees in the areas of migration and social policy at the EU and global levels.

How many undocumented migrants are there around the world?

It's very difficult to give a reliable estimate on the number of undocumented worldwide. The UN Office for Drugs and Crime suggested in 2010 that there could be 50 million undocumented migrants globally, but this is still an estimate.¹ In the United States there are nearly 11 million undocumented migrants while in Europe figures from a project from around ten years ago, the Clandestino project, suggested there could be up to 4 million undocumented.² However, we do not have any newer robust and credible estimates for Europe.

To what extent do undocumented migrants and asylum seekers end up in urban centres and major cities in destination countries?

Many undocumented migrants end up in the larger urban centres, often in capital cities and the largest

cities of destination countries. This is the same outside of Europe and in destination countries of the global north and global south; big cities are usually where they are drawn to.

How important are diaspora or existing migrant communities in cities to newly arrived undocumented migrants?

Existing communities play a critical role and are important in the decision-making processes of those in mixed migration including those who are undocumented. Migrant communities offer all kinds of support, advice and financing that facilitates others from their communities to move.

In the PICUM 2016-2020 strategic plan, there's no mention of cities, municipal leaders, or mayors in terms of your advocacy work or partnerships. Is there a reason for this? Do you not see these groups as key

¹ UNODC (2010) [The Globalization of Crime - A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment](#).
² European Commission (2009) [Clandestino Project Final Report](#).

players in the implementation of right services and assistance to undocumented migrants?

Yes, they are very key players for us. When we wrote our strategic plan in 2015, we hadn't developed this aspect of our work as much as we have in recent years. We've especially been more proactive about our work on cities in the past four years. During this time period we've been part of the City Initiative on Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe (C-MISE)³ and we also compiled a report called Cities of Rights, a couple of years ago. It's clear that when we work on the issue of undocumented migrants and human rights, there are so many different levels that we have to work on. Obviously, if you have a national level law change on access to healthcare, that can really pave the way for the undocumented to be able to get access. But the implementation on the ground still needs to be clear, and the city level is crucial in this regard. Not one action alone really gives the key impact, not one in and of itself. It has to be multi-level work.

“ We are working to ensure that now that we have this EU Victims of Crime directive that it can translate into gains on the national and local levels. ”

Can you give us an example of something you are working on now?

Yes, for example, the new victims of crime strategy that the European Commission launched in June 2020.⁴ We've been working with the European Commission's Directorate General for Justice over many years to ensure the application of the Victims of Crime Directive which was adopted in 2012 and which came into force in 2015.⁵ Article One of this directive states that the rights in the directive apply to all victims of crime in a non-discriminatory manner, including with respect to their residence status. This means that it is applicable to undocumented migrants. So that meant a huge opening for us because that means undocumented migrants should be able, as victims of crime, to report a crime, to get access to services designated for victims of crime, etc. But there was no other mention in the directive that specifically indicated undocumented migrants except Article One which referred to residence status. So we've been trying to do work over the years to ensure that now that we have this EU directive and this reference that it can translate to gains on the national and local levels.

You promote greater recognition and realisation of the rights of all people, regardless of their migration or residence status, or of whether they claim or are recognised as beneficiaries of international protection. But isn't that the point? Certain rights come with status so surely irregularity cannot bestow the same rights as regularity?

The right to vote is attached to citizenship, but the right to the highest attainable level of physical and mental health does not, nor does the right to education, or to fair working conditions, meaning being paid the right wages, being able to claim your rights in a labour court. You have all of those rights even if you don't have regular migration status.

Concerning the human rights of undocumented migrants, there is actually a large body of references from the UN level, from various committees that oversee the various human rights conventions, as well as the special procedures mechanisms and International Labour Organization conventions, that have established that there are now inherent human rights regardless of resident status. The increasing recognition by these UN bodies and special procedures has been a development in the past 20 years.

It is also the case that the majority of undocumented migrants are within the world of work. You have to work in order to survive if you're undocumented, or you have to receive support from someone else in your family or others who are working. You cannot claim any welfare benefits if you're undocumented. We've only come across extremely limited examples where very destitute undocumented people may get some form of assistance from the city level, but this is extremely rare, and it may only be in cases of families with children. The majority of people who are undocumented are working, and in some cases they are also paying taxes and social security contributions. And on that point, there are other taxes as well, besides employment taxes. We all pay taxes on goods and services, and all undocumented people, as individuals, pay these as well.

Do you mean that because taxes are often paid directly by the employers—and therefore indirectly by undocumented workers—that to some extent the state turns a blind eye to who those taxes are coming from?

In the case of income tax yes, I think there's probably a combination of blind eye as it's in the state's interests, and also not all undocumented workers are able to pay these taxes. The majority of the undocumented in Europe have to work informally and undeclared.

3 Compas (undated web portal) [City Initiative on Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe \(C-MISE\)](#).

4 European Commission (2020) [EU Strategy on victims' rights \(2020-2025\)](#).

5 European Union (2012) [Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA](#).

Concerning the human rights of undocumented migrants, there is a large body of references from the UN level from various committees that oversee the various human rights conventions, as well as the special procedures mechanisms and ILO conventions, that have now established that there are inherent human rights regardless of residence status. The increasing recognition by these UN bodies and special procedures has been a development, I would say, in the past 20 years.

“ It’s in the interest of the community to enable people to report crime irrespective of migration status. It’s not in the public’s interest to have people who can’t report crime. ”

What’s your view on “sanctuary cities” around the world? As a movement, are they growing, and are they a good response to national immigration policies which may be exclusionary, especially to undocumented foreigners?

The sanctuary city movement is a very interesting movement to look at, because it builds on decades of cities being at the forefront of integration issues and trying to find solutions for people to be able to have housing or access to services or be able to exist as an individual without being afraid of immigration control.

In North America the sanctuary city movement has roughly 40 years of experience with examples such as New York City and San Francisco, which was one of the forerunners of the movement. In the European context, it’s kind of hard to talk about a sanctuary city movement, because there isn’t the same degree of openness in addressing the issue. In Europe it has been much more recently that cities have started to feel slightly more confident about addressing the situation of their undocumented residents and exchanging with other cities on this issue. We’ve seen this through participation in the C-MISE project in the past couple of years. Looking at the 11 cities or so that participated on a more or less regular basis throughout this project, you could see different levels of how they, as cities, responded to the undocumented.

Cities in their responses to the undocumented are really characterised by values and principles. There are many varying examples from individual cities, but it seems that it could have also been linked to how the leadership at the city level was seeing the issue.

Can you give an example of an approach used at the city level?

There are many, but Barcelona has had a very well-known international campaign, the anti-rumours campaign, that really sees its policies as making sure that individuals in the cities can feel safe, that they trust their neighbours, that there’s this whole degree of social cohesion, and so that extends beyond immigration status in the city-level policies. What’s been the driving force for a lot of these cities, is how do they see their policies in general, and how do they make sure that that translates to people who might have vulnerabilities because of migration status.

Would you say that the city-level moral imperative to protect undocumented migrants trumps national immigration policies?

Cities are concerned with things that are really close to them, like how many children are able to go to school. If children in their city can’t go to school, why can’t they? How can they find a solution for that? How many children in the city are actually undocumented? City officials may generally feel that it is a big challenge not knowing how many children could be undocumented, because they also have these obligations to provide for children, because of children’s rights. Cities’ concerns are most likely around issues which everyone is concerned about: healthcare, housing, social support. For example, it’s in the interest of the community to enable people to report crime irrespective of migration status. It’s not in the public’s interest to have people who can’t report crime.

“ Fighting irregular migration has been one of the core elements of the EU’s common asylum and migration policy since 1999. ”

PICUM states that, “Mobility is a cornerstone of the European Union.” We know that. Yet you also state that, “the European Union and its member states are steadfastly pursuing further criminalisation of migration, border control and cooperation with other countries to prevent migration and facilitate deportations.” How do you account for this apparent contradiction?

It’s a good question. The EU does have fundamental rights as one of its core values. So in theory the EU migration policy rests on this, but at the same time, the policy really is to encourage regular migration. Fighting irregular migration has been one of the core elements of the EU’s common asylum and migration policy since 1999, when it was first adopted. So, since the beginning of the EU’s common policy in these areas,

a core tenet has been to fight migration that is in a sense deemed “unwanted”. So hence there has been an increase in border controls and enforcement as well as cracking down on people who assist the undocumented to reside in or to enter the EU. In the past five years there’s been an increase in individuals, volunteers, organisations who’ve all been either arrested or harassed or condemned in courts for assisting undocumented migrants.

“ In the past five years there’s been an increase in individuals, volunteers, organisations who’ve all been either arrested or harassed or condemned in courts for assisting undocumented migrants.”

What you call the “criminalisation of solidarity”?

Yes. And it’s been a reality for the past 20 years, so it’s not new. What’s new on the issue of criminalisation of solidarity is the numbers. There have been many cases in the past five years of harassment as well as prosecutions against those assisting undocumented migrants. This is due to the fact that there were major arrivals in 2015 and 2016, and not everyone who arrived received status or were returned. So there was a larger irregular population in a sense, that was increasing quite rapidly, coupled with an increase from the EU in enforcement of borders and related mechanisms.

EU and member-state policies concerning the Eastern Mediterranean route and the Central Mediterranean route have involved implementing policies, or co-opting or cajoling foreign governments into preventing undocumented migrants and asylum seekers reaching European shores and European cities. Looking at the numbers of new arrivals in Europe in 2019, one might think they have succeeded, that their policies have achieved their aims. Do you agree?

Usually when the numbers are lower, it just means that the routes are elsewhere. So if people are unable to arrive in Europe, then they’re most likely stuck in the border countries next to Europe. We don’t really know with North Africa, and specific countries like Libya, and other countries that are bordering the EU, how many undocumented are actually there.

Also, the numbers that are provided by Eurostat focus on irregular entry. Yet the majority of people become undocumented after they enter regularly. This was one of the key findings of the Clandestino project. On the one hand there is the deployment of Frontex operations

and the increase in their budgets, and yet the numbers arriving in Europe through irregular entry are extremely small, but they’re the visually powerful ones that the media pick up on.

What do you think the impact of Covid-19 and our response to it has been on undocumented migrants, and are they different from documented migrants?

We’ve been gathering information on states’ responses to undocumented migrants in the past two months, and we’ve grouped them together in a couple of different categories. On the one hand some EU member states have released migrants from detention, because of health reasons. But it also should be noted that just detaining someone when there is no prospect of removal, or just because they are undocumented, is unlawful in international human rights law and according to jurisprudence from the European Court of Justice. So with all these lockdowns, if countries were not actually undertaking removals, then detention should have been avoided. During this Covid-19 lockdown period, the reasons why states were releasing migrants most likely were multiple, but there were states such as Spain, Belgium and the UK that released several hundred migrants from detention; that was an interesting development.

“ Detaining someone when there is no prospect of removal, or just because they are undocumented, is unlawful in international human rights law.”

What happened once they were released varied. In Spain, many of the migrants were put into housing by some NGOs working closely with the government, and the process was smoother there than in other countries in terms of transitioning from the closed detention centres to more suitable accommodation. In Belgium and the UK, civil society organisations noted that people were made destitute, and there was no transition for them from closed detention centres to accommodation. There were also a number of countries that temporarily suspended deportations or forced returns, as well as several countries that automatically extended residence permits during the lockdown period.

Then there were countries that were looking at regularisations. Regularisation itself is also a big issue now. For many years it has seemed to be somewhat taboo on the EU level. When France held the presidency of the EU in 2008, it actually proposed banning large-scale regularisation programs. The agreement that they came up with in the end was that the governments that opt for regularisations do so case-by-case with specific criteria. But from 2008 onwards, regularisation was seen in a very

negative light from the EU. And now in May, Italy adopted this huge regularisation ordinance as part of its stimulus package to reform the economy. It is estimated that potentially 200,000 domestic workers, carers, and agricultural workers could benefit from this regularisation. It's still with criteria, with strict deadlines and potentially excluding many workers, and has been criticised for being employer-driven and not addressing structural reasons for exploitation, but it still is a major regularisation in 2020. There have been other similar calls for regularisation made by MPs in France; from a large civil society coalition in Spain; and from the city level, including Mons in Belgium and Barcelona in Spain.

In the UK, there was also a campaign from a number of civil society organisations calling for regularisation. And IOM and UNHCR have called on the EU to recognise that forced return is not the only option, and the EU should look at regular migration pathways and also regularisation as a possibility. All of this has been in the past two months, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

be hopeful that the European Commission would acknowledge these developments and not shy away from recognising them.

A lot of these measures are imperfect, but they're starting points. We definitely have to recognise all of these initiatives and see what can be learned from them. The release from detention could be initially seen as excellent news, but still the EU legislation, the Returns Directive, allows children to be detained, for example. So while it might be really promising that hundreds of people have been released in a number of member states, the EU legislation and the member states legislation then, as being transposed from that, still allows this reality. So there are definitely many, many different areas to focus on, but all of them have a potential way of looking at a more progressive agenda. There's not a lack of initiatives, there's a lack of will sometimes to actually try them out.

“ **There's not a lack of initiatives, there's a lack of will sometimes to try them out.** ”

What do you see as the post-Covid-19 era in terms of mixed migration as well as perceptions and attitudes to undocumented migrants?

What's next as we go into recovery and de-confinement, and how does this bode now for the coming rest of the year, the year after? There probably won't be a vaccine available for at least another year or so, and we'll all have to live with this virus for a long time. So it also begs the question about detention, enclosed settings, when this virus will continue to be present. The countries that removed migrants from detention, will they continue to look at this as a possibility? When you look at removing people from detention, you really have to look at alternatives to detention. And there are models that have been tried out on the national level in the past couple of years that are community-based placements, so individuals can be removed from detention or not placed in detention and then be living in the community working with a social worker, having a case-management type approach.⁶

So, it's these kinds of things that we have to look at going forward, how many of these other types of approaches can be developed and tried going forward. Perhaps these couple of months of looking at different options, including regularisation, they can be an impetus for states going forward. We would definitely

6 Ohtani, E. (2018) [Alternatives to detention from theory to practice](#). European Programme for Integration and Migration.



Daniela:

“Migration is very hard.”

When armed youths entered the university, we decided it was time to leave Venezuela. My daughter called me from class as it happened. Over there you need to be in favour of the government, and I said in that moment that we needed to go. My son had already travelled to Colombia. The idea was for him to come and have a look, find a way to save money so that we could join him. But he couldn't find a job, it wasn't easy in Bogotá, and then he heard there were better opportunities in Peru, and he left. Then my daughter came to Colombia and once she was able to save enough for my ticket, I followed.

My son and daughter had no problems getting here, but I did. I arrived by bus to the border. I had to show my papers, I opened my purse, and I think that's when they saw how much money I brought. I gave my passport to the officer, and all was normal, they let me in. But as I was walking, I saw a man coming towards me and there were other men nearby. And the young man tells me that I have to pay to enter Colombian territory. That hadn't happened to my children, so I refused and kept walking. Ahead there was a Colombian officer who asked if I had paid to enter. I told him no, and he told me I couldn't go on if I didn't pay. They asked for the exact amount that I had in my purse. All I wanted was to meet my daughter, so I gave all the money to the young man and I could pass. I had nothing, and I didn't know what to do, so I sat down, and some people showed compassion for my situation and helped me with my bus ticket to Cúcuta.

I'm a professional, I taught pre-school for twenty years in Venezuela and here I worked as a housemaid. It was one of many poorly paid jobs, hard work, some with a lot of exploitation, that I did before I got my residency permit. Some employers don't even look at you or talk to you. Later I worked for a company where my employer harassed me. I had never been through something like that. I didn't know that to do and I remember that I stayed still and couldn't move, and I didn't go back next day. I didn't even pick up what they owed me.

After that, I found a job in a big company here in Chia and I was there until the pandemic. I was doing well, my boss was happy with my work. But with the pandemic and the quarantine, I was told to ask for vacation. And the day before starting my vacation I had to sign a new contract, but human resources said no, my passport had expired, so they couldn't hire

me. I knew that it was because I was Venezuelan, because while I was there, I could feel they looked at me differently.

This is not our country, and I don't feel we're welcome. We are foreigners here. Many people think we came here to take away their opportunities. I thought that because Venezuela gave many foreigners opportunities to move forward, that we would receive the same support. On the contrary, it has been hard to settle down. There are some people that are more humane, more kind. Others, not so much. But we also understand, there are many from Venezuela who came and didn't come like us to make a living.

Before the pandemic, cooking was just an idea to make something extra but now it is our only livelihood. My daughter has studied cookery. She makes products based on wheat flour. Tequeños, cakes, what you call cheese sticks, potato and cheesecakes. It does not generate much money, especially now due to the pandemic, but at least we can sustain ourselves. Little by little, we have been working on it. Despite so many limitations, we keep going, from home and through social networks. We received information and support about the Minuto de Dios foundation, which provides support to Venezuelans in our situation. They are going to give her money for an oven and a countertop, and other little things she needs.

My dream is for my daughter to succeed with her business and finish college. If I have a dream right now, that would be it. And then to see my son again.

Migration is very hard. We left our country, we left our lives behind, my children had to interrupt their university studies, fleeing an economic crisis, to face another type of crisis. Xenophobia, discrimination, labour exploitation and sexual harassment. However, we continue to fight to get ahead, with honest work and taking advantage of our knowledge and skills. For now, we don't have plans to move further. At least here we have a place to live and some calm. We don't have much, but we have enough. I'd like to go back to my country when it gets better, but not for now.



Sabbir: “People just don’t like us.”



I have been living in Kuala Lumpur for one-and-a-half years. My plan is to earn some money here then return home to Bangladesh to open my own business, a café in my hometown. Before coming to Malaysia, I wanted to live overseas to make money. If I could, I would go anywhere in the world, maybe London, maybe Germany.

An employment agency got my visa and organised my flight. The total cost was \$3,000, of which 50 percent was paid in advance. I borrowed a lot of money so my family still have debts. To repay the remaining 50 percent my salary is deducted by middlemen. My visa will expire in six months. My employer renews it, and the costs will be deducted from my salary.

I work in a plantation farm. I wake up at 7 am, and come back at around 7:30 pm, sometimes 10 pm. I usually have one or two days off a week. I don't like my job, but I have no choice. My visa says I have to work in Kuala Lumpur for this company and the Malaysian government does not allow us to change our company.

With Covid-19, I don't go to work as often as before, and my boss pays me less money. Sometimes I work only two or three days a week. Very little food was provided as well, but my boss provided hand sanitiser and masks for us. I borrowed some money from my friends. Here many people have a lot of problems, but in my country and my hometown there are problems too, so they understand and lend me their money.

It is very difficult to survive here as Kuala Lumpur is very expensive. Sometimes I can send some money to my family, sometimes not. Sometimes I get a full salary, there are deductions. I live with other men from Bangladesh in the suburbs. They also work in plantation farms. Four people share one room. It is an ok accommodation. We have shopping malls and small markets nearby.

I have some Malaysian friends here, but not so many. I can only make friends at my workplace. Our skin colours and languages are different. I speak a bit of Malay, but even then, they still know I am a migrant. Malaysians think that migrants and refugees are uneducated, and our work is dirty. Because of our skin colour, they think that we don't know how to wash. With Covid-19, they think that it is unsafe to get close to us. People just don't like us. They look at us in weird ways. They don't see us as equal humans here in Kuala Lumpur. Not everyone here is bad to us, some people still have humanity. But after Covid-19, people think that the virus came from all migrants.

Here, there are many illegal migrants and refugees, and people mistake me for illegal people sometimes. If I did not have documents, I would have to go to detention and get punishment. I don't have much experience with local authorities here or any other organisations. I went to an immigration office once and they were not very friendly. With the recent police raids, some Bangladeshis were arrested because their documents had expired or because they didn't have documents. They are still in detention centres now. I am a bit worried about the situation, but if anything happens, my employer will help me.

One day, I came back to my room from work, and an immigration officer was there. He asked me where I came from, where I work, then he took me to the police station, where they asked me many questions, like if I had a visa, who my boss was. They asked me to call him and later he came to the station and brought me back.

Kuala Lumpur is very beautiful, they have some nature that reminds me of my hometown, but they also have a lot of cars and shopping malls. The transportation and hospitals are very good, but the food is so expensive. I heard Malaysia has one place called Langkawi, a very good place. That's my dream to go there.

My hometown is a village, so we don't have many buildings, no shopping malls, and not many markets, nothing like this city life. But I feel safer in my hometown, I have more friends and my family there. I am here alone. I have not met anyone to build my family here and I miss my family back home a lot. I would not suggest my friends or family come to Kuala Lumpur if they could make a better life than me in our hometown.

If I earn enough money here in Kuala Lumpur, I will go back to Bangladesh and open my business. But now I am not sure anymore. With Covid-19, I will think one more time about the possibilities and see how the situation will go.



Angélique: “Our relationship with Tunisians has improved over the last two years.”

Money was a factor, but the main reason I left Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire) was political. Just after the last war, we started being tracked by the new government. As I was affiliated with the party of the previous president, we had meetings in our neighbourhood to discuss politics, like everyone. But when the new president came with his militias, they started attacking us. The father of a friend has disappeared for that reason. I had to move out of my neighbourhood, and then in the end, out of the country. I came directly from Ivory Coast to Tunisia by plane as Ivorians have visa-free access to this country.

I was very badly treated by the owner the supermarket I worked in. This was in Sfax, the first place in Tunisia I came to. I first worked without documents and I had to accept every opportunity I could find. While Tunisians in the supermarket constantly had breaks and were allowed many things, I was told to continue working and could not even take a lunch break. Later, I moved to Tunis after a Frenchman offered me cleaning work here.

Since I arrived in Tunisia, both my parents became ill and died, my mother died during lockdown. This was very hard financially and it has broken me. I always had to send money home to make sure they were taken care of in the hospital.

I am fine here; I live comfortably now. I live in La Marsa. There are a lot of other refugees and migrants, especially Ivorians, but also some Malians and Burkinabe. I have met a lot of people. The Ivorians are known for occupying a whole neighbourhood and creating their lifestyle there. They do their activities and sell their spices, like at home.

I had a problem with the Ivorian embassy here. It created issues for my safety. After, I went to see UNHCR and I applied for asylum. I now have my status document and I can stay here and be calm, without even having to think about making a dangerous move to somewhere else.

Having documents makes a big difference in so many ways. Everything has become easier. That is really all you need here to feel safe and included. I can now move freely, and I have more access to jobs, especially in restaurants, and also to health facilities. Before, I had to ask the assistance of NGOs to make sure I was given access in a hospital. Without being regularised, access is not guaranteed.

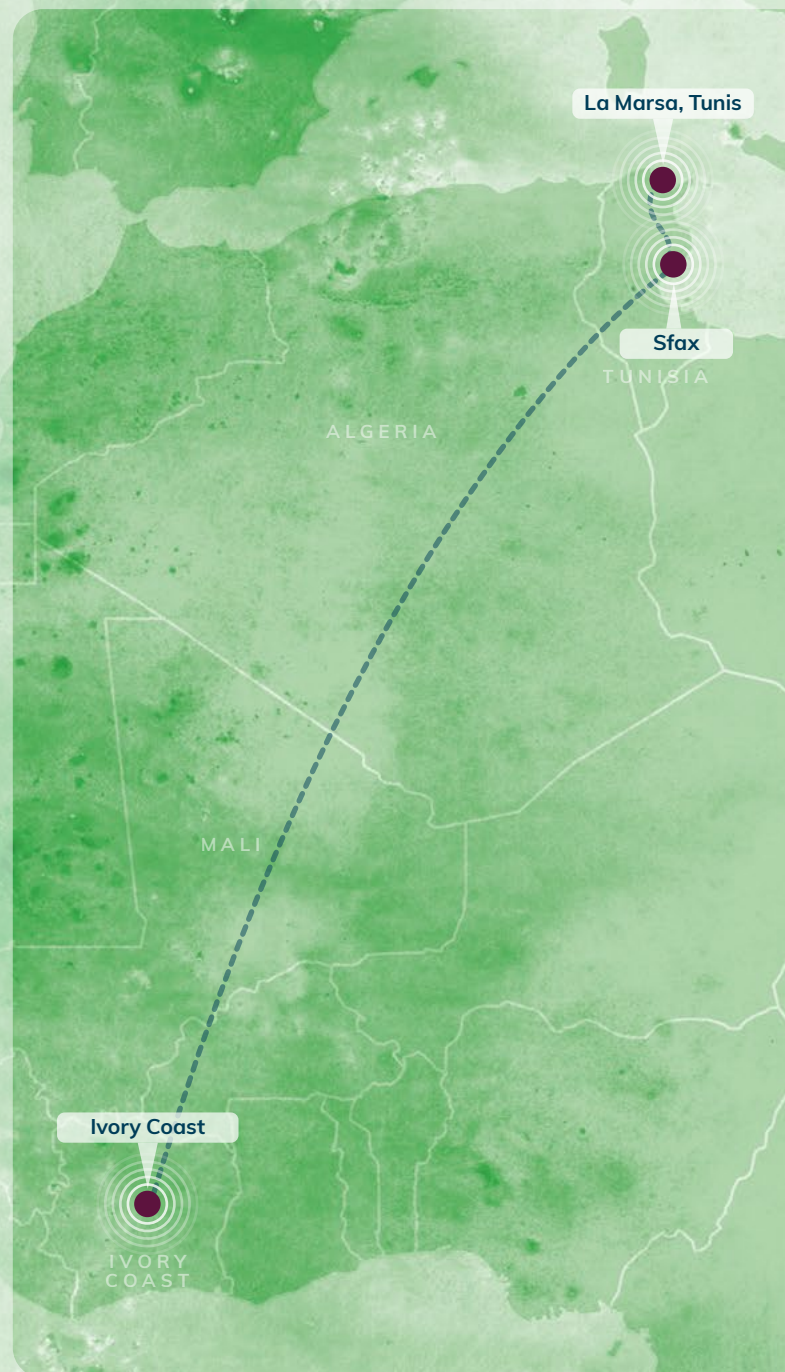
For those without documentation, it is a totally different situation. They will have to accept any kind of job, and it is hard for them to feel comfortable in this city.

Still, there are many risks for us here, especially rape and sexual violence. This can also happen in work environments, like when you are asked to clean somewhere, and you only find the man (with the rest of the family gone). It is often during the day, so if you make noise, he will probably leave you alone, but still it is a big risk for us. There are also robberies, carried out by youngsters who break into your house. In some neighbourhoods, particularly in Bhar Lazreg, there is a multitude of risks and problems. We now face the fact that both Tunisian and Ivorian groups there are involved in crime. This was not the case before.

While before we felt like we could not go to the police, this has become better. We now go there and report that men tried to rape us, for example, and that there was a lack of respect towards us, sub-Saharan women.

Our relationship with Tunisians has improved over the last two years. I easily communicate with Tunisians nowadays. Back then, I was often discriminated and once physically attacked by groups of younger Tunisians on the streets. There would be adults around, but they would not say anything and just let it happen. They were throwing stones so big that we had to run fast.

Discrimination and racism happened all the time. The change I see now is when we experience this again, there is often an older brother or a parent who comes to help you. This did not happen before. Tunisia has been criticised harshly over racism, and I think that has sunken in.



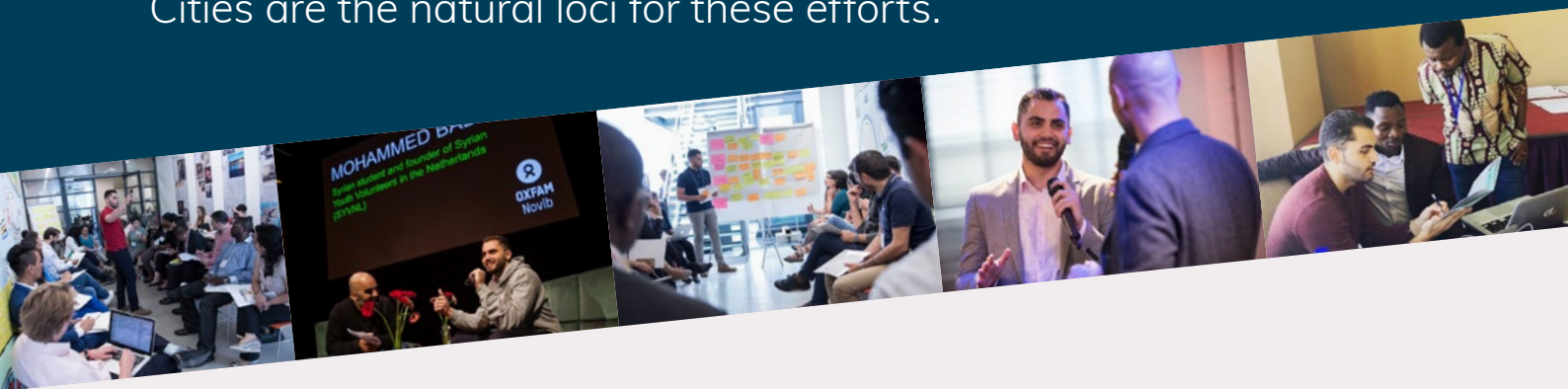
The local authorities and the Tunisians here in La Marsa have made us feel included. During the lockdown, we lost everything and could not save any money. But the municipality supported us by handing out food boxes. It had everything inside. There was a lot of solidarity from the Tunisians here. I felt like during lockdown there was a sudden change in mentality. We experienced a lot of spontaneous initiatives from their side.

Eventually, I would like to open a shop here and have my own business. Maybe I can open the shop in 2021, and then stay until 2022. I want to stay based in Tunisia, but with going back and forth to Abidjan.

Interview

Count us in

A refugee since birth, **Mohammed Badran** has little time for charitable hand-outs, however well intentioned, because they reinforce the degrading concept of victimhood and undermine individual agency. His work focusses on empowering and connecting refugees, placing them at the forefront of collaborative solution formulation, not just locally, but also at the global level. Cities are the natural loci for these efforts.



Mohammed Badran is a Palestinian anthropologist, advocate, and community mobiliser. He is a founding member of a number of self-led networks such as Syrian Volunteers in the Netherlands (SYVNL), the G100 initiative, the Global Refugee-led Network (GRN), and the Diaspora Networks Alliance (DNA). His consultancy MB Capacity Development supports organisations, companies, and government institutions to better understand the different dimensions of migration and the refugee experience.

You've been a refugee twice in your life, is that correct? In Syria, as well as now in the Netherlands?

I've lived all my life as a refugee. I was born with the label of being a refugee and I grew up with being a refugee. I've never experienced being other than a refugee.

Why do most refugees and migrants end up in cities?

When you arrive as a refugee, the main focus for your future is to rebuild your life, and that perspective matches very much with the different opportunities that you can get within bigger cities. If you are located, let's say in a village, you have less opportunities to integrate and learn the language, interact and participate in the society, so that sense of participation and being part of

the society and contributing to it, it has a bigger chance in bigger cities.

To what extent is the motivation to go to cities due to the diaspora or national communities already there?

That is one of the factors that will determine which European country you're going to move to. Before the whole refugee crisis in Europe started in 2015, a lot of people, they were saying "But how do these refugees know where to go or which country is better for them?" That depended a lot on the social networks that each of these refugees had, and their families and their neighbours and their friends who made the journey to Europe, to a certain country, and then they know the different policies and then they advise them to which city or which country they should go to.

“ The vicious cycles start from the perception of how we see refugees, and that has been either as threats, burdens, or as victims. If we don’t see refugees for who they really are—human beings with a lot of capacities—then we will keep creating short-sighted policies that don’t help either refugees, the host communities, or anyone. ”

You talk a lot about breaking the vicious cycles of fear-driven policies. Can you elaborate what you mean by this?

The vicious cycles start from the perception of how we see refugees, and that has been either as threats, burdens, or as victims. If we keep this perception and don’t see refugees for who they really are—human beings with a lot of capacities—then we will keep creating short-sighted policies that don’t help either refugees, the host communities, or anyone. This perception is also connected to an old mentality of how we would like to help refugees, and some of this of course is coming from the goodwill of policymakers or NGOs, European NGOs. It’s coming from an old philanthropy mentality where we want to help refugees. But that doesn’t help them and rather puts refugees in an unequal structural position in society: that they are helpless, they are victims without agency, and then they need help from the help-givers. That’s what creates the vicious cycle; instead of helping refugees, these policies do the opposite. Instead of becoming self-reliant, refugees become dependent when you keep looking at them as victims and you are not taking their agency into account when you develop policies or solutions.

“ Instead of becoming self-reliant, refugees become dependent when you keep looking at them as victims and you are not taking their agency into account when you develop policies or solutions. ”

In your experience, was this phenomenon as prevalent when you were a refugee in Damascus as it is now Amsterdam?

Actually, no: there are differences. Palestinian refugees [in Syria] have their own places or camps where they live, and yet they had some access to be integrated into Syrian society. I remember working in the biggest local NGO in Syria. They all knew that I was Palestinian, but I never actually thought that I was different from them.

We had access to whatever we wanted. I mean, you could become a teacher, for example, and you could take a higher position, although of course there’s certain positions that you cannot reach. Palestinian refugees had a lot and they were more integrated than when we compare them to Europe. What’s different here in Amsterdam or in other European cities is that there are many policies that hinder you from succeeding. As a refugee you have the will, and there’s a lot of people who are passionate just to start rebuilding their life as soon as possible, but then they find that there’s a lot of obstacles that are so unnecessary put up against these people.

“ As a refugee you have the will, and there’s a lot of people who are passionate just to start rebuilding their life as soon as possible, but then they find that there’s a lot of unnecessary obstacles in the way. ”

Can you summarise briefly the kind of work you do?

I’m actually an anthropologist, and I’m interested in city space and politics. I established Syrian Volunteers in the Netherlands, which is a refugee-led network of refugee volunteers and Dutch volunteers, and they participate in doing different social activities and contribute to Dutch society through voluntary work. I’m also part of the G-100 initiative, which is a series of conferences by and for refugees and migrant newcomers in cities like Amsterdam, Brussels, and Berlin. And then last year, we co-organised the only session with the Mayors Migration Council on cities during the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). What the G-100 does is, in each city, we try to bring around 60 or 80 refugees, experts and policymakers, together to map the different challenges and then try to come up with concrete policy recommendations or solutions that could be taken. These recommendations are then discussed in a more practical way, how they could be implemented in each of these cities.

I’ve also been involved with the whole Global Compact on Refugees and the Global Compact for Migration since its beginning, the New York Declaration in 2016. When I was invited, I was the only refugee that was allowed to speak and address the UN General Assembly in 2016. When I was in that room, I saw that I was the only refugee there and that it was a lot of responsibility on me, to bring out all the diverse voices in just three, four minutes. My objective, since that moment, has been focussed on how can we create more spaces for refugees and refugee leaders and advocates to bring their voices into these different spaces? Less than two percent of GRF participants are actually refugees so it’s quite an improvement on zero, but still a long way to go!

Interview

Mohammed Badran

What do you think you'll be working on in five, or ten years' time? Do you have a target?

My interest is to focus more on cities, but with a different approach, a different way of thinking. How can we connect the different migrant communities or local communities across cities? How can we connect city to city? Not necessarily just with policymakers, what the different city networks already do, but how can you connect horizontally the different migrant communities between cities and across borders? And how can that kind of space transform knowledge and best practices and best fits? We know that a lot of solutions that are being tried now are found at the local level or by local civil society or by migrant communities themselves, developing their own solutions. Also, concerning advocating for refugee participation, participation is not only low at the international level, but refugees are also excluded at the city level. There's a lot of potential where refugee-led organisations and local movements could participate to work together with the cities and then have those kind of alliances at the international level... and that's what I would like to do in the coming years.

“How can we connect horizontally the different migrant communities between cities and across borders? And how can that kind of space transform knowledge and best practices and best fits?”

Do you see a clear difference between city-level responses to and policies about refugees and migrants compared to national or economic-bloc level?

Yes, one hundred percent. There are a lot of policy tensions between national and local. Cities have a lot of flexibility in taking quicker responses, quicker actions and finding practical solutions. While it's important to have the laws that protect refugee rights and migrant rights at the national level, what you need to do is also to focus at the different local actions that local authorities are making, mobilising the different cities in a country and then coming with a stronger voice to the national policy.

In some European cities, almost half the population is foreign-born, something you don't see in cities in the global South. In any city or country where the proportion of migrants and refugees is seen to be rising, isn't it natural to find some resistance?

Yes, but when you look at, for example structural racism, that's an issue that you would find in most northern countries rather than in the global South. As migrants and outsiders, you have to deal with that kind of white supremacy discourse or white nationalism. Let's look

right now with the Covid-19 crisis, you see that most of the essential workers and healthcare workers are from migrant backgrounds, but you still find that “hostile environment”, especially politically, towards migrants, and that is problematic. Even here in the Netherlands, right now, we are starting a campaign to advocate for the rights of refugee doctors who arrived here and still cannot work, [to help them] contribute to the national health system because it's not inclusive towards migrants and people with a non-Western diploma.

“When I was invited to address the UN General Assembly for the New York Declaration in 2016 I was the only refugee in the room.”

Should the world expect to have to distribute and share a lot more refugees than in the past? At the moment, we're seeing the trend going the other way, countries are taking fewer and fewer refugees.

Yes, absolutely. Everyone has been talking about sharing responsibility, having that kind of a sharing responsibility mechanism. If you look at Europe, in comparison to Turkey or in the same region Lebanon or Jordan where you have millions of Syrian refugees, you see a significant difference. Definitely, there should be a kind of sharing mechanism so that if all countries share a little bit, it wouldn't be that huge of a pressure on any one country.

Migration numbers will definitely increase and the problem of migration will stay a hot topic with big challenges in this century and the coming years and mainly because when you consider city development strategies, most cities actually do not take migration as a new challenge that they should face for the future. Migration is something that they respond to as if it is an emergency, as if it's unexpected, even though you have all these scientists and researchers that are saying migration is going to continue to be a major phenomenon and that countries and cities need to take it into account.

When we talk about city vision and city development in the future... Amsterdam has its own vision, Berlin has its own vision and so forth, each city has a five-year or a ten-year vision, but when you when you look at each of these visions, you don't see the migrants' voices in these visions. That's also another aspect I would like to do in the future: to create inclusive spaces for migrants to participate in developing the vision of the city, of their own city and how they see the future of their own city.

The narrative around cities and migrants and refugees concentrates often on the two words, “integration” and “inclusivity”. In your views, are

these the most important aspects for the migrant and refugee perspective?

Yes, well, “integration”... What is integration? Integration could be anything, couldn't it? We try to say that integration must also include inclusion, and that also makes it more complex. The most important issue, instead of getting tied up with these terms that can be interpreted differently, is how can refugees and migrants meaningfully participate in the city itself, in all its development, thinking, planning and all of its institutions and overall, how can they succeed in society and be treated equally, similarly to any other urban communities living in that city. Meaningful participation is key because at the end, you want to reach self-reliance, and you cannot achieve it without meaningful participation.

Are there city-level failures that might be conducive to the emergence of criminality or even terrorism among refugee and migrant populations?

When people go in that direction because of discrimination and the exclusion from all the discussions that leaves people unable to express themselves and find their purpose in life in that city, people then start looking for a different purpose, whatever that might be. When you don't find yourself belonging to the community where you are based in, then you start looking for other communities where you can feel you belong, and it doesn't matter whether these people are Muslims or from whatever religion, they could be anyone. So the objective for the city should be how it can make sure that all of its inhabitants feel they belong to that city and invest in belonging to the city.

“ Right now with the Covid-19 crisis you see that most of the essential workers and healthcare workers are from migrant backgrounds, but you still find that ‘hostile environment’, especially politically, towards migrants.”

Do you have a sense how Covid-19 may have affected things for refugees and migrants? Do you think things have been set back by the pandemic, or has it created some opportunities?

Both: definitely Covid allowed us to see a lot of the issues that we were aware of before but were not ready to be confronted with. For example, here in the Netherlands we set up the Corona Health Desk, which provides information for refugees and migrants in their own language, in Arabic, and Tigrinya for Eritreans, etc. It has exposed how disconnected the city and the government are from its inhabitants,

especially the refugees and the migrants, that they couldn't communicate with them even. Refugees and migrants cannot access information about prevention because it's all shared in a language that many are not well-equipped with. You have a big number of people who recently arrived in the Netherlands and they don't speak Dutch at that level.

Every crisis brings also an opportunity, or you can turn it into an opportunity. For example, we were talking about how refugee doctors were excluded. There are certain skills and a huge amount of resources that could be invested in these doctors who arrived in a new country but are just waiting for, say, five years, six years and they cannot find a job, and then at the end, they are pushed to do a very lowly job that's far away from their background. And this showed the opportunity that everyone knows right now how important it is for these people to work as soon as possible, and that when you start looking for the different opportunities that could come up, it could turn this crisis into an opportunity, and you can build on that.

How would you characterise life for most refugees and migrants in European cities?

You have that vision, especially people in the global South, when they think of Europe and of European cities, or global North cities, they think that they are going to be treated as an equal human being, they are not going to be discriminated against, they're not [still] going to be running from war or conflict or all these kind of difficulties that they have been through. But then they are faced here with all of this again, with discrimination, racism, structural racism, and it's very disappointing.

So all those positive things refugees and migrants might gain are outweighed by the discrimination and the negative aspects?

I would say that you are going to find both. You are going to find welcoming people. I have come across a lot of welcoming people and people with a very good heart, but this is the reality, you have both. When you are a refugee and you live in these cities, you try so hard to avoid having an experience of structural racism or discrimination. And I don't think I'm going to bring a picture to an outsider saying it's just like utopia, where you're going to get everything that you have ever dreamed of. It's not like that, and things need to be addressed the way they are, because a lot of people are disappointed when they arrive.



Habiba: “There are many difficulties here in Tehran, but it is much better than Afghanistan.”

I've been in Tehran for about two years. We moved here from Kabul in early 2019. We left mostly because my father became unemployed and also because of my own educational goals. My father had a homeware store in Dasht-e-Barchi [a settlement in western Kabul] but he went bankrupt, so he sold it. After he sold it, a year before our migration to Iran, he tried to launch a new business but in vain. After this, my uncle, who has a tailor workshop in Tehran, suggested my father should come and work with him. So my father, mother, brother and I came to Tehran.

In Kabul I was at a private university, but its teaching quality was low. Mostly it was a waste of time and money, so I left. When my father disclosed his plan to migrate to Iran, I got motivated because universities in Iran are of high quality. Their fees are almost the same as those in Afghanistan.

We didn't come with a smuggler. We all had passports and got visas from the Iranian embassy within a few days. It took us around a month to sell our house and possessions. My father sent the money to my uncle via hawala. Then we flew to Iran and took a cab to my uncle's house which was nearby the airport.

All in all it cost about €750 per person, most of it for the tickets, but also for the visa fees, travel insurance, and health certificate. We made this money from selling our furniture.

Now we live in a house in Baqer Abad. There are both Afghans and Iranians living in this locality. It is better than Afghanistan. At least we have 24/7 water and power services. There is a school and a hospital here. There is security, but its only problem is the high rate of crime and robbery, like in Afghanistan.

I tried to resume my education here but have not been able to. When we arrived, we had a three-month visa and at that time it was not time for enrolment, so I had to wait. I tried again after six months of being in Tehran when enrolment was open, but they refused to accept my application because my visa had expired. Once I have earned enough money, I heartily want the problem of my visa to be resolved so I can start studying in a university. The teaching here is much better. If I can solve the problem of my visa, I will surely proceed my educational goals, no matter how long it takes.



Now we are considered as undocumented migrants. I planned to go to the police and pay the fine to extend my visa, but I found out it was very high and impossible for us to pay. For all of us, it would be around 21 million tomans (\$5,000) in total. Plus, we would have had to return to Afghanistan and apply for a new visa. So I decided to ignore my educational ambitions and work to support my family.

Life without a legal permit is very tough. We always need to be careful when commuting. People with no documents can hardly go anywhere, except their workplace. They do not have holidays, cannot visit shrines, hospitals, schools. They are deprived of everything. The only thing they can do is live and work under fear. Even if you get a good job, they pay you less or exploit you because you are undocumented. You cannot complain. The police will not listen to you.

It is very difficult for my father because men are more in danger of deportation. Police are always on the roads. They stop Afghans as soon as seeing them and ask for documents. If a person does not have a document, he will be taken to the police station, and then to a deportation camp. Most of the police officers ask for a bribe in return for release. Once they arrested my father and took him to the police station. When he called us, I immediately called my uncle. When we went to the police station to release my father, some policemen were continuously

insulting us. It badly affected us. My uncle went there with some money and released him before he was sent to a camp. Had he been sent to a camp, it would be impossible to release him by bribing the authorities. He would directly be deported.

Documentation makes a huge difference. Firstly, there is a feeling of deprivation. In Afghanistan, despite insecurity, we could go to university and could walk freely on the roads. But we cannot do the same here, even if we go somewhere, our heads are down to escape people's attention and questions about documents. When we walk on the roads, we try to avoid the main streets because there are a lot of police there.

I know two people from my community who were arrested without documents and they were taken to a camp and then deported. They are in Afghanistan now. Usually, when Afghans are arrested, we notify each other and try to get them released by paying money in a police station before they are sent to a camp.

Arrests of Afghans have increased since two months back, especially in Tehran. There was a time when they did not conduct raids on construction sites. But now they do. The workers do not feel safe in their workplace.

My mother and I are working in my uncle's workshop. My father works in construction every day.

With the Covid-19 outbreak, my uncle's workshop was closed for around five months under government orders. The death toll was very high in Iran and even now there are still some restrictions. My uncle's shop reopened two months ago, but there is not much work so my he fired almost half of the workers. Currently, lots of our products are not sold, they are just stored here. There is not much for me to do, I just chat with others and pass my time. We do not have good salaries because it is based on the number of clothes we make. I get 5,000 tomans (\$1.2) for each collar I sew. Previously, I used to make 10 to 15 in a day, now I make 20-25 in a week, because we do not receive any orders.

The most important assistance for new migrants is finding a house to rent house and getting a job. Those who have relatives can get help from them with housing, paying the smuggler's fee, rent, and things like this. If they have no relatives, they will find an Afghan to show a them place. The only assistance we got was from my uncle and some of our community. They usually lend money when we have financial troubles. They helped us find a house because we knew no one else here.

The biggest need at the moment is money for rent. I know some households and other Afghans who cannot afford their rent because their work has stopped. Lots of households cannot afford food also. Previously they were working so at least they were able to afford bread. Now they do not have even that. So the number of Afghan child beggars has increased during the pandemic. For families with no male head of household, the situation is worse. Women who were previously going to work on farms or to the factories have lost their work. But now they are all at home and receive no assistance for food, housing or health services. Those who receive remittances from Europe or elsewhere,

their situation is usually better, because if they receive \$100, it's a huge amount in tomans.

I am not part of this city. I do not feel a sense of belonging to Tehran. No Iranian accepts me as a human being. They all see us as foreigners who are supposed to leave this city today or tomorrow. I like this city because it is beautiful. Iranians may enjoy it, but the city cannot solve my problems. When an Iranian sees me as a stranger, then I feel like I am a stranger and do not belong to this city. For us, it is enough to work, get money and wait for what will happen in the future.

The Iranian authorities are worse than the people of Iran. At least it is possible to talk to civilians, but never with government officials. The situation of those who have documents might be better; their access to higher education, hospitals, and schools might be better than before. But for undocumented migrants, the situation is the same: we do not have access to anything.

Just a few days ago, it was announced that the children of undocumented migrants will be allowed in schools, but when we took my younger brother, he was rejected. They said that they had not yet received approval, and the classes had already started. They said the same thing last year and my brother was deprived of school.

There are more restrictions in Kabul for women compared to here. In Kabul, families monitor what their daughters do, when they go out, with whom and where. Other than this, there was much verbal harassment on the streets which means that women do not feel secure in Afghanistan. The main threat for us here is people making jokes about us on the street. My father and family are very sensitive about where I go and when I return because they are sure that the same harassment will happen here as in Afghanistan.



There are more opportunities for women here. For instance, in tailoring workshops, factories, in photography, malls and other places. If you have documents, there are more opportunities. In Afghanistan, women cannot work other than in government or NGO sectors. Even in workspaces in Afghanistan, especially in government offices, there is so much harassment that many women prefer to leave their jobs.

There are also more entertainment opportunities here. For example, I have been to the cinema with my friends two times, whereas there is no cinema in Afghanistan, even for men. It was the first time in my life I ever went to a cinema. It was an interesting experience, a great hall with a huge number of people watching a movie together. Men and women sitting side by side. Visiting the cinema was a good memory. This is an experience that an Afghan woman does not get to experience in her entire life.

We have no plans to leave here or return to Afghanistan. The main reason is my father. He says that all our relatives and community are in Tehran and therefore it is best for us to stay in this city so in case we have any problems, we can receive assistance from them. Once there was talk of going to Turkey, but my parents do not have the courage to make the journey because we don't know anyone there.

Especially, for me as a woman, Afghanistan was not a place of life for me. While I was there I didn't realise that I had such a miserable, restricted life. Now that I am here for a period of time, I understand what is happening to Afghan women. Probably in Kabul, Mazar and Herat girls and women can go to school, but outside the big cities, life is completely rural and traditional. Women do not have the right to have an ID card. I have not seen an Iranian girl who has not gone to school. Even the poor Iranian girls who work with us in the workshop go to school without fear and laugh out loud together on the streets.

For this reason, I am now happy that we came to Tehran. There are many difficulties, but still it is much better than Afghanistan.

4Mi: The Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative



4Mi is MMC's flagship data collection project. Regional teams in West Africa, North Africa, East Africa and Yemen, Asia, Europe and Latin America collect and analyse data on mixed migration dynamics, including profiles, drivers, means and conditions of movement, the smuggler economy, aspirations and destination choices. Launched in 2014, 4Mi today consists of a network of around 150 monitors in 19 countries. Stationed in known gathering points for refugees and migrants on commonly used routes, 4Mi monitors use questionnaires to conduct in-depth structured surveys of people on the move on a continuous basis. These surveys provide indicative insights into the protection concerns, and experiences of refugees and migrants along mixed migration routes. 4Mi also conducts short-term, topic-specific surveys in particular locations. To date, 4Mi monitors have conducted more than 50,000 surveys, all surveys combined.

4Mi in the MMR 2020

The 4Mi data presented in this year's Mixed Migration Review is presented in two parts. The first relates to the overarching theme of the MMR 2020, urban migration. It is drawn from a total dataset of 4,732 surveys conducted between September 2019 and March 2020 (1,731 interviews with women and 3,001 with men).¹ The second presents 4Mi data from the adapted, Covid-19-focused surveys implemented from March 2020 (see pages 112-119).

Urban origins

The urban origins section explores the link between where journeys began, and the socio-demographic profile of migrants and refugees, how they prepare for their journey, and why they leave.

The data is presented for 250 Afghans (interviewed in India, Indonesia or Greece), 903 Venezuelans (interviewed in Colombia or Peru), 551 East Africans (interviewed in Kenya, Somalia, Libya or Tunisia) and 2,424 West Africans (interviewed in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Libya, Tunisia or Italy). This includes 1,578 interviews with women and 2,550 with men. Regional designations follow UN-DESA guidelines.² We excluded those who did not begin their journey in their country of nationality, and those who responded 'don't know' or 'refused' to the question of country of nationality, or the question of whether they started their journey in a rural or urban area. (Respondents determine themselves

whether they left a rural or urban area.) It is important to note that where we have broken down the data further, the sample size can drop below 100; sample size is indicated in all charts.

Urban mixed migration hubs

Two maps explore the roles that certain cities play on the journey and the dangers they pose. The analysis draws on the full 4,732 surveys conducted between September 2019 and March 2020.

In order to ensure reliable data, here we only look at countries that more than 150 people reported transiting, where a minimum of 100 people stopped, and a minimum of 50 people reported to be dangerous. During the survey, respondents can name up to eight countries transited, five places stopped – more if interviewed in North Africa – and five dangerous places.

The data cannot tell us which are the most stopped-in cities on a route, or the most dangerous cities, because of the sampling approach (see 'Limitations' below). What the data can tell us, however, is the role played by those places that our respondents have travelled through: why did they stop there? Why was a particular city considered to be dangerous?

1 The sample for this first part, based on the standard, face-to-face 4Mi migrant survey, is considerably smaller than in previous Mixed Migration Reviews. This is the result of the suspension of face-to-face data collection due to Covid-19 in March 2020, when we switched to remote interviewing and conducted thousands of 4Mi surveys focused on the impact of Covid-19. See page 112 for more information on this switch, and analysis of the impact.

2 Nationalities of West African respondents: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo. Nationalities of East African respondents: Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia.

What is a city?

Defining a city is no easy task, particularly if attempting to do so globally, across countries with varying levels of population density. For the data presented here, MMC defines a city as a place with a population of over 50,000.

Limitations of 4Mi data

A lack of data on the target population, coupled with the difficulties in accessing a very diverse, hard-to-reach and highly mobile population, means that we cannot conduct random sampling. Instead, 4Mi uses a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. Data is therefore not representative, and we do not provide estimates of the volume of migration flows or of the prevalence of protection violations along routes. While 4Mi strives for diversity of respondents, the breadth of the target population and the constraints on sampling mean that particular profiles are likely to be over- or under-represented in the data. With regard to gender, 4Mi strives to adhere to a policy of at least one male and one female monitor in each data collection location.

Data collection during the Covid-19 pandemic has been successful, but not without limitations. Conducting research through remote activities means that MMC has only been able to interview respondents with access to a phone, and participant recruitment has at times been more challenging.

Finally, 4Mi data is self-reported. It depends on respondents' recall, and the information they choose to share with monitors. This may vary according to a range of factors, including the personality, profile, and circumstances of the respondent, the location and environment in which the survey takes place, and the rapport between monitor and survey respondent. 4Mi continuously reviews and improves its methodology. For more information, see the MMC website: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi/>

Photo credit: Pascal Mannaerts / Alamy

When conducting data collection face-to-face, 4Mi monitors usually find their respondents in places where migrants and refugees congregate and in migration transit hubs such as this bus station in Dori, Burkina Faso.



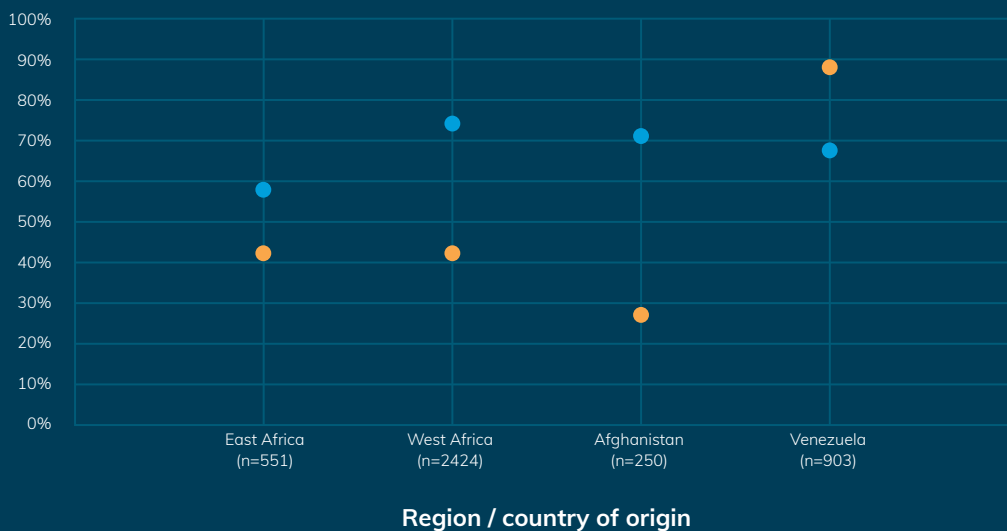
Urban origins

Links between urban origins and migrant and refugee profiles and journeys

Are there differences between the people we interview who leave from rural areas, and those who leave from cities? MMC analysed 4Mi data to explore how migrants and refugees who start their journeys from a rural setting might differ from those who start from urban areas. (For more on the methodology, see page 98.)

71% of 4Mi respondents started their journey from urban areas

Did you leave from an urban or rural setting?



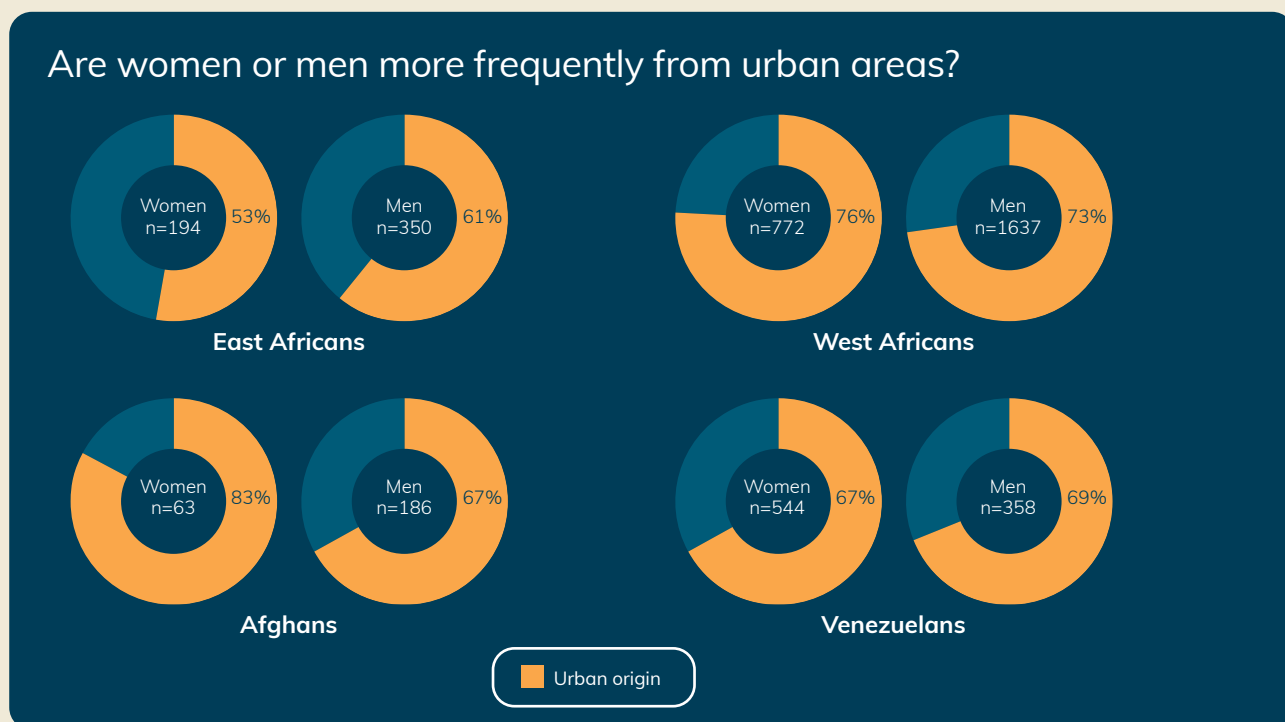
● 4Mi respondents of urban origin ● General urban population
(Values for East Africa and West Africa are the values for Sub-Saharan Africa)

Note: General urban population taken from the World Bank, United Nations Population Division, World Urbanisation Prospects: 2018 Revision, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>; Full question "In the country you started from, were you last living in a rural or urban area?"

Cities are a springboard for international migration; in general 4Mi respondents are more urban than the general population. The proportion of Afghan 4Mi respondents who left urban areas was much higher than the general level of urbanisation in Afghanistan (71% compared to 26%).

In Venezuela, in contrast, 4Mi had a smaller share of urban respondents than the general urban population (68% compared to an urban population of 88%). This is likely due to a large proportion coming from the states of Venezuela that neighbour Colombia, which are predominantly rural. It is important to note there are also differences depending on which route respondents take. For example, in East Africa, those travelling along the Eastern route to Yemen and onwards are much more likely to have left rural areas, compared to East Africans whom we interview in North Africa, who are more likely to have left urban areas. The Eastern route to Yemen costs far less than the longer journey to Libya, and might be more affordable for those coming from relatively poorer rural communities.

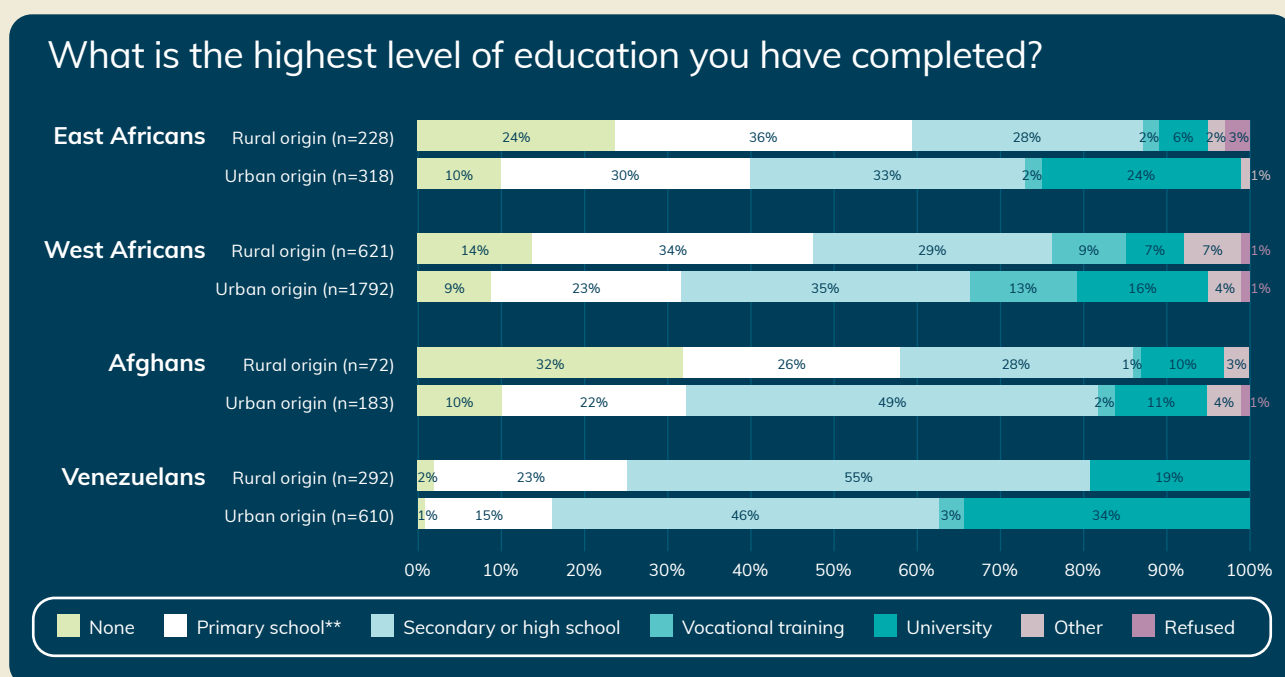
In some places of origin there are large differences between where men and women start their journey



Men from East Africa had more frequently left urban areas than women. It was the opposite for Afghans, where women were more frequently from urban areas. Women respondents from Venezuela are more likely to be from a rural setting, although within the Venezuelan population, women are more urban.*

Respondents from urban settings have reached a higher level of education

While the overall levels of education among respondents vary from region to region, people who left urban areas had more often reached a higher level of education than those who left rural areas, for every region or country of origin. This is despite the fact that there is little age difference between the groups.



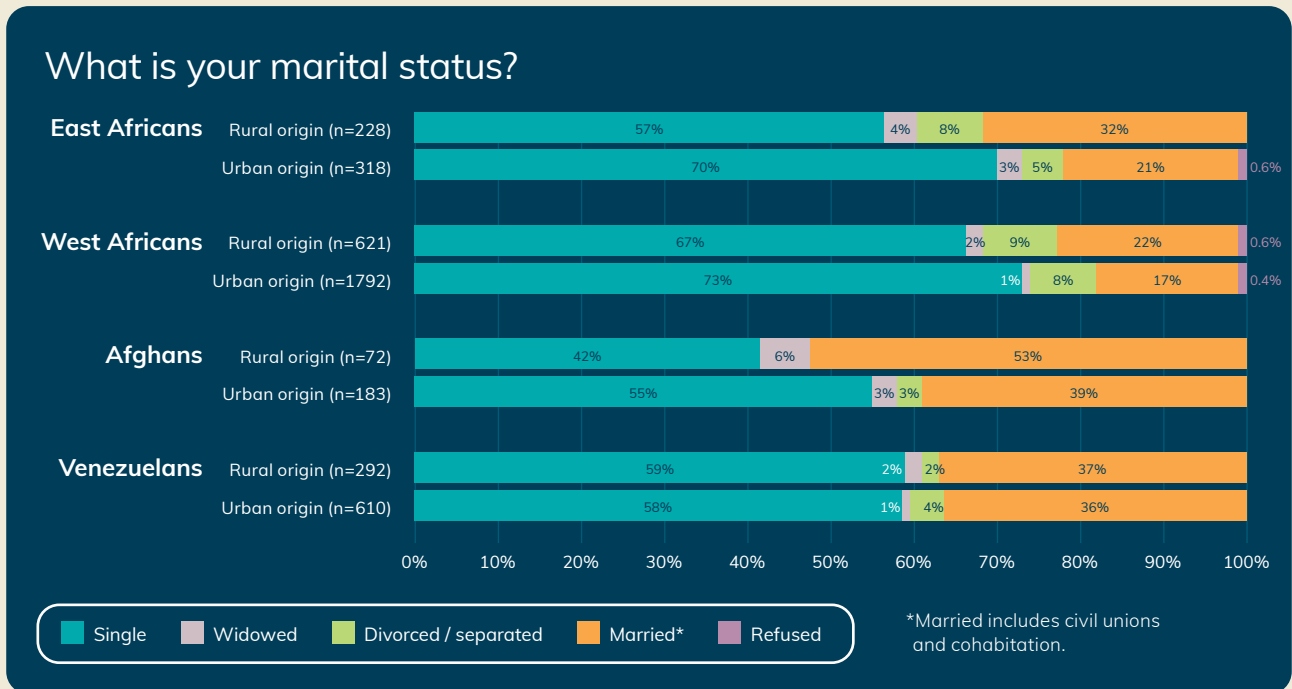
* United Nations Demographic Yearbook 2018, https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/products/dyb/dyb_2018/

** Primary school includes religious primary schooling. Percentages may not add up precisely to 100%, because of rounding.

Is migration from rural areas more of a family affair?

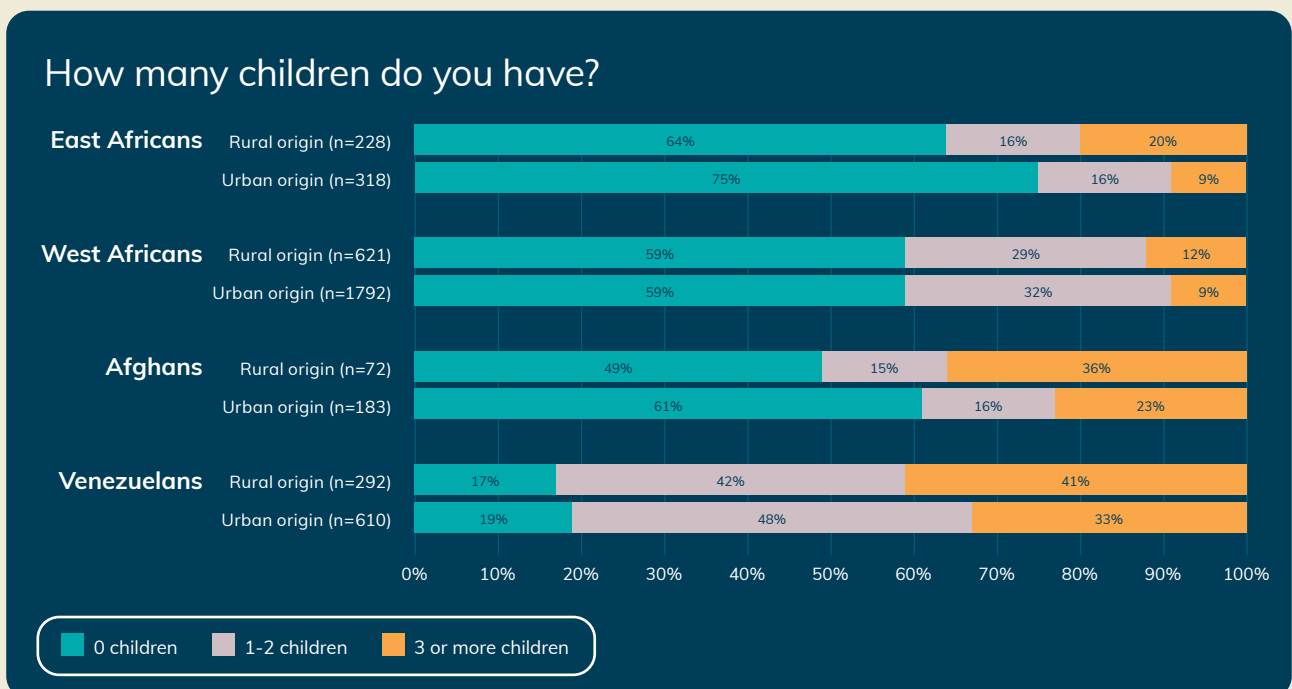
Respondents leaving urban settings are more often single

Though it needs further exploration, the higher proportion of married people leaving rural areas could signal that migration from rural areas tend to be a family affair, where a wife or husband migrates to support the family, as a rural poverty-reduction strategy, whereas migration originating from urban areas is more of an individual undertaking. The only exception is Venezuela, where people from rural areas are more frequently single.



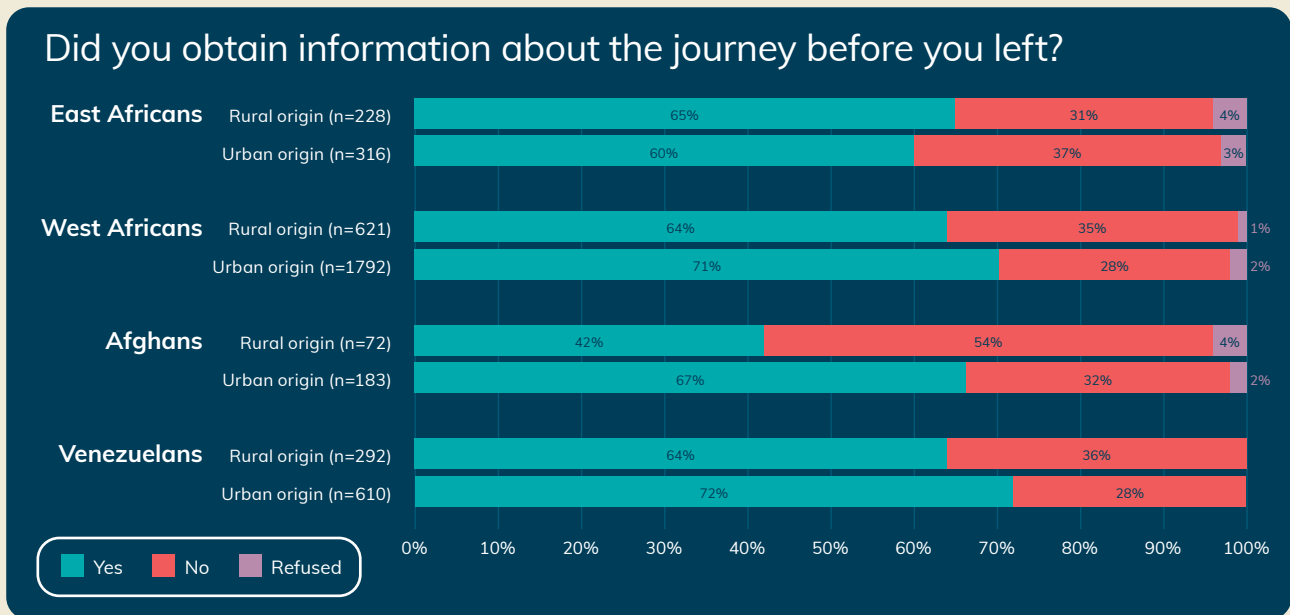
Respondents leaving urban settings are less likely to have children

In almost all regions, respondents leaving urban settings were more likely to have no children, which supports the suggestion that migration from urban settings is more of an individual undertaking. Only among West Africans were the proportions the same.

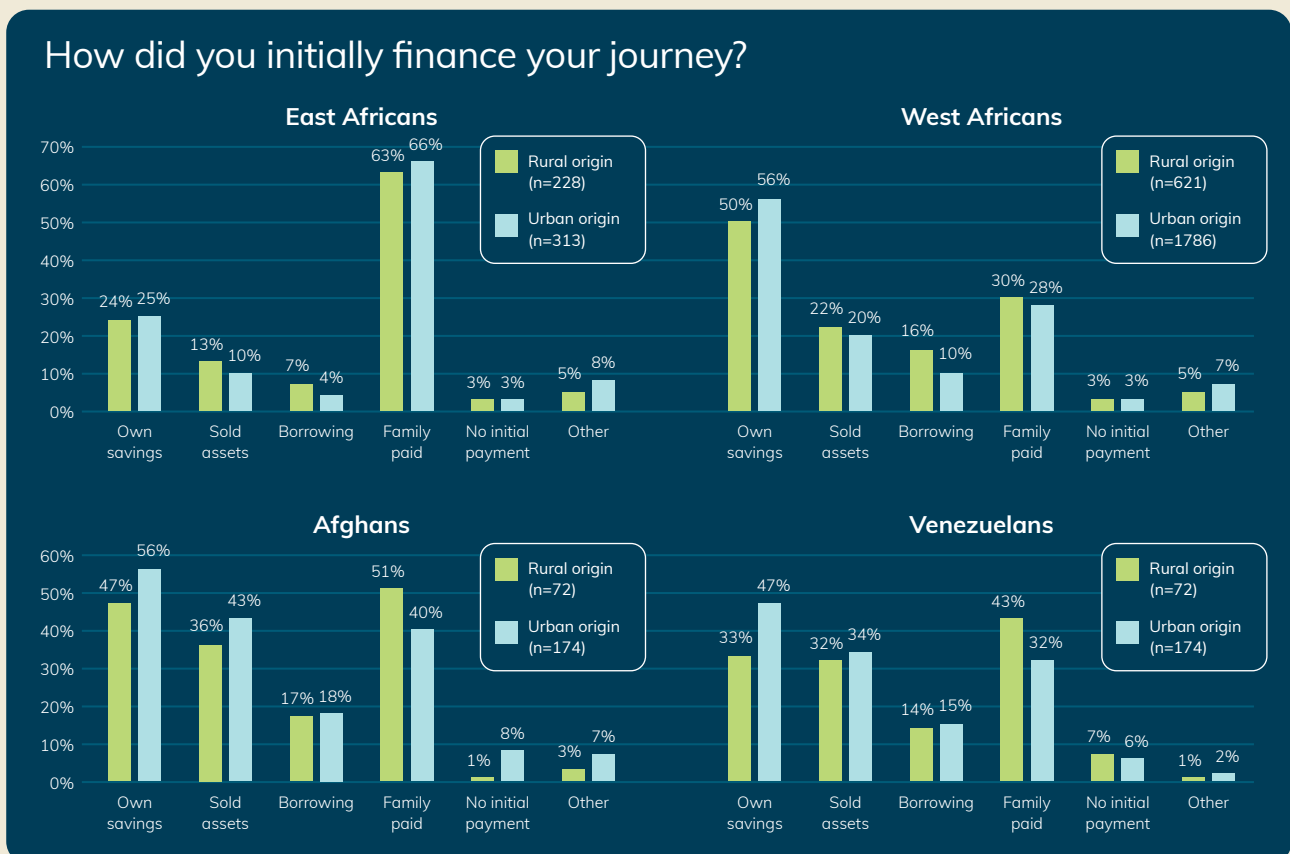


Do people leaving urban settings prepare their journey differently?

Accessing information: Respondents from urban areas more frequently reported obtaining information before they began their journey. The only exception was among respondents from East Africa.



Financing the journey: Respondents from urban areas were more likely to use their own funds, and less likely to use money from family to pay for their journey. This aligns with migration theory, and other findings in the data here, indicating that migration from rural areas is more of a family affair, and that cities can be where individuals accumulate the resources to finance international migration.



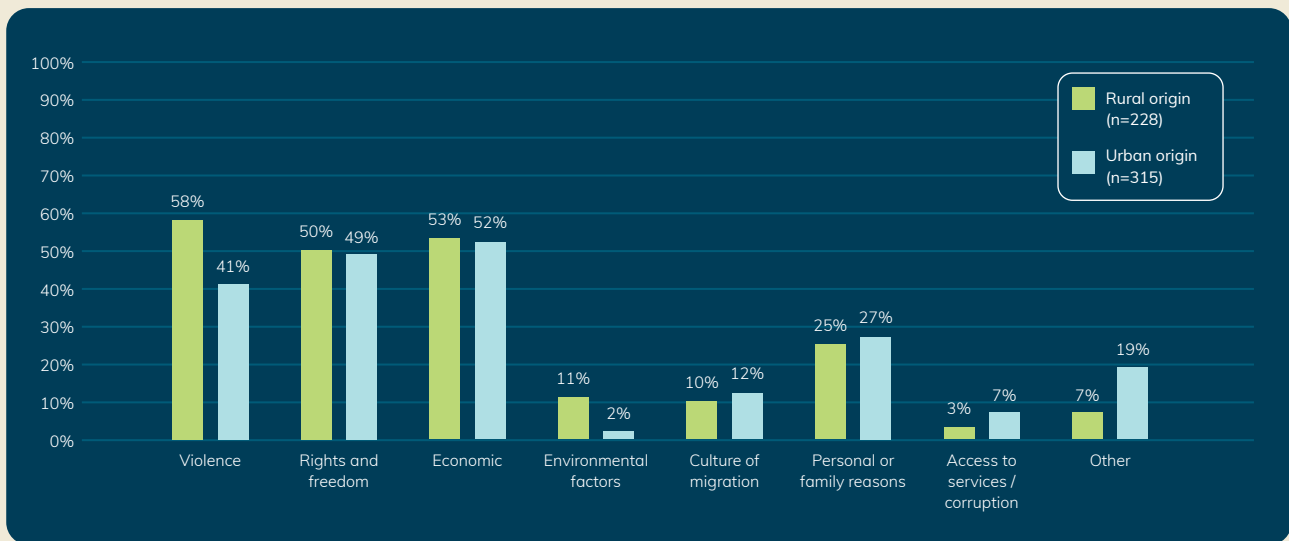
Note: Percentages for marital status, number of children, and access to information may not add up to precisely 100%, because of rounding. Full questions: "Did you obtain information about routes, destinations, costs, risks, etc. before your journey?"; "How did you initially finance your journey?" answer options for the financing question are not prompted and respondents can report more than one answer.

Do respondents leaving urban areas migrate for different reasons?

Respondents tend to give more than one reason for migrating, showing, among other things, that the search for livelihoods can underpin the decision-making of both refugees and migrants. When focusing on specific regions or countries of origin, some differences between those who left rural or urban areas become more salient.

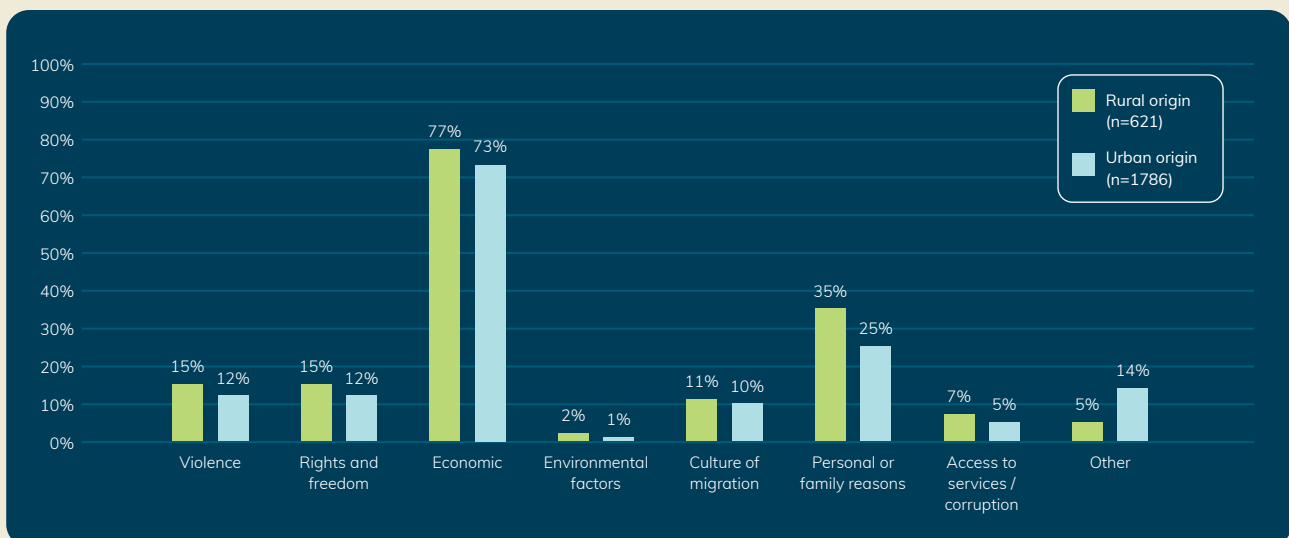
Among East Africans...

Respondents from urban settings were most likely to report economic reasons for leaving, followed by rights and freedoms. Respondents from rural areas more frequently reported violence, then economic reasons.



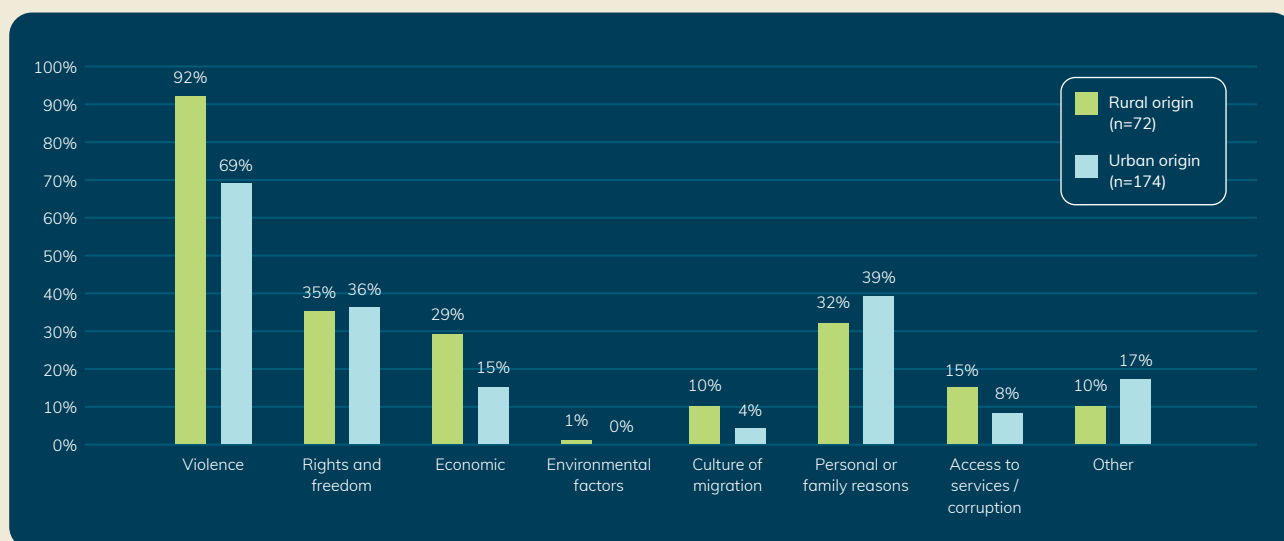
Among West Africans...

Economic and personal or family reasons were important drivers for both groups, but slightly more so among people from rural areas.



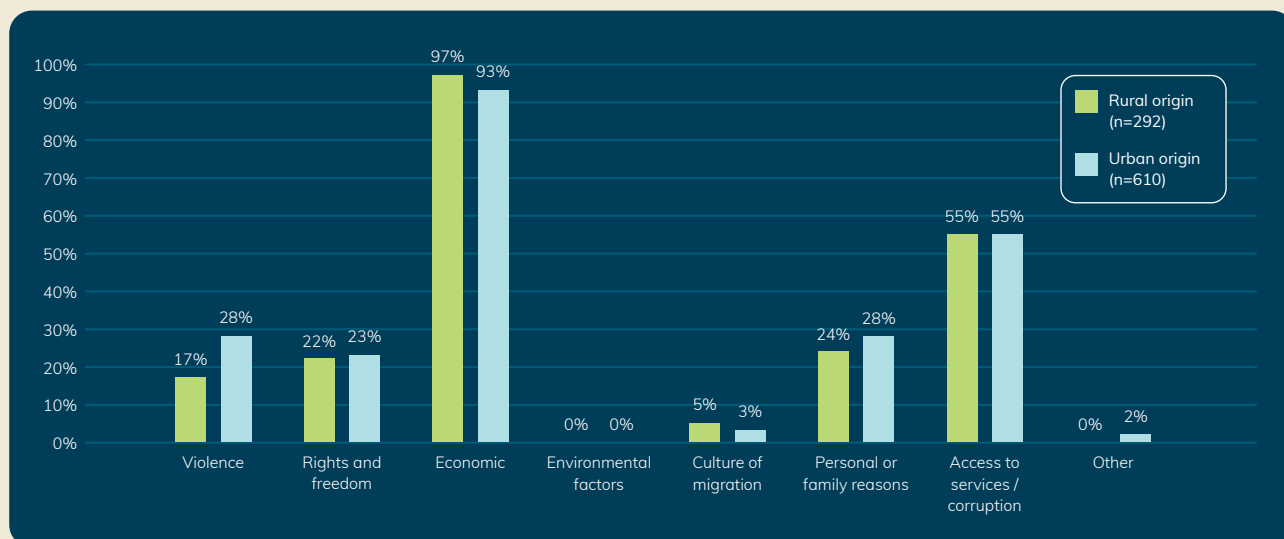
Among Afghans...

While the three most reported reasons are the same for all Afghan respondents, urban respondents more frequently reported personal and family reasons and rights and freedoms, and rural respondents much more frequently referred to violence (92%) and access to services.



Among Venezuelans...

Perhaps reflective of how the situation in Venezuela affects urban and rural populations alike, there are few differences between reasons for migration between urban versus rural respondents from Venezuela. The exception is violence as a driver of migration, which is notably more often reported among those from urban settings.



Was there another option?

Both in rural and urban contexts, respondents generally say they did not feel there were alternatives or other options to migrating, with little difference between the two groups, ranging from 67% to 84%.

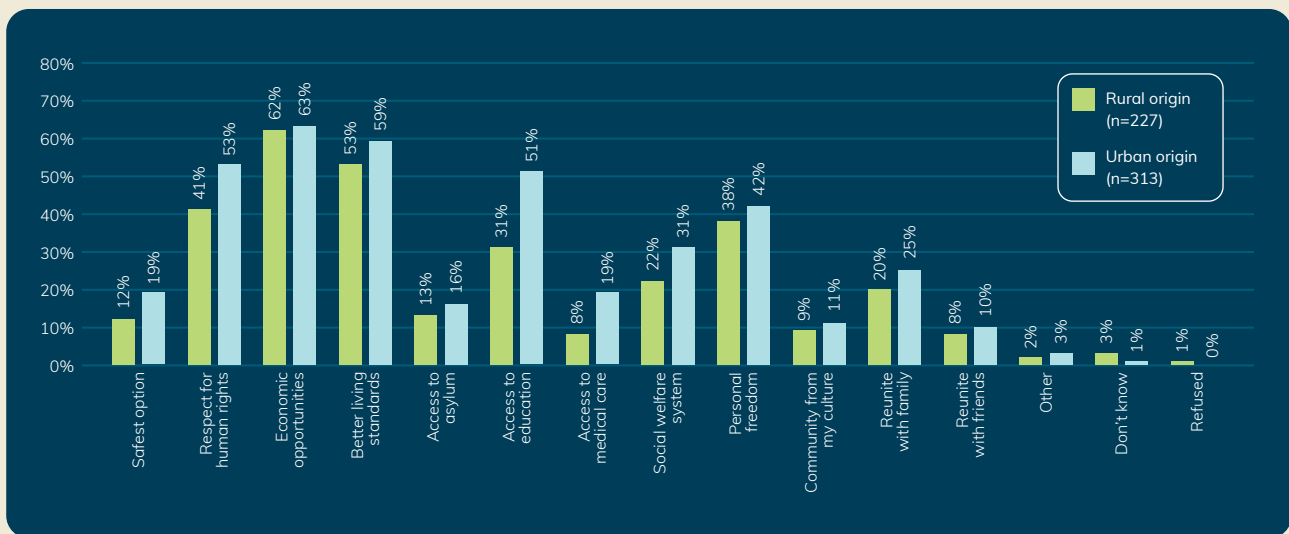
Note: full questions are "For what reasons did you leave?" (answer options are not prompted), and "Before you started your journey, did you think there were options for resolving the issues we just talked about within the country of departure?"

Do respondents leaving urban areas choose their destination for different reasons?

Access to education seems to play a greater role in choosing a destination among people leaving urban settings, who tend to be more highly educated and perhaps aspire even further.

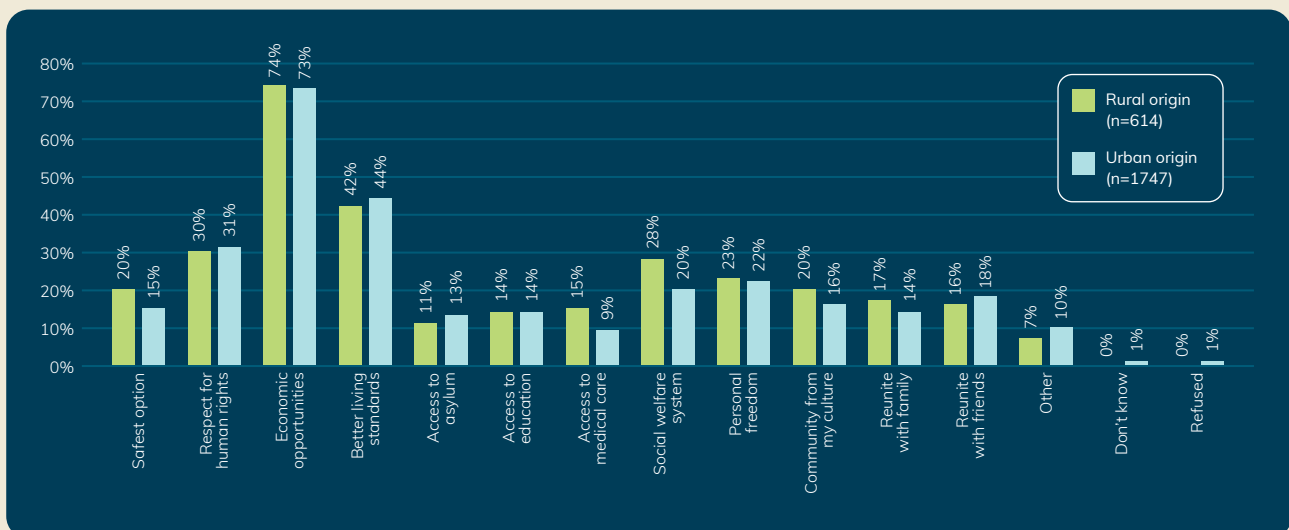
Among East Africans ...

Economic opportunities, living standards, and respect for human rights were the most common reasons for all respondents, although those from urban areas reported these reasons more frequently. This aligns with the motivations for leaving. Interestingly, access to education and medical care are more often indicated among urban respondents, where it could be expected these services are generally better in urban, compared to rural areas. For education, however, it is likely that the higher educational level of urban respondents (see page 101) creates further aspirations to achieve more.



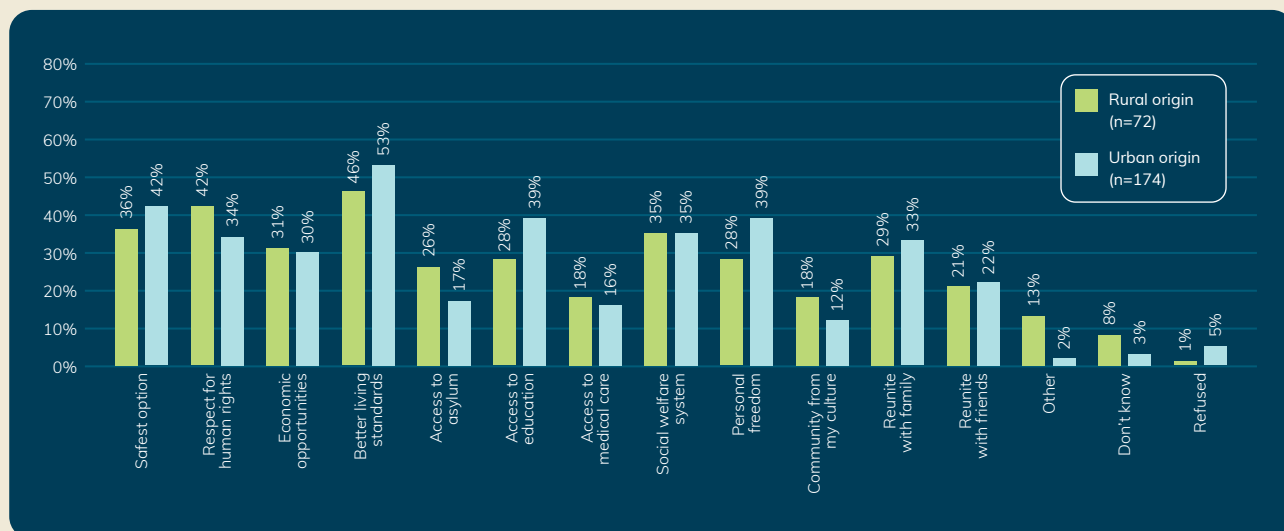
Among West Africans ...

Economic opportunities, living conditions, and respect for human rights were the top three answers for both groups of West African respondents. People from urban settings more frequently cited personal freedoms, and people from rural settings a good social welfare system.



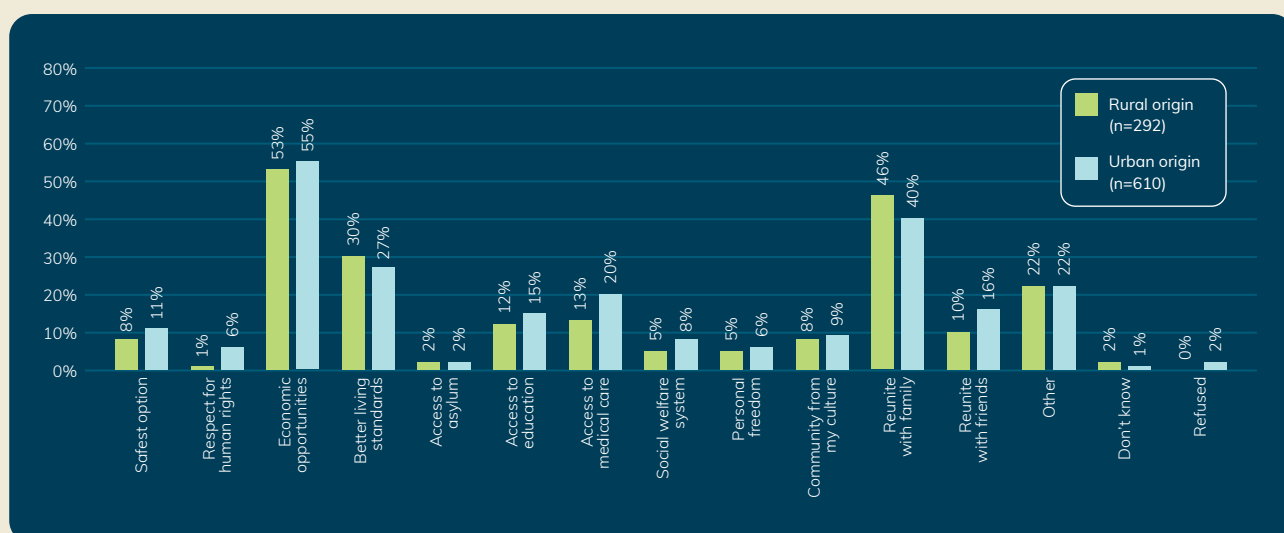
Among Afghans ...

People leaving urban settings more frequently reported better living conditions, personal freedoms, and safety as reasons for deciding on their destination, while rural respondents reported living conditions, human rights, and safety. Like in the other regions/countries of origin, those originating from urban areas – who already have a higher education profile – more often than those from rural areas choose their destination for better access to education.



Among Venezuelans...

Economic opportunities, living standards, and family reunification were the main reason for all Venezuelans for choosing their destination. While the differences between those from urban and rural areas are small, people from urban areas were more likely to talk about economic opportunities, access to health services, as well as reunification with friends, while people from rural areas more frequently reported living standards and family reunification.



Note: full question is "Why did you select this destination?" Answer options are not prompted.

Urban mixed migration hubs (1)

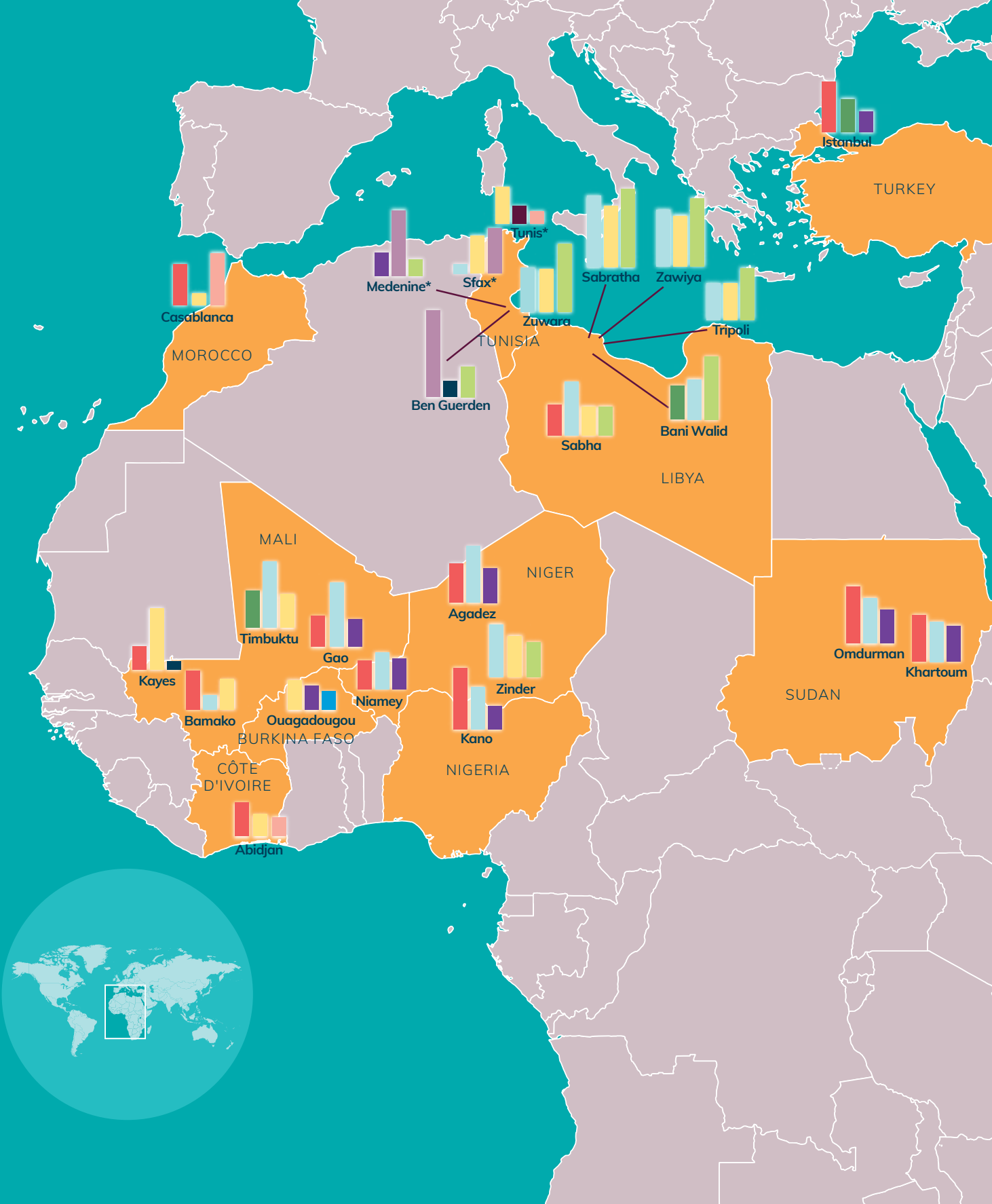
Why do refugees and migrants stop in cities?



This map shows the three most common reasons why respondents stopped in 31 cities on the mixed migration routes on which 4Mi is collecting data.

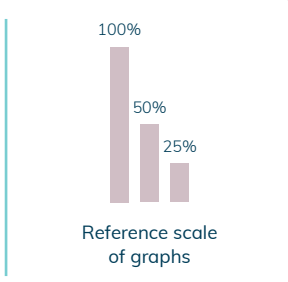
These are the cities on which 4Mi has most data: they are the cities (population over 50,000) where more than 100 respondents said they stopped, across the 27 countries through which more than 150 4Mi respondents transited. It does not mean that these are the most frequently transited cities on the route by the total migrant and refugee population. Cities of departure and cities of destination are not included. Respondents can report more than one reason per location. Unless stated otherwise, 1% or fewer refused to answer the question.

For more information on inclusion criteria and methodology, see pages 98-99.



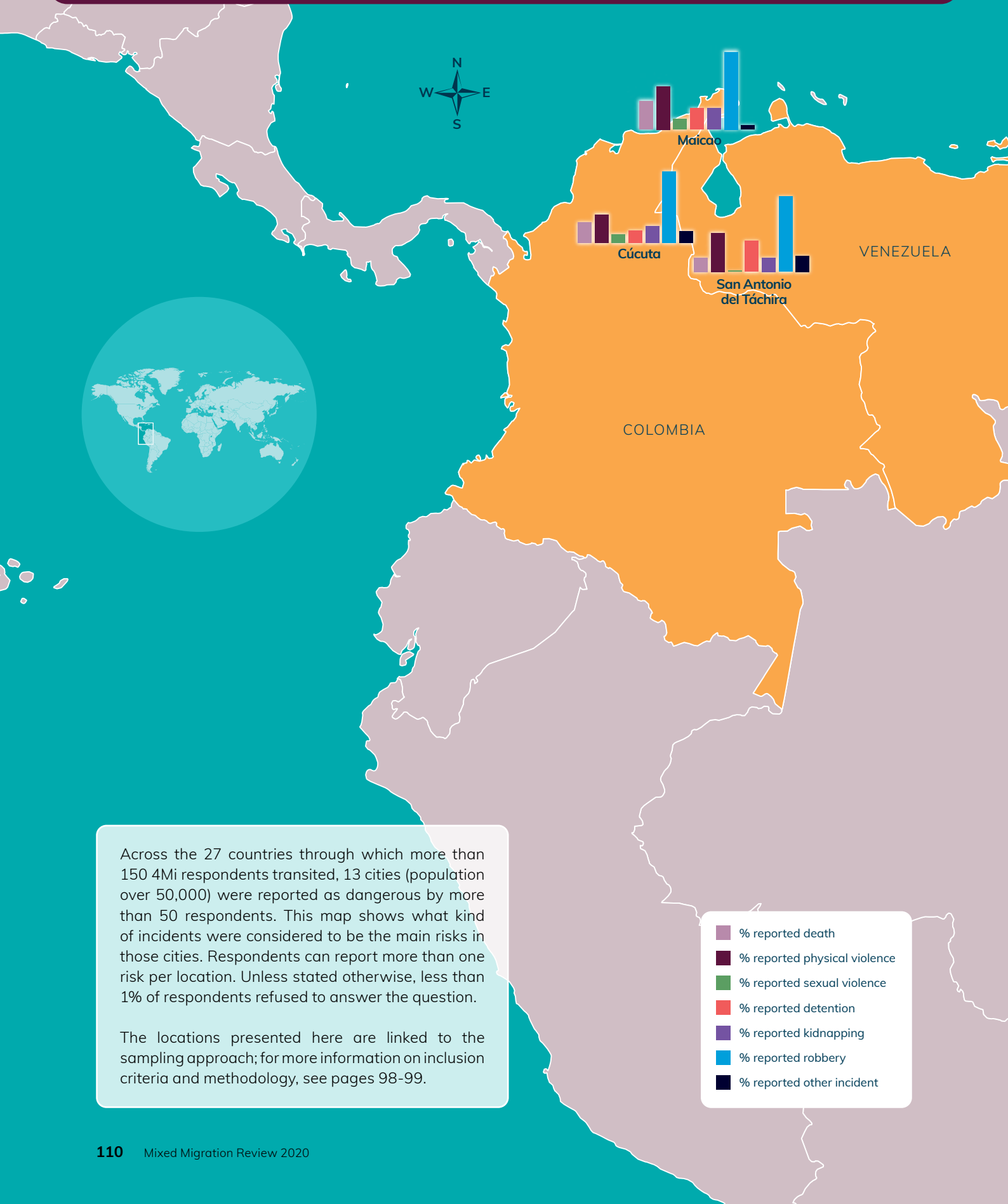
- Waiting for transport
- Waiting for money transfer
- Looking for smugglers
- Working
- Studying
- Resting
- Staying with friends/relatives
- Applying for asylum
- Onward journey blocked
- Detention
- Next steps undecided

*Refused to answer: 2% in Medenine, 2% in Sfax, 3% in Tunis.



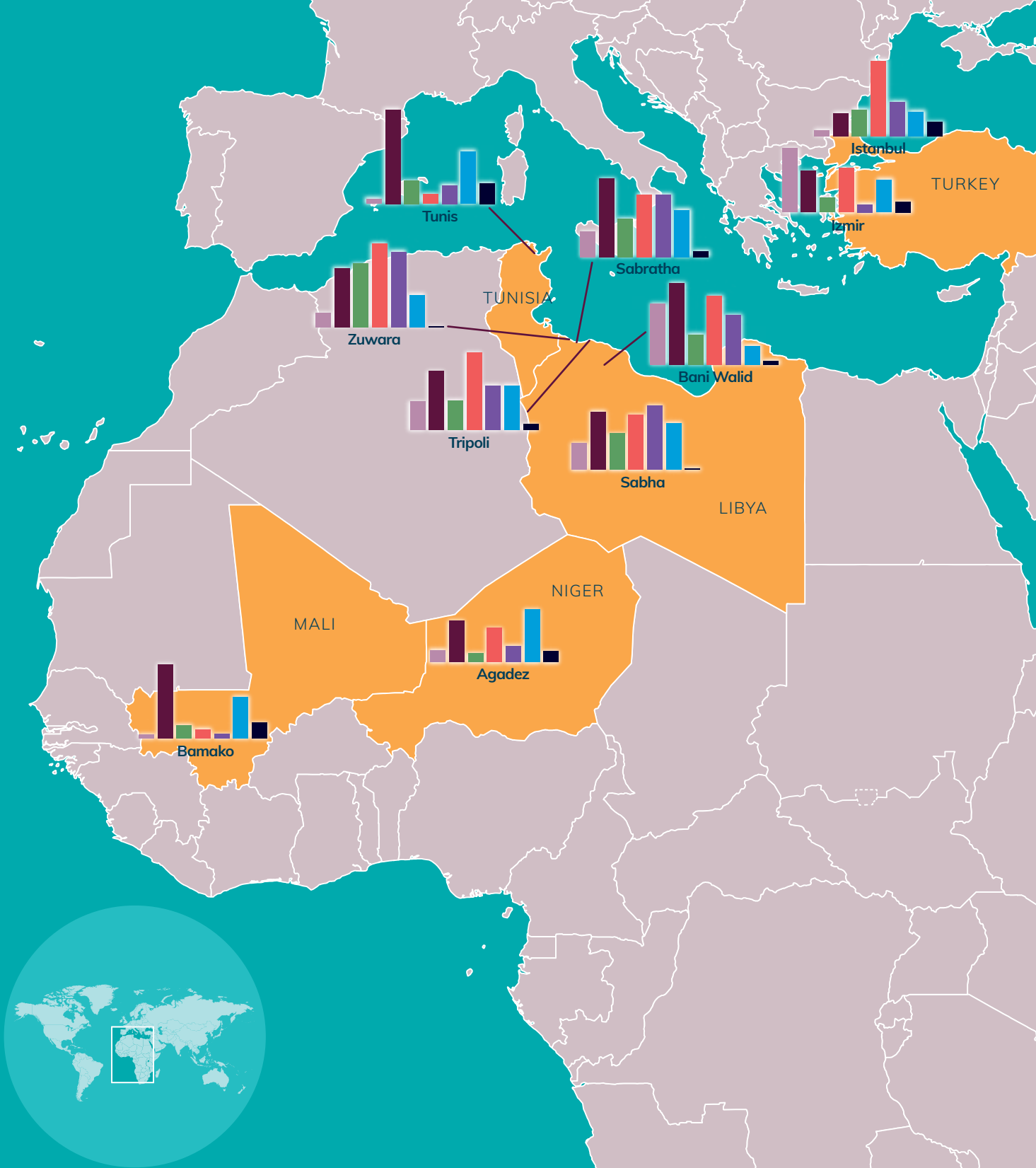
Urban mixed migration hubs (2)

Which cities are considered dangerous by refugees and migrants, and why?



Across the 27 countries through which more than 150 4Mi respondents transited, 13 cities (population over 50,000) were reported as dangerous by more than 50 respondents. This map shows what kind of incidents were considered to be the main risks in those cities. Respondents can report more than one risk per location. Unless stated otherwise, less than 1% of respondents refused to answer the question.

The locations presented here are linked to the sampling approach; for more information on inclusion criteria and methodology, see pages 98-99.



What were the main risks reported in that location?

City	Number of respondents	Death	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Detention	Kidnapping	Robbery	Other
Agadez	57	12%	42%	9%	35%	16%	54%	11%
Bamako	55	4%	75%	13%	9%	5%	42%	16%
Bani Walid	162	62%	83%	31%	70%	51%	19%	4%
Cúcuta	122	23%	32%	10%	14%	19%	81%	13%
Istanbul	52	6%	23%	27%	77%	35%	25%	15%
Izmir	66	65%	42%	15%	45%	8%	33%	11%
Maicao**	59	32%	49%	12%	24%	24%	88%	5%
Sabha	259	27%	59%	37%	56%	65%	47%	1%
Sabratha	88	26%	80%	39%	64%	64%	48%	6%
San Antonio del Táchira	68	16%	44%	1%	35%	16%	85%	18%
Tripoli	408	29%	60%	30%	79%	45%	45%	6%
Tunis*	131	5%	96%	24%	10%	19%	53%	21%
Zuwara**	98	15%	60%	65%	85%	77%	33%	1%

*The large proportion of 'other' answers most frequently relate to non-physical violence/ discrimination (25 out of 27 responses).

**3% of respondents in Maicao refused the question; 2% of respondents in Zuwara refused the question.

How has Covid-19 affected refugees and migrants in urban centres?

Covid-19 and measures to contain it have profoundly impacted mobility around the globe. As the virus spread, various publications discussed how it might disproportionately affect the lives of refugees and migrants. 4Mi suspended face-to-face data collection in March 2020, as the pandemic was declared, but immediately began preparations to gather data on how the pandemic was impacting on refugees and migrants. At the end of March, MMC launched a new survey focused on the impact of Covid-19 and started using new methods to recruit respondents remotely. Between March and July, our monitors conducted 5,897 interviews with refugees and migrants in 14 different countries across Africa, Latin America and Asia, gaining insights on everything from access to information about the virus to the impact of the crisis on income and access to asylum.*

The data presented here focuses on how the crisis affected refugees and migrants in eight major cities during those first months. This analysis is based on 1,688 interviews conducted between March and July 2020 (708 women and 978 men). These are the cities where we have a sample of at least 100 people.

Cities of interview for 4Mi's Covid-19 survey

	City	Country	Number of interviews
Latin America	Bogotá	Colombia	191
	Lima	Peru	190
West Africa	Gao	Mali	120
East Africa	Hargeisa	Somaliland	114
North Africa	Tripoli	Libya	501
	Tunis	Tunisia	301
Asia	Delhi	India	141
	Jakarta	Indonesia	130

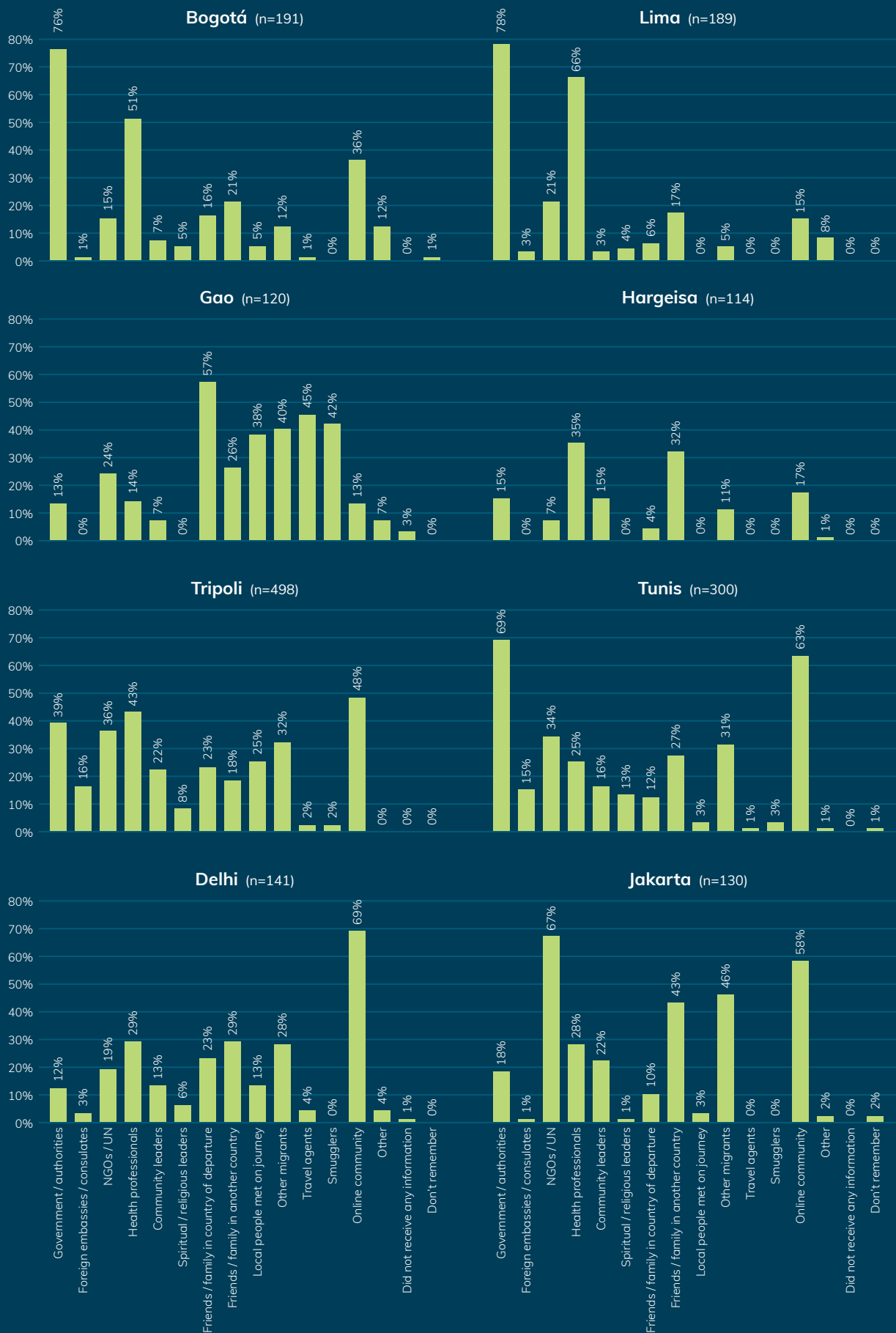
All respondents in Lima and Bogotá were Venezuelan, and all respondents in Jakarta and Delhi were Afghan. In Hargeisa, respondents were mainly Ethiopian (54%) or Yemeni (44%). Respondents in Gao came from 16 different West African states, while respondents in Tripoli and Tunis came from both West and East Africa. For more on methodology, see page 99.

Access to information seems quite high

In almost all cities, respondents reported accessing information from multiple sources. Sources varied according to city, however, with noticeably stronger access to information from government authorities among refugee and migrant respondents in Bogotá, Lima and Tunis. Health professionals are an important source in Bogotá, Lima and Tripoli. In Gao, which is traditionally more a city of transit, respondents more frequently mentioned personal and informal sources of information, such as friends and family or travel agents, and 3% said they had received no information. Hargeisa is notable as the city where respondents were likely to cite fewer sources of information – information is mainly from health professionals or friends or family. Respondents in Delhi, Jakarta, Tunis and Tripoli appear to be more connected technologically, with a high take-up of information from online networks.

*In July, we started to collect more data on how the crisis was affecting people's journeys, and broader mixed migration dynamics. Between July and October 2020 we conducted more than 6,200 surveys in 17 countries with this revised Covid-19 survey. For all our Covid-19-related analysis, see www.mixedmigration.org/resource-type/covid-19/

Who did you receive information on Covid-19 from?*



**Respondents can provide more than one answer.

Generally high take-up of common infection control measures

Only in Hargeisa was the take-up of infection control measures very low, with over half of respondents – 60 people – saying they were doing nothing. Most said it was because their living situation did not allow it (42) or they did not have access to the necessary materials (49). Only one person said they thought protection measures were unnecessary. In the other cities, most respondents said they were washing their hands, and two-thirds or more of respondents said they were wearing a mask, except in Gao, where only 17% reported wearing a mask. Staying at home was generally more frequently reported in those countries where the lockdown was reported to be more severe and last longer.

What are you doing to protect yourself against Covid-19?*



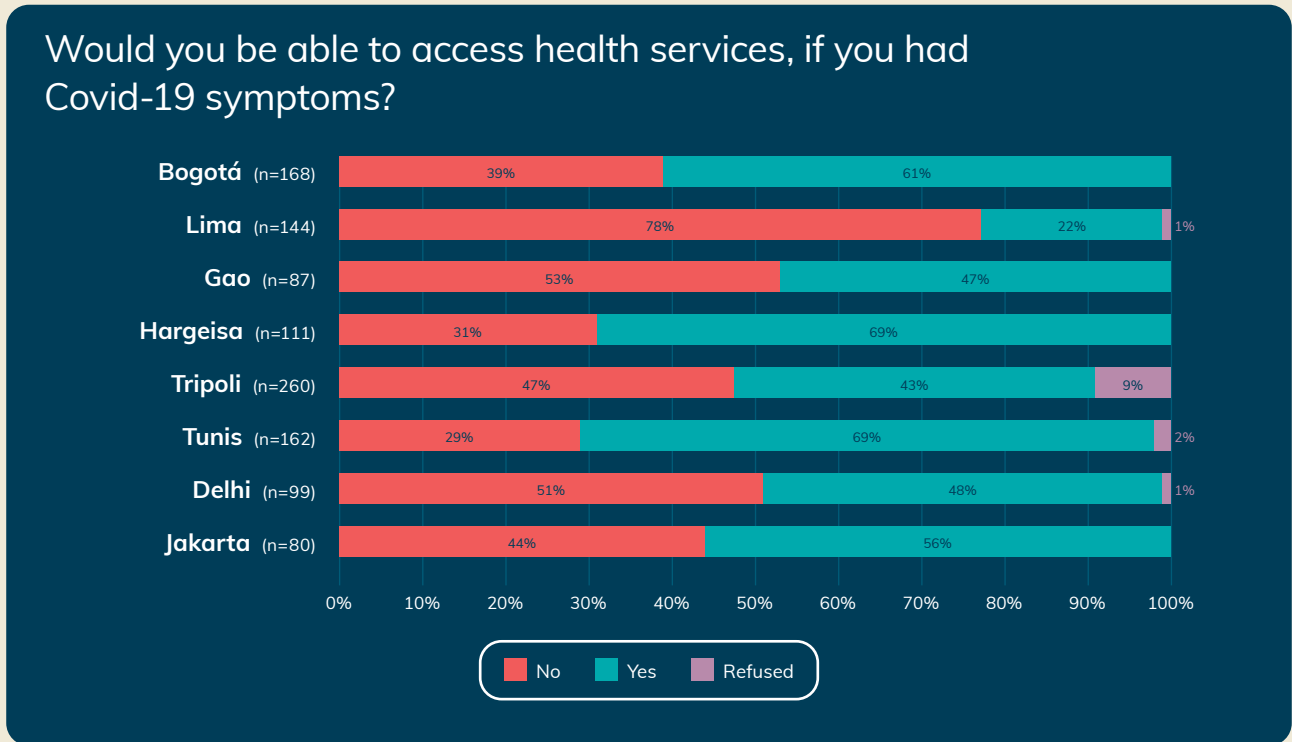
It was also more frequently reported in those cities where people were more likely to say they could maintain physical distancing at home: more than 90% said they could keep the distance in Lima and Bogotá, 85% in Delhi and 77% in Jakarta. In the same vein, people were least likely to say they were staying at home in Gao and Hargeisa, perhaps with reason: 86% of respondents in Gao said they could not keep 1.5m distance between each other at home, and 57% in Hargeisa. Additionally, both Gao and Hargeisa are generally transit cities, where respondents are less likely to have a home than in cities like Bogotá, Delhi, Jakarta and Lima.



*Respondents can provide more than one answer.

Barriers to healthcare vary widely

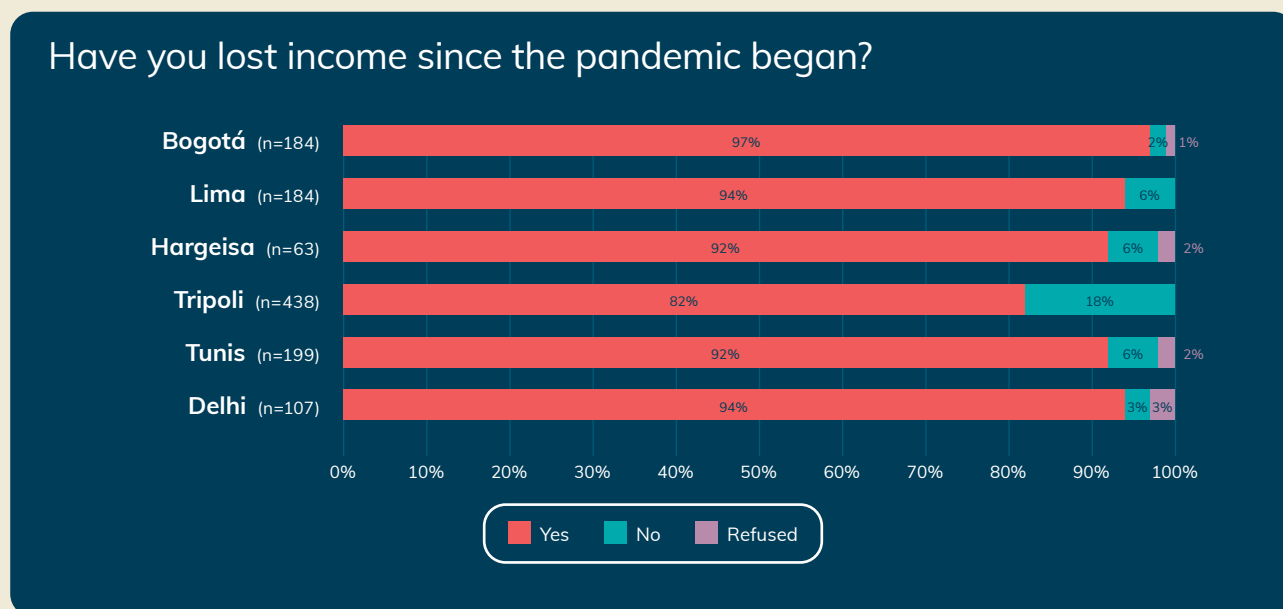
Perceived access to health services varies widely from city to city, and does not match access to other services from institutions, such as information. For example, 66% of respondents in Lima said they had received information from health professionals, but 78% said they would not be able to access health services for Covid-19. In Hargeisa, in contrast, access to information is relatively low but 69% say they have access to health services. A majority also said they had access to healthcare in Bogotá, Tunis, and Jakarta; in all other cities a majority say they do not.



The most frequent barrier to health services in almost all cities was cost, irrespective of perceived access. Discrimination was considered a barrier among 52% of respondents in Lima, 37% in Tunis and 28% in Tripoli. A large proportion of respondents in Bogotá were concerned about not having the right to access health services (56%). Not knowing where to go was a concern for a majority of respondents in Tripoli, Gao, and Delhi, which suggests that vital information is not always reaching refugees and migrants in cities.

The vast majority of respondents who were earning have lost income, with severe consequences

Income loss has been pervasive across cities, affecting almost all respondents who were earning an income. For most cities, fewer than 6% said they were continuing to work and earn as before. In Tripoli, the figure was 18%. In both Gao and Jakarta, a majority of respondents said they were not earning an income before the pandemic (for number, see the note below).



Note: The figures in the chart above are calculated after excluding those respondents who said they were not earning an income before the pandemic, and excludes Gao and Jakarta because the sample size was very small. Number of respondents who reported not earning an income before the pandemic: Bogotá 7; Lima 6; Gao 93; Hargeisa 51; Tripoli 62; Tunis 101; Delhi 34; Jakarta 112.

Income loss has had a severe material impact, with the majority of respondents in all six cities presented below saying they could not afford basic goods (ranging from 69%-98%). Over half of respondents in Lima and Bogotá, and almost half in Tripoli, said they could no longer pay remittances. Refugees and migrants in Tripoli and Tunis more frequently reported an impact on the journey than those elsewhere. Stress and anxiety were cited by a majority in Delhi, Lima, Bogotá and Tunis. Loss of housing is most frequently indicated in Bogotá, where it has indeed been reported that many Venezuelans were evicted as they could no longer afford the (sometimes daily) rent. The 'other' responses in Lima refer mainly to falling behind with the rent and being unable to pay other bills.

What impact has the loss of income had?

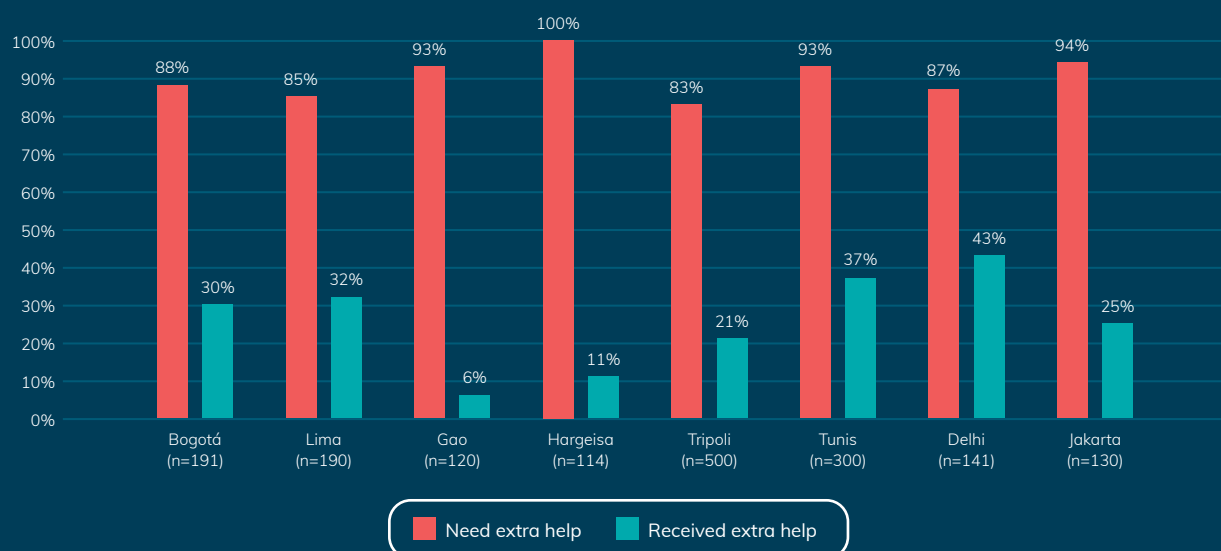


Note: This question is only asked of those who say they lost income, hence the small sample size in some cases. Gao and Jakarta are not included because the sample size is too small.

Assistance needs are very high and overall are not being met, although some are receiving more help than others

The need for extra help is above 83% in every city. Delhi is where the largest share of respondents report receiving assistance, at 43%, which is still only half of the proportion saying they need help. In Hargeisa and Gao, where 100% and 93% reported extra needs, respectively, only 11% and 6% report receiving any assistance.

Are you in need of extra help since the crisis began?



For most, migration intentions remain the same despite the challenges

The majority of respondents said they had not changed their travel plans. For those who had changed plans, people in Gao, Tunis and Tripoli were more likely to say they were stuck for the time being (25%, 24%, and 15%, respectively), and also that they had changed their route (17%, 14%, and 33%, respectively), reflecting that the cities have a highly mobile and transitory refugee and migrant population. Few expressed a decision to return, except for a notable 27% of Venezuelan respondents in Lima.

Photo credit: Pecold / Shutterstock. Kampala, Uganda

Sometimes overlooked in international analysis, south to south international and internal migration is far more numerous than south to north. Major magnets include Johannesburg, Nairobi, Lagos and Cairo and many others. In a smaller way, Kampala, is one such centre in East Africa, with far more than half of its 3.3 million population consisting of internal migrants – rising at 5 percent per year. It also attracts international migrants and offers refuge to over 80,000 urban refugees from different countries. Somali refugees, in particular, find it offers safer refuge than Nairobi, since the Kenyan police and government have blamed the Somali community for terror attacks in Kenya, as they did between 2015-2018.



Photo credit: Mark Hanley / Panos. Hong Kong, China

Young Indonesian Muslim migrant workers in Hong Kong (working as housemaids) often gather in Victoria Park in Causeway Bay on their days off. For many people migrant work can be affirming, empowering and exciting. Despite stories of abuse and exploitation, millions of overseas workers find regular labour migration an important channel for personal and professional development, financial accumulation and important support of their families through remittances. Irregular migrants are a small fraction of international migration globally (over 270 million) but often dominate the headlines and fractious policy debate around migration.



Section 3

Urban mixed migration

How cities are on the frontlines of human mobility and mixed migration.

This section dives deep into the wide range of issues that relate to migrants, refugees and cities. Using interviews with expert commentators and essays on key issues this section explores what refugees and migrants can expect to face when they come to cities. Whether it be exposure to crime, climate change, viruses, poverty, exclusion or discrimination the journey of newly arrived refugees or migrants in 'arrival cities' is not an easy one, but cities can also offer many benefits to refugees and migrants, and vice versa, and play a pivotal role in shaping people's migration experiences and journeys.

Frontline cities – the urban reality of mixed migration

The rapid growth of urban migrant and refugee populations across the world

By Chris Horwood¹

International migration is irreversible and predominantly an urban affair. International regular labour migrants as well as asylum seekers, refugees, and irregular migrants flock to cities all over the world. An even greater number of internal migrants do the same. Migration is thought to contribute to around half of urban population growth in Asia and Africa, and up to 80 percent in China and Thailand.² “Human mobility is the signature of the urban era we live in, which makes understanding the impact of migration so important.”³

Cities as concentrations of talent, investment, culture and close-living consumers can transform dreams and hopes into reality by offering work, security, refuge, health facilities, education and training services, and community. As places where newcomers settle or just pass through, cities offer both opportunities and risks to refugees and migrants; equally refugees and migrants can be both beneficial and burdensome for cities.

Cities are therefore on the frontline of a longstanding transition towards multi-culturalism and diversity that some argue is essential for the success of the 21st century metropolis.

City growth entwined with mobility

The history and life of cities has always been entwined with mobility. Whether internal or international, forcibly displaced or traveling voluntarily, people on the move have always been urbanisation’s driving force. And urbanisation has been the dominant trend of human society in modern times.

The staggering 100-year rise from 750 million city dwellers in 1950 to an expected 6.7 billion in 2050, means that overwhelmingly cities have been and will continue to be the main locus of human organisation and activity.⁴ With migrants contributing to a significant proportion

of urban growth, it is increasingly municipal authorities who take the lead in managing migration in their urban planning and implementation. This introductory essay provides an overview of the situation and highlights the most salient opportunities and challenges faced by both those in mixed migration flows—who are increasingly drawn to, and find themselves living in, these “arrival cities”—and the authorities that manage them.⁵

The unfinished trajectory

Globally, urbanisation is on an unfinished trajectory, one that describes the huge human transition from countryside to city that has been spurred by shifts away from employment in agriculture everywhere.⁶ The rapid diversification of the global economy set in motion by the First Industrial Revolution that began in the middle of the 18th century, with the introduction of factories, mass production, and rising wages, continues today through what has been termed the Fourth Industrial Revolution: the growth of mobile supercomputing, machine learning, intelligent robots and other “new technologies that are fusing the physical, digital and biological worlds, impacting all disciplines, economies and industries.”⁷ With less than a tenth of the global population living in urban centres in 1800, the transition gathered pace in the 20th century with this proportion rising to 30 percent in 1950, to 55 percent in 2018, and is projected to become 68 percent by 2050.⁸

The watershed year of 2007 was the first time more people lived in urban centres than in rural areas. But behind these global proportions and averages, individual nations and regions have their own stories, moving at different speeds and are expected to peak—if they have not already—at different times. Brazil, for example, charged forward from being 10 percent urban in 1900 to 80 percent urban in 2000. Some 90 percent of urbanisation in the next 30 years is expected to take place in Asia and Africa, while

1 Chris Horwood is a migration specialist and director at [Ravenstone Consult](#).

2 Hennesay, G. (2019) [Why we need better data on mobile populations in cities – and how to get it](#). ODI

3 The quote is from former Cities of Migration lead Kim Turner, excerpted from: Ryerson CBI (2017) [Kim Turner On Global Inclusion And Urban Prosperity](#). An interview with Turner appears on page 196 of this Annual Review.

4 UN DESA (undated web portal) [World Urbanization Prospects 2018](#)

5 The term is taken from: Saunders, D. (2011) *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping Our World*. London: William Heineman.

6 Satterthwaite, D. et al. (2010) [Urbanization and its implications for food and farming](#). The Royal Society.

7 World Economic Forum (undated) [The Fourth Industrial Revolution, by Klaus Schwab](#)

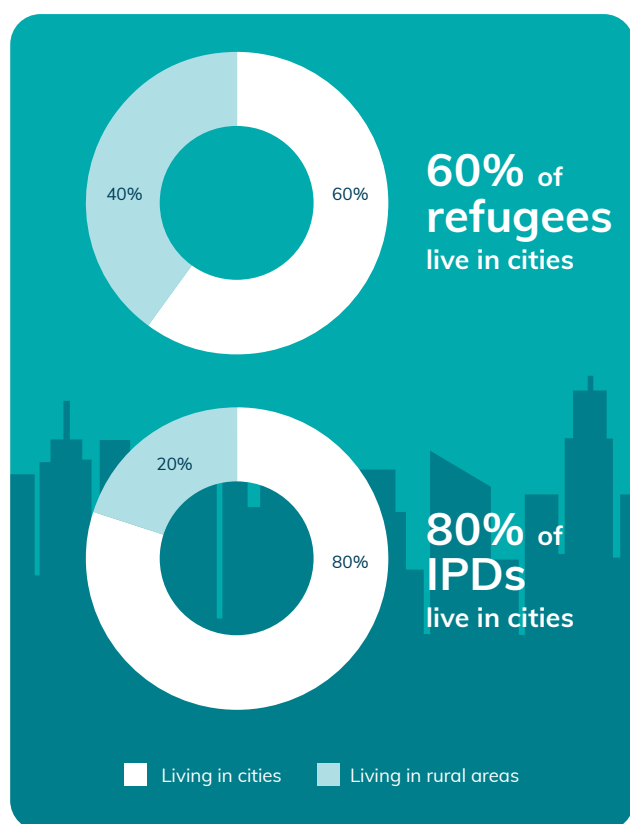
8 UN DESA (undated web portal) [World Urbanization Prospects 2018](#)

in other regions that urbanised earlier, some cities are experiencing population decline.⁹ In some cases, such as London and New York, population levels are only being maintained or re-stocked by international migration.

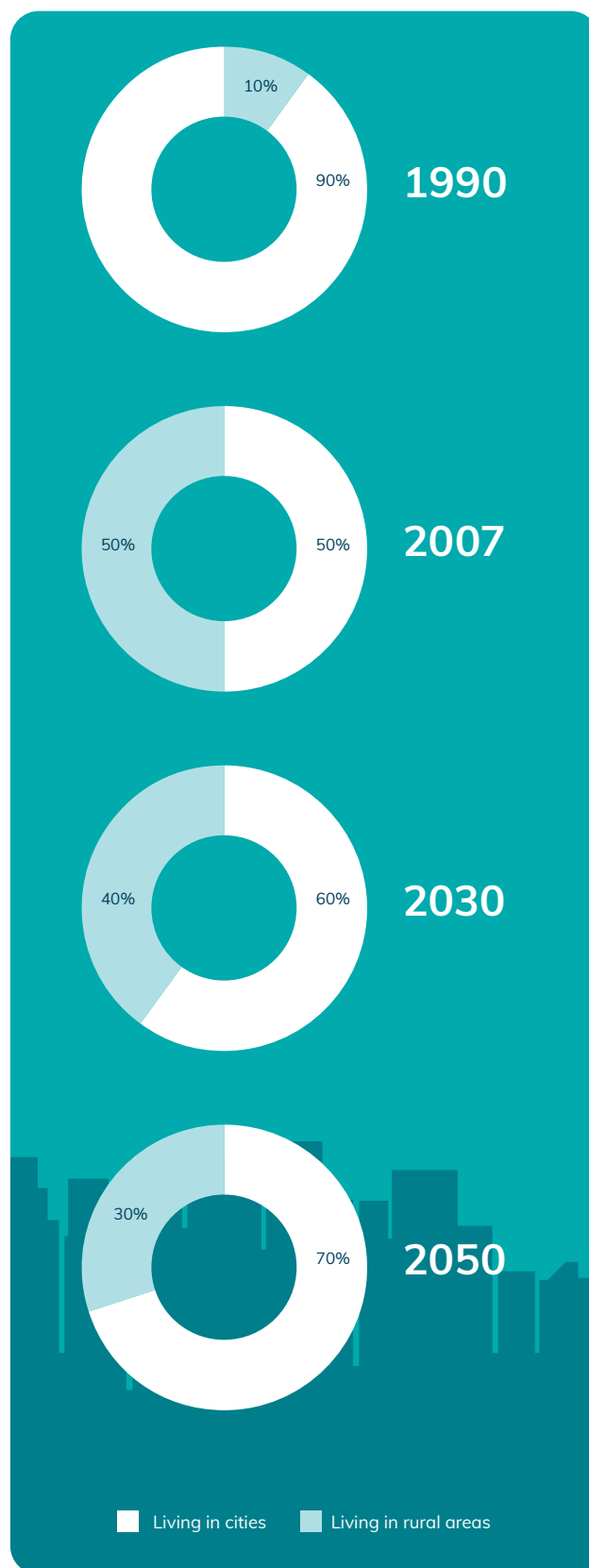
The UN calculates that today the most urbanised regions include North America (with 82% of its population living in cities in 2018), Latin America and the Caribbean (81%), Europe (74%) and Oceania (68%). The level of urbanisation in Asia is now approximating 50 percent, while Africa remains mostly rural, with 43 percent of its population living in urban areas.¹⁰

According to UN projections, by 2030, the world will have 43 megacities with more than 10 million inhabitants, most of them in developing regions. But some of the fastest-growing urban agglomerations are cities with fewer than 1 million inhabitants, many of them located in Asia and Africa. “While one in eight people live in 33 megacities worldwide, close to half of the world’s urban dwellers reside in much smaller settlements with fewer than 500,000 inhabitants.”¹¹ Urbanisation and migration are two interrelated processes. Urbanisation, defined as the increasing proportion of a population living in urban areas, usually involves some form of migration, whether internal or international.¹²

Refugees and internally displaced populations (IDPs) living in cities



Urban and rural population of the world, 1990-2050



Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *Global Migration: Resilient Cities at the Forefront*. (2017)

9 Ibid.

10 UN DESA (2018) [68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN](#).

11 UN DESA (2018) [2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects](#). Population Division.

12 UNESCO (2016) [Cities Welcoming Refugees and Migrants](#). Inclusive and Sustainable CITIES series.

City “fever”

Not all cities are established organically over hundreds of years; some are created quickly and grow rapidly following deliberate plans, the emergence of new workforce-hungry industries, special opportunities, or particular historic events. Some speculate we are in the midst of a new city “fever”.¹³ In Egypt, in addition to 22 existing or nearly completed new cities, plans to build another 19 were announced in 2019.¹⁴ Hundreds of new cities that sprang up in China in recent decades were mostly built, and subsequently populated by, migrants. “Some of these manufactured cities have been extraordinary successes. Shenzhen rose from a rice paddy into one of the world’s most dynamic metropolises—its economy is the size of South Korea’s—in just three or four decades.”¹⁵ India, anticipating and encouraging huge migration from villages to cities, embarked on the “world’s most ambitious planned urbanization programme” in 2015, with the Smart Cities Mission to build the next generation of Indian cities.¹⁶ Successful urban concentration of economic, cultural, and human capital attracts more migrants, from both the countryside and abroad.

City formation and growth has always depended on the influx of people. These are mostly internal migrants coming suddenly into big cities from rural areas, or, in a process called “step migration,” moving through urban hierarchies from smaller towns to larger ones and then to cities. Many others arrive from abroad, practicing circular migration or more commonly chain migration.

Concentrations count

International migrants and refugees comprise only a small proportion of the 4.2 billion people now living in cities across the world. The number of international migrants globally reached an estimated 272 million in 2019, an increase of 51 million since 2010. Currently, international migrants comprise 3.5 percent of the global population.¹⁷ Data from 2019 indicates that global displacement has reached an estimated 79.5 million people, of which 26 million are registered refugees and the rest internally displaced people.¹⁸

Most international migrants and those arriving irregularly live and work in cities, as do refugees and asylum seekers. Contrary to widespread perception, the dominance of the refugee camp is reducing as millions of refugees choose cities. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), “over half of the world’s refugees now live in the slums of some of the world’s biggest cities such as Bangkok in Thailand, Amman in Jordan, and Nairobi in Kenya.”¹⁹ In recent movements from Venezuela, the vast majority of refugees have ended up in towns and cities of Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Peru, and Ecuador. The city is the new de facto refugee camp. With nearly all migrants—internal and international—heading for cities, and a (growing) majority of the world’s population living in urban areas, migration to cities can’t be ignored, but can it be counted?

The proportion of foreign-born residents in major cities has been growing rapidly in recent decades. It is not uncommon for many so-called “world” or “global” cities to have at least a quarter or well over a third of their residents from overseas.²⁰ Migrants tend to be concentrated more in global cities than other parts of a country, contributing sometimes to distorted perspectives of the proportion of migrants in a country and influencing political views.²¹ On average across the world, it is estimated that around 20 percent of all foreign-born residents are concentrated in a relatively small number of “global” cities, which in some countries attract the lion’s share of the national total. For example, in 2015, of Canada’s 6.8 million foreign-born population, 46 percent lived in Toronto; 38 percent of the United Kingdom’s foreign-born population lived in London; and 28 percent of Australia’s 6.6 million people born overseas were concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne.²²

Figure 1 below illustrates the proportions of foreign-born residents in 19 of the world’s major cities, nine of them in Europe.²³ The difficulty of tracking new arrivals and people on the move (as described below), coupled with the large numbers of irregular and “hidden” migrants and asylum seekers, means that these figures may well be underestimates.

13 Voce, A & Van Mead, N. (2019) [Cities from scratch](#). The Guardian

14 Keeton, R & Provoost, M. (2019) [New cities in the sand: inside Egypt’s dream to conquer the desert](#). The Guardian.

15 Mações, B. (2019) [The City in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction](#). City Journal.

16 Puri, H. (2019) [How India is building cities of the future](#). The Economic Times.

17 UN DESA (2019) [The number of international migrants reaches 272 million, continuing an upward trend in all world regions, says UN](#).

18 UN News (2020) [UN refugee chief laments nearly 80 million people forcibly displaced](#).

19 IRC (2019) [Urban Refugees](#). International Rescue Committee.

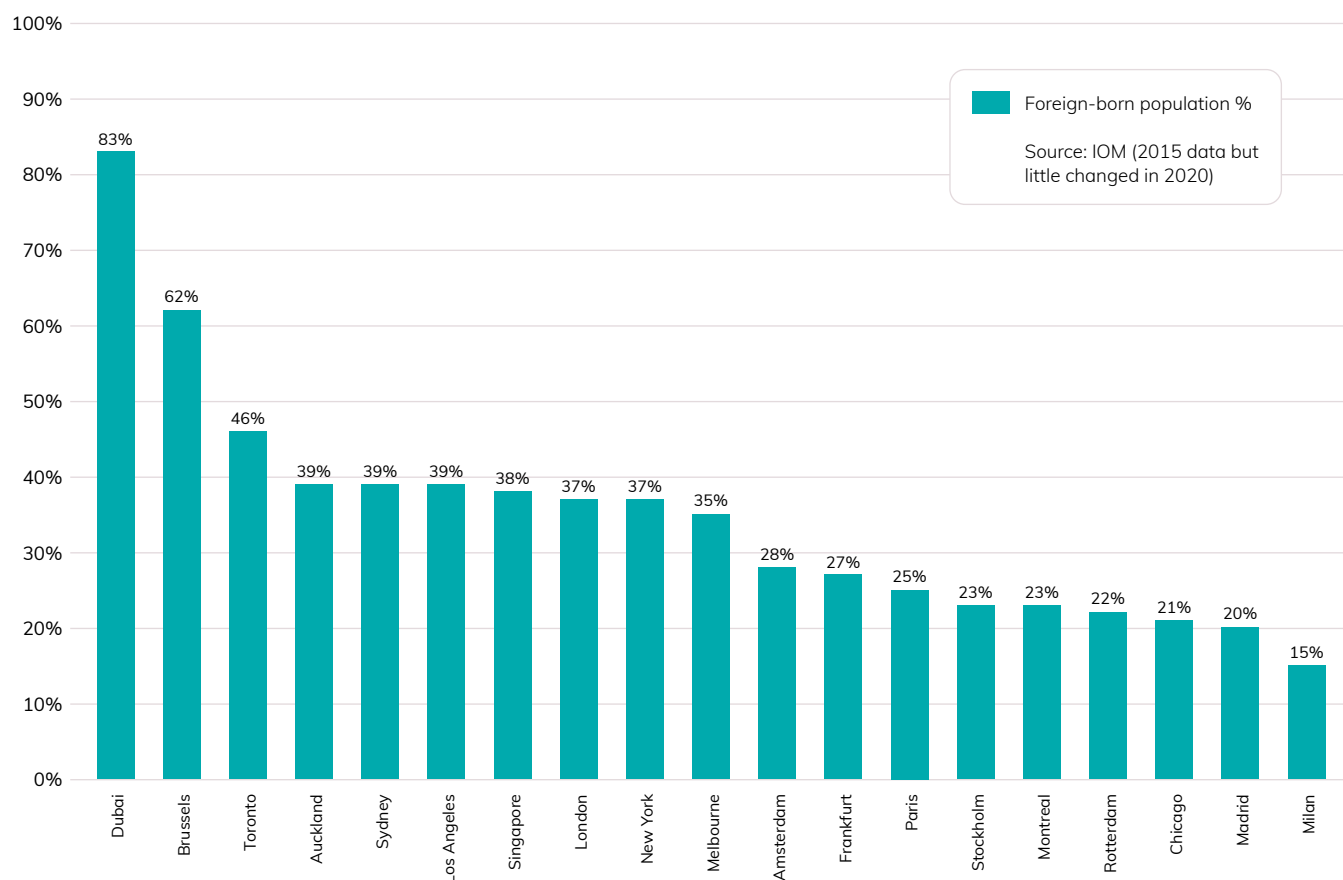
20 A global city, also called a power city, world city, alpha city or world centre, is a city that is a primary node in the global economic network. The concept comes from geography and urban studies, and the idea that globalization is created and furthered in strategic geographic locales according to a hierarchy in the operation of the global system of finance and trade. Not surprisingly these cities attract migrants and refugees.

21 Although intolerance of multiculturalism, diversity and migrants is more associated with communities with low or no migrant presence rather than cosmopolitan cities.

22 IOM (2015) [World Migration Report 2015 - Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage Mobility](#)

23 Ibid

Foreign-born population in major cities as share of total city population



Embedded but invisible

Nearly half of all international migrants are known to reside in 10 highly urbanised, high-income countries.²⁴ Establishing detailed data of urban populations can be challenging, let alone data concerning regular and irregular migrants. One of the problems is the speed of growth and the velocity of change. “Even basic data about urban populations are lacking in many of the fastest growing cities of the world. Existing methods for gathering vital information, including censuses and sample surveys, have critical limitations in urban areas experiencing rapid change.”²⁵ This is particularly true of “hidden populations” in cities missed by traditional approaches.²⁶

Existing data collection methods struggle to generate representative data on mobile populations arriving

in cities and on mobility within cities.²⁷ Population censuses tend to be infrequent and, being conducted at households, generally only enumerate people who are formally registered as permanent residents, thereby excluding temporary or undocumented migrants, and often overlooking those living in informal settlements, unmapped locations, or places where enumerators don’t feel safe. Where urban growth is very rapid, by the time census results are published, their data might be out of date.²⁸ Moreover, “undocumented migrants may try to conceal their identity for fear of detection by the authorities, or they may be unreachable during the day as they tend to work long hours and are not at home when enumerators call.”²⁹ The result is that despite being increasingly embedded in cities across the world, those in mixed migratory movements—including asylum seekers and refugees—are often invisible, which has serious

24 UNESCO (2016) op cit. In descending order of migrant population size these are: the United States, Germany, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, the UK, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, France, Australia and Spain.

25 The quote is excerpted from the abstract of the University of Bristol/UK Research and Innovation project, [Quantifying Cities for Sustainable Development: Transforming urban data collection to support research and policy making in developing countries](#).

26 See: Connor, P. & Passel, J. (2019) [Europe’s Unauthorized Immigrant Population Peaks in 2016, Then Levels Off](#). Pew Research Center. Based on European data sources this analysis estimates that at least 3.9 million unauthorized immigrants—and possibly as many as 4.8 million—lived in Europe in 2017. Pew’s methodology, it should be noted, has been contested by [some](#).

27 Hennesay, G. (2019) op cit.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

implications for city planning and service provision, let alone protection of the most vulnerable.

Heterogeneity dominates

What migrants and refugees find when they arrive in cities and urban centres is highly varied, reflecting the myriad urban situations that receive those on the move. Cities' responses and level of attention they pay to these newcomers is highly heterogeneous. A random selection drawn from the virtually endless list of migration experiences might include any of the following:

- A Rohingya refugee who left Bangladeshi camps to try his chances with some kinsmen in India, living precariously under the radar of an unwelcoming host government.
- A Nepali labour migrant working in Dubai in intense heat and living in a dormitory, enjoying few if any rights or legal protections, but benefiting from a previously unobtainable salary.
- A Venezuelan family arriving in Bogotá, Colombia, housed by the city with many others and given minimum support from international and national organisations. Their children attend school while parents look for work.
- A Chinese internal migrant who, along with millions of others, is given permission to leave a remote rural area to work in a factory in a new city where rental prices and food costs are high, working hours long, and legal status and access to services uncertain.
- A Nigerian car mechanic, rescued on the Mediterranean and now selling watches in Italian cities, already sending money home and sharing a room in a disused building with many others.
- A Senegalese asylum seeker in Valletta, Malta working as a day-labourer with a family construction company while he waits for the results of his asylum claim.
- Two Somali brothers running a small kiosk in a South African township, fearful of anti-foreigner attacks while trying to organise a smuggler to bring their young wives and children from Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya to join them.
- A Syrian family living in Germany, the wife a physiotherapist who easily found employment, the ex-policeman husband retrained as a metalworker. After intensive language classes both speak German and help out at the local primary school in their free time.

- A Mexican couple who reached the United States but who have no papers. They live in a low-quality one-bedroom flat. He works in the orchards of California, she as a maid in a coastal town and is pregnant. She can use the local hospital and later the schools will admit their child.

The immediate needs and concerns of new arrivals centre around what kind of shelter, employment and working conditions they find, whether they have protected or supported status in the municipality they find themselves in, and the extent to which their families enjoy access to health services, education, psychosocial support and protection and so forth. These needs are common to all those travelling in a precarious or irregular manner across borders, and to those staying weeks, months, or years in a transit or destination city.

Labour migrants moving with a pre-agreed contract and through government or private employment programmes, as well as refugees benefiting from assisted resettlement or return packages, may reckon on more organised and structured assistance, but the many others will have to discover and negotiate for themselves what help exists in their new location. One study surveying major European cities in 2016 found that consistently, “the major challenges reported by cities and local governments regarding refugees’ and migrants’ arrivals are housing, education and employment.”³⁰ Various essays in this Annual Review, including “First Responders...” (page 200) will delve deeper into these challenges.

Security cannot be guaranteed

The reception new arrivals face in cities ranges from hostile and dangerous to welcoming and supportive. Migrants may find they have been driven to migrate, in part, by environmental issues such as the impact of climate change, only to find the cities they arrive at also face or will face similar threats. Equally, people may flee violence, persecution and insecurity to encounter dangerous environments in cities where levels of crime—including violent crime such as homicide—are high and where they may become victims of sexual violence and/or assault and robbery. In some cases, they may become embroiled in crime themselves, joining gangs or resorting to theft to survive or cope. Additionally, migrants and refugees can fall prey to sexual and labour trafficking and exploitation, risks that can be as real in cities of the global North as they are in those of the South. These risks are explored in two essays, “Risky cities, mean streets” (on page 178) and “Climate exposure – the complex interplay between cities, climate change and mixed migration” (page 190).³¹

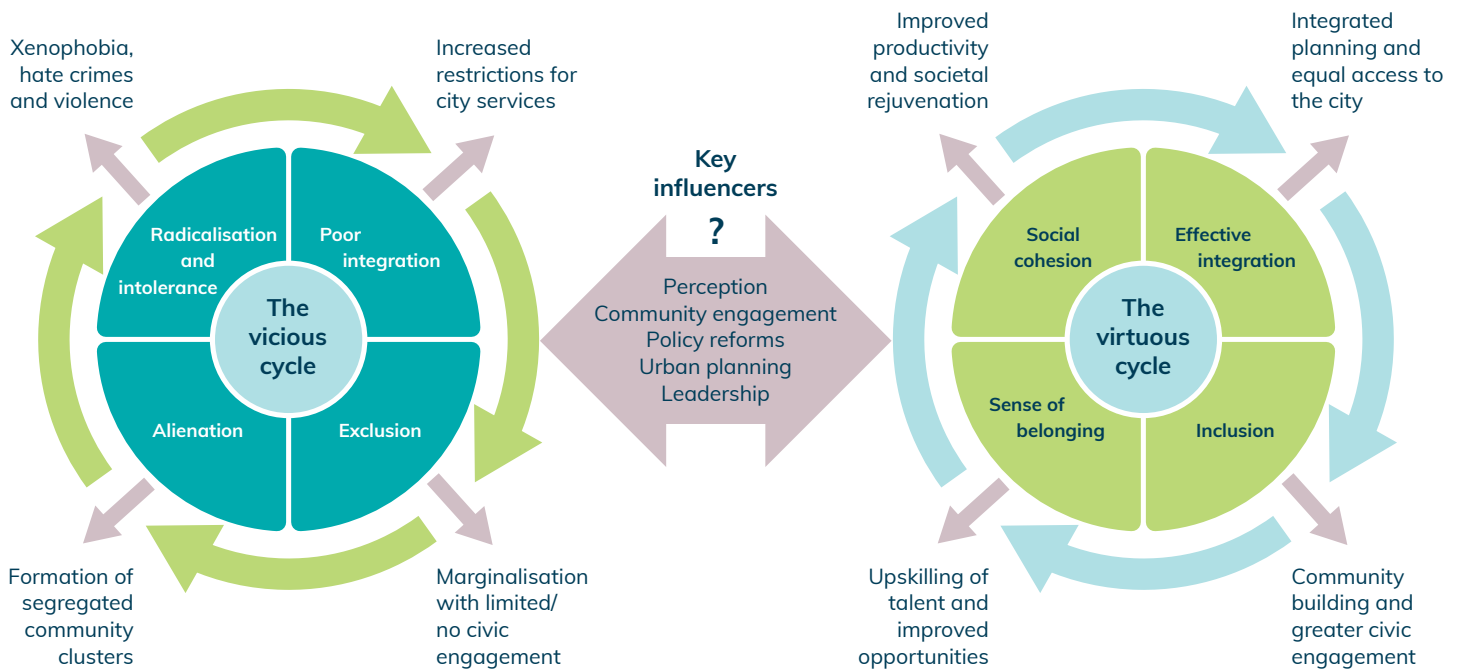
30 UNESCO (2016) op cit.

31 And discussed in the interview with crime expert Mark Micallef, page 160.

Vicious and virtuous cycles

The essays in this Annual Review explore the spectrum of experiences, initiatives, and plans that cities provide migrants and refugees. Contradictions may exist between national and municipal treatment of newcomers; at the city level the prevailing attitude of the existing community may also be at odds with the authorities' policies and provisions. The growth of "sanctuary cities" is of special interest in this regard and is explored in more detail in

the essay entitled "Sanctuary cities: solidarity through defiance" (on page 222) that looks at the contested space between national and municipal responses to mixed migration. In the face of increasing numbers of refugees and migrants in cities, how they are treated is critical to whether the experience results in a virtuous or vicious cycle, and not just from the perspective of refugees and migrants there, but also that of the city itself.



Source: World Economic Forum. (2017) [Migration and Its Impact on Cities](#)

Poor integration, alienation, structural or cultural exclusion, and intolerance are typical characteristics of the vicious cycle that results in marginalisation, segmented communities and social discord and/or crime and possibly radicalisation. By contrast, cities that work with migrants and refugee groups to enhance social cohesion, inclusion, effective integration and offer newcomers a sense of belonging stand a high chance of activating a virtuous cycle that harnesses and facilitates conditions for diverse benefits to cities. “The arrival of migrants in urban settings can have a transformative effect in terms of their demographic, cultural, political and economic characteristics. The policies of municipal authorities are critical to ensuring migrants’ integration within and contribution to the overall development of localities.”³² While migration policy is often discussed nationally, the lived reality of settlement and integration is uniquely local and urban.

The success of many of these cities is to a large extent tied to their success in actualising the hopes and dreams of the thousands of migrants and refugees who choose to settle there. When they succeed, the result can be a strong economy and a vibrant ‘cosmopolis’; when they fail, the result can be poverty, segregation and social tension.³³

Research on urbanisation has found that expanding populations have been the primary driver of rapid GDP growth in major cities, and migrants account for a significant portion of this trend.³⁴

Alternative models

Not all governments or cities subscribe to the above approach and instead of recognising virtuous or vicious dynamics work according to alternative models. For example, the proportion of non-nationals in the employed population in countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and Lebanon and Jordan, (35 million in 2019, 31 percent of whom were female) is among the highest in the world, ranges from 56 to 93 percent, with a regional average of 70 percent.³⁵ Foreign nationals make up the majority of the population in Bahrain and Kuwait and account for more than 8 of every 10 people in Qatar and the United

Arab Emirates. But these workers do not expect and are not permitted to settle permanently; they have limited rights and freedoms, no path to citizenship and are not invited to have family members join them. The cities built and maintained by these migrant populations have no interest in inclusion, integration or equality. Discrimination is high between native population and migrant workers and their treatment is often the subject of human right reports.³⁶ Migrants in the 6 GCC states account for over 10 percent of all migrants globally.³⁷

In China huge numbers of internal migrants are given temporary jobs to build cities and infrastructure while supplying labour to new industries. These “floating populations” are not offered integration or inclusion. On the contrary, they are treated differently from the resident population and afforded different rights and reduced access to services.³⁸ The rapid development of China’s economy meant the demand for labour in the coastal cities in particular has been relentless: by 2015, official statistics reported that the floating population had grown to a staggering 247 million, accounting for around 18 percent of the total Chinese population.³⁹

Transit cities and smuggling hubs

Some cities bustle with a cocktail of mobility, being places of origin, destination and transit in the mixed migration dynamic. Nairobi is an example, where residents may be planning to leave to live in cities abroad, while tens of thousands of others arrived as international or internal migrants, often without documentation, to settle or at least try their luck and find refuge. One of the most economically vibrant urban areas in the whole of East Africa is Eastleigh, a suburb of Nairobi dominated by hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees and migrants that have made it a transnational hub.⁴⁰ At the same time, Nairobi is a transit city for many who aspire to move on to Southern Africa, Europe via North Africa, or the Middle East and Gulf states, and as such it boasts an industry of facilitators, smugglers, and purveyors of false documentation and international transport. In different ways, cities like Bangkok, Cairo, and Tripoli have similarly complex and multifarious profiles.

In some cases, such as Agadez in Niger, transit migrants and the smuggling business that serves those about

32 Price, M. (2014) [Cities Welcoming Immigrants: Local Strategies to Attract and Retain Immigrants in U.S. Metropolitan Areas](#). Background paper for World Migration Report 2015. IOM.

33 Ryerson University (undated) [Cities of Migration](#) website.

34 Zanuso, V. (2018) [Global Migration: Resilient Cities at the Forefront](#). 100 Resilient Cities.

35 ILO (undated web page) [Arab States: Labour Migration](#).

36 Recent examples include: Amnesty International (2019) [Qatar: All Work, No Pay: The Struggle Of Qatar’s Migrant Workers For Justice](#); Middle East Institute (2020) [Migrant Workers in the Gulf: Unseen Struggles and Prospects for Reform](#); and Amnesty International (2020) [COVID-19 makes Gulf countries’ abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore](#).

37 Amnesty International (2020) [COVID-19 makes Gulf countries’ abuse of migrant workers impossible to ignore](#).

38 ‘Hukou’ is a system of household registration that gives floating populations reduced access to health services, for example. See: Zheng, L. et al. (2018) [Comparing the needs and utilization of health services between urban residents and rural-to-urban migrants in China from 2012 to 2016](#). BMC Health Service Research. Also in terms of future discrimination many of these workers are unlikely to have adequate pensions: The Economist (2019) [The migrants who made China an industrial giant face a grim retirement](#).

39 Statistics quoted from Jianguo, C., et al. (2017) [Spatial Variation Relationship between Floating Population and Residential Burglary: A Case Study from ZG, China](#). International Journal of Geo-Information.

40 Carrier, N. (2017) [Little Mogadishu: Eastleigh, Nairobi’s global Somali hub](#). Oxford University Press.

to cross the Sahara desert towards the North African coastal cities (and for some beyond) are critical to a city's economy. These smuggling centres are key hubs with concentrated expertise that lubricates migratory movement while benefiting economically. Their importance and prevalence are explored in the essay "Smugglers' paradise: cities as hubs of the illicit migration business", on page 152 of this review.

New global governance and cooperation

Unlike the cases of the Gulf and China above, many cities and municipalities, particularly those in more open and democratic societies, seek to find solutions to ensure migrants and refugees settle well. As discussed, migration is primarily an urban phenomenon that falls increasingly under the responsibility of city rather than national authorities, encouraging cities to adopt new and hybrid approaches to urban governance. "The twin forces of urbanisation and global migration have created a rich field of action and experimentation in cities around the world on integration strategies for migrants,"⁴¹ but recent global and international efforts are also increasingly focused on enabling cities to achieve better management. Management based around inclusion and integration, which itself is not only based on principles of rights and equality (anti-discrimination and anti-racism) but also practical necessity. Irrespective of national level politicking or regulations it is cities and towns that are left with the responsibility to address the quotidian needs and issues of migrants and refugees.

The essays in this Annual Review detail some of the international efforts to support urban governance around migration. They explore inter-city cooperation, mentorship programmes, and how urban management relates to the global compacts on migration and refugees adopted in 2018 and to the Sustainable Development Goals. The New Urban Agenda, a roadmap adopted by world leaders in 2016, is seen as the delivery vehicle for the SDGs in urban settlements, where 17 of the goals apply to migrants and refugees.⁴²

The International Municipal Movement has a history going back more than 100 years, to the 1913 creation in Belgium of the Union Internationale des Villes.⁴³ Prominent members of the movement include United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the largest organisation of local and regional governments in the world. Headquartered in Bonn, Local Governments for Sustainability is a global network of almost 1,800 towns,

cities of local and regional governments that have made a commitment to sustainable development. UN-Habitat works in over 90 countries to "promote transformative change in cities and human settlements" and is increasingly engaged with the issue of migrants and cities, implementing actions such as the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration Project, led by the International Centre for Migration Policy and Development, and hosting—alongside UCLG and the UN's International Organization for Migration (IOM)—the 2017 Global Conference on Migration and Cities.⁴⁴

There are many other international collaborations and initiatives that promote various urban agendas, such as the Cities Alliance (hosted by the UN's Office of Project Services, the Global Mayor's Forum, Metropolis, Cities of Migration, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy, Eurocities, C40 Climate Leadership Group, Smart Cities Association, and Cities-4-People, to name but a few.⁴⁵ Some have a strong online presence as hubs for exchange, such as the Joint Migration and Development Initiative (M4D Net) which brings together almost 5,000 migration practitioners and policymakers from around the world. Some organisations focus on the inclusion and integration of migrants and refugees, like UNESCO's European Coalition of Cities Against Racism, which emphasize the need for "welcoming cities" and for fighting xenophobia towards the new arrivals.

A stronger role for mayors

Established in 2018, the Mayors Migration Council (MMC) is one of many initiatives aimed at fostering international collaboration between urban administrators.⁴⁶ It emerged from the discussions leading up to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the realisation that cities handle more of the practical aspects of integrating migrants and refugees than do national governments.⁴⁷ The MMC, UCLG, and IOM co-steer the Mayors Mechanism, which works to include local and regional authorities within the Global Forum for Migration and Development (GFMD) process, "bringing their voices and expertise into state-led deliberations, and intensifying the dialogue between different levels of government and different stakeholder groups."⁴⁸ The crowded sector of urban organisations may be in need of a voluntary governance structure and coordination itself, particularly around specific issues such as responses to refugees and migrants. One of the Mayors Migration Council's ambitions is to provide leadership and coordination in this sub-sector. However, in recent

41 Carrier, N. (2017) [Little Mogadishu: Eastleigh, Nairobi's global Somali hub](#). Oxford University Press.

42 UN (undated web page) [The New Urban Agenda: Key Commitments](#); Compass Housing Services (undated web page) [Linking the SDGs with the New Urban Agenda](#).

43 UCLG (2013) [Centenary of the International Municipal Movement 1913 – 2013](#).

44 An interview with the Executive Director of UN-Habitat in this review can be found on page 244.

45 An interview with Caterina Sarfatti of C40 for this review can be found on page 174.

46 Others include (aside from national organisations for mayors and international organisations for cities); the Global Parliament of Mayors, Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, World Mayors Council on Climate Change, Mayors for Peace etc.

47 Marvin Rees, mayor of Bristol, UK and on the Leadership Board of the MMC, and Vittoria Zanuso, the MMC's Executive Director, are both interviewed in this Annual Review on pages 258 and 272 respectively.

48 Mayors' Migration Council (2020) [6th Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development](#)

years—and particularly since the migrant or refugee “crisis” of 2015/2016 in Europe—agencies and fora dealing with urban themes have become more alive than ever to the issues around migration and asylum.

Transitioning to integrated and inclusive cities

Many cities are aware of the need for and have implemented policies to enhance integration and inclusion. While much progress has been made, overall there are major challenges and many other large urban centres and cities are only starting to gear up. Various studies concur that if cities are to achieve integration and inclusivity they need to move away from biased and negative perceptions of migrants and refugees towards more active civic engagement with migrants while embracing their community participation. They need to change from ineffective—or in some cases non-existent—migration and integration policies and reduce the policy misalignment between federal, state and city governments. The sudden surge of refugees and migrants into Europe in 2015 and 2016, for example, served as a wake-up call for many municipalities and prompted more comprehensive approaches. Reactive, role-based, and process-driven leadership should give way to a conception of urban planning that incorporates future contingencies in view of the inevitable growth of the proportion of migrants and refugees in many towns and cities in the coming years.⁴⁹

The rising number of migrants and refugees in cities presents municipalities with both challenges and opportunities in eight critical areas: housing, education, employment, transport, utilities, sanitation and waste, integration and social inclusion, and safety and security.⁵⁰ All these issues are discussed with the help of examples in the essays and interviews of this Annual Review; the success of cities’ responses to them demands a holistic, cross-departmental approach by local and national governments.

Echoing this observation, a recent report on European cities by IOM and the Migration Policy Institute identified some key recommendations in a context where European cities have seen a shift towards “mainstreaming” diversity and inclusion.⁵¹ Mainstreaming here means meeting the needs of diverse groups across all services instead of through stand-alone integration programming, and from seeing inclusion and diversity not as a solely sociocultural

issue but as one relevant to all aspects of city life. “Many of these cities have stepped up to the task and are now working to translate emergency responses into long-term plans to make the most of diversity.”⁵² The report also underlines the importance of strong city leadership and the critical role mayors play with regard to immigrants by giving them a greater say in local policies and community life, especially in cities with recent or rapidly diversifying migrant populations. It concludes that “the real test of governance structures is in the design and delivery of local services, including where they are located and how they are linked to one another.” As they plan for a more inclusive future, cities are increasingly using Singapore’s “45-minute city with 20-minute towns”, or Sydney’s “30-minute city” to deliver key amenities and services as a guiding principle.⁵³

This Annual Review promotes the notion that while migration policy may be polemical and discussed at the national level, the lived reality of settlement and integration is explicitly local and urban. Migration-focused agencies and research bodies, as well as refugee-centred organisations, are re-doubling their focus on these concerns.⁵⁴

But 2020 is a year of extraordinary uncertainty, where the Covid-19 pandemic and the responses to it have created unprecedented conditions whose impact may be felt for many years to come. Some commentators are describing the fallout in revolutionary terms, predicting global transformations in a wide range of social, cultural and economic areas, including migration. Alan Gamlen goes so far as to ask whether the pandemic will herald “the end of the age of migration”.⁵⁵ Various interviews and the “Hot zones” essay on page 210 of this Annual Review explore how migrants in cities might be particularly vulnerable to the virus and how pandemics affect migration and migration policy as well as urbanisation trends.

Nevertheless, whether those on the move are doing so internally or across borders, regularly or irregularly, or in a voluntary or forced manner, as long as they continue to concentrate in cities and towns, the outcomes and fate they face in these arrival cities will primarily be the product of choices made by those that run municipalities.

49 World Economic Forum (2017) op cit.

50 Ibid.

51 Patuzzi, L. (2020) [European Cities on the Front Line: New and emerging governance models for migrant inclusion](#), Migration Policy Institute Europe and IOM.

52 Ibid.

53 The 45 and 20 minutes refer, respectively, to the time taken to commute to work and access amenities. See Teo, G. (2019) [‘45-minute city, 20-minute towns’: Advisory panel outlines vision for Land Transport Master Plan 2040](#). Channel News Asia. See also: Levinson, D. (2019) [The 30-Minute City: Designing for Access](#). Self-published book.

54 See, for example, Couldrey, M. & Peebles, J. (eds) (2020) [Cities and towns](#). Forced Migration Review, Issue 63.

55 Gamlen, A. (2020) [Migration and Mobility after the 2020 Pandemic: The End of an Age?](#) Blog post published as part of the Compas [Coronavirus and Mobility Forum](#).

Data gaps

The quality and quantity of detailed information about refugees and migrants living in cities varies widely across the world and in many cases is non-existent. If the needs of such vulnerable residents are to be adequately met, more comprehensive and standardised data are essential.

By Julia Litzkow¹

Urbanisation and migration—both internal and international—are closely intertwined, and cities are both key destinations and transit hubs for refugees and migrants. Cities are on the frontlines of hosting and attending to the needs of refugees and migrants: it is cities that manage the outcomes—both intended and otherwise—of national migration policies. But urban authorities and service providers are generally left to respond without reliable, in-depth, real-time and comparable data. In terms of the migrant population—and especially those without a regular status—it is safe to say that many municipal authorities cannot be sure who is living in their city, where they are living, and what their presence might mean for the city. Amid increasing awareness of and interest in urban migration, it is important and timely to consider what is currently being done in this specific realm with regards to data collection. In other words, who is being counted, and who is being overlooked?

Broadly speaking, data-collection tools relating to migration and urbanisation include censuses, population registers, surveys, and other administrative data sources.² Each of these methods comes with its own limitations, for instance with regards to undercounting or excluding data on irregular or temporary migrants.³ Yet irregular and other hard-to-count populations are often among the most vulnerable of city residents; they tend to be denied access to employment and social services and often work and live in precarious conditions.⁴ Recognising the importance of the subject, there are various initiatives, sources, and projects related to city-level data on refugees and migrants, such as:

- [UN-DESA World Urbanization Prospects](#): produces annual estimates/projections of urban and rural populations worldwide.
- [UN Statistics Division's Demographic Yearbook](#): a collation of data from national statistics on urbanisation.
- [UN-Habitat Global Urban Observatory](#): collects data to support reporting of SDG 11: “Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.
- [UNHCR](#): produces a range of data, including some information on urban refugees, such as in the annual Global Trends Report.
- [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre – Global Internal Displacement Database](#): a repository of internal displacement estimates related to conflict and disasters.
- [Joint IDP Profiling Service](#): an inter-agency body that supports national authorities, humanitarian agencies, and development organisations measure and understand internally displaced populations in various settings. JIPS also provides guidance on data collection in cities.
- [IOM Migration Data Portal](#): an access point to global migration statistics, including a section on urbanisation and migration.
- [European Commission Data for Integration \(D4I\)](#): a dataset obtained through spatial disaggregation of 2011 census statistics showing concentrations of migrants in all cities of eight European countries.
- [The Globalization, Urbanization and Migration site](#): a collaborative research venture affiliated to George Washington University that provides urban-level data on migration in 150 cities around the world.
- [KNOMAD](#): a global knowledge hub that provides estimates of migrant stocks compiled in the Bilateral Migration Matrix which has a thematic working group on internal migration and urbanisation.
- [World Population and Housing Census Programme](#): part of the UN's Statistical Division that helps countries with their national censuses, including by setting standards and methods.⁵ Its Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses includes recommendations for data collection on international/internal migrant populations.

1 Julia Litzkow is the Programme Officer, at the Mixed Migration Centre, Geneva.

2 [IOM Migration Data Portal](#).

3 *Ibid.*

4 Hennessey, G. (2019) *Why we need better data on mobile populations in cities – and how to get it*. ODI.

5 Some countries have rescheduled 2020 Population and Housing census activities due to the Covid-19 pandemic, see <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/census/COVID-19/>.

- [Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative \(4Mi\)](#): a vast data collection project conducted by the Mixed Migration Centre on mobile and hard-to-reach populations (in many cases irregular migrants), with most enumerators based, and surveys taking place in, cities.

Information gaps

This non-exhaustive list of initiatives and available data on urban migration emphasizes the topic's ever-increasing relevance, yet the various efforts remain constrained and sporadic. There is a general lack of data at the local level. The data that is available lacks disaggregation, and comparison is difficult as definitions differ from one initiative to another.⁶ In addition, there is a clear evidence gap when it comes to irregular migrants. This is unsurprising, as it concerns a population that largely doesn't want to be found, making data difficult to collect. Nonetheless, this lack of information can result in a significant mismatch between reality and policy, as those who enter a country or stay there irregularly—which can include rejected asylum-seekers and even registered refugees living outside designated encampment areas—are often among the most vulnerable populations in cities.

Implications for cities

There are wide-ranging consequences of having what are essentially “invisible populations” residing in cities, both for refugees and migrants and for the cities hosting them. This has been especially exemplified during the coronavirus pandemic, as those left uncounted and unable to access essential services were left at greater risk themselves but also increased the risk of exacerbating the broader public health crisis.⁷

A case study from Arua Municipality in Uganda sheds light on how lack of data affected provision of assistance to urban refugees during the Covid-19 pandemic.⁸ Despite the large estimates of refugees residing in cities across Uganda, refugees are not included in the national census and many are not officially registered in the municipalities where they reside.⁹ This lack of accurate data, among other challenges, meant that many refugees experiencing food insecurity in Arua due to the pandemic were essentially “caught between already stretched government support and humanitarian systems of support—and effectively eligible for neither”.¹⁰ Refugees

and migrants are likely to find themselves slipping through similar (data) gaps if caught up in foreign countries during natural disasters or outbreak of conflicts.¹¹ Counting these “hidden populations” should facilitate more inclusive urban policies and better service provision, as recognising their presence affects various sectors, from the informal economy, to housing, healthcare, access to other services, and immigration enforcement.

New initiatives, new risks

Despite the inherent complexity involved in counting people who don't want to be found, there are positive initiatives being implemented at the city level to combat the lack of available data. In Barcelona, for example, the local census allows for the registration of irregular migrants without a requirement for a fixed address.¹² This evidence of registration can be used by municipalities as proof of a migrant's “social rooting” in Spain to support an application for regular migration status.¹³ Nonetheless, one must keep in mind that collecting more (accurate) data on migrant populations in cities, whether they are regular or irregular, might not necessarily lead to better policy outcomes for the migrant population itself. Increasing the visibility of refugees and migrants in cities could boost efforts towards regularisation and better access to services, but it could also put pressure on law enforcement agencies to deport those present irregularly.¹⁴ Availability of more (digital) data on refugees and migrants could lead to better public service outcomes but also raises concerns over surveillance technologies and migrants' right to privacy.¹⁵

The focus on urban migration and the need for better and more data is reflected in various international agendas. Together with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10.7 on “well-managed migration policies” various SDGs¹⁶ relate specifically to urban migration, such as SDG 1.3. on social protection systems, 1.5 on access to basic services, and 8.7 on eradicating forced labour and human trafficking. Regarding data collection, SDG Target 17.18 focuses on the “availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data” disaggregated, among other factors, by migratory status.¹⁷ Similarly, UN-Habitat's New Urban Agenda lists the generation of “globally comparable as well as locally generated data” as a means of its own implementation (and in turn that of the SDGs), and includes disaggregation by migration status.¹⁸ The

6 IOM op cit.

7 Milan, S & Pelizza, A & Lausberg Y. (2020) [Making migrants visible to COVID-19 counting: the dilemma](#). Open Democracy.

8 Lozet, F & Easton-Calabria E. (2020) [Counting urban refugees during COVID-19](#). Forced Migration Review.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 A gap being addressed by the [Migrants in Countries of Crisis Initiative](#). specifically Guideline 2 provides practices by stakeholders on collecting and sharing information on migrants.

12 Delvino, N. (2017) [European cities and migrants with irregular status: municipal initiatives for the inclusion of irregular migrants in the provision of services](#) Report for the 'City Initiative on Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe' (C-MISE).

13 Ibid.

14 OECD [Towards 2035 - Strategic Foresight \(Making Migration and Integration Policies Future Ready\)](#).

15 Ibid.

16 ODI (2018) [Migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: an interactive tool](#).

17 UN (undated web page) [SDG Indicators](#).

18 UN (undated web page) [The New Urban Agenda](#).

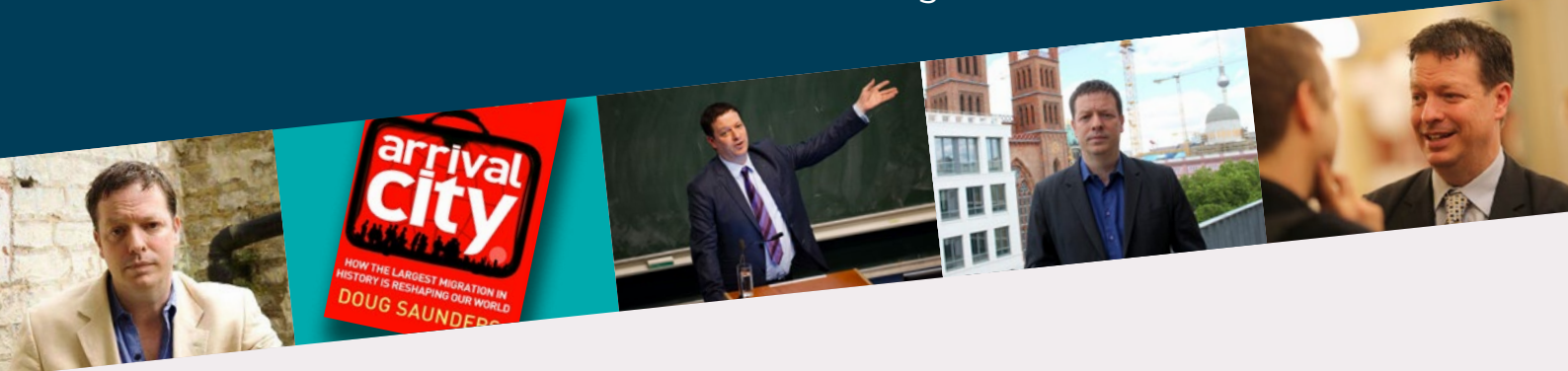
need for better data on all levels of government is also reflected in the Global Compact for Migration, which features “accurate and disaggregated data as a basis for evidence-based policies” as its first objective.

Undoubtedly, more efforts towards consistent and standardised data on migrants and refugees in cities is needed to adequately respond to current realities of human mobility. Data on urban migration is vital to adequately inform advocacy efforts, policy, and practice related to urban planning, service provision (health, education, housing, etc.), short- and long-term integration, and more. Biases in data collection or discounting certain populations entirely can exacerbate refugees’ and migrants’ existing vulnerabilities and widen inequalities between host and foreign populations with adverse effects not only for those affected but for the development of the city itself.

Interview

Sticking points

A decade after his best-selling book explored the idea of immigration as a constant process involving interlinked networks, **Doug Saunders** reckons many policymakers still fail to grasp the fundamental dynamics of international migration. And as immigration has become more suburbanised, traditional pathways of social mobility are increasingly strewn with obstacles, leaving many stuck in “trap neighbourhoods”. The good news is that canny one-off local investments are often enough to clear them.



*Doug Saunders is a Canadian journalist and author best known for his 2011 book **Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping our World**. Previously he was the *Toronto Globe and Mail's* European bureau chief. He currently lives in Berlin where he is a Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow at the Robert Bosch Academy, conducting field research on “local economic-mobility traps”.*

It's been almost a decade since you wrote *Arrival City*. You wrote that we do not understand contemporary migration because we don't know how to look at it. Since then, we've seen large-scale migration continue with massive amounts of media and political focus. Have we learned how to look at it better?

At the point when I started writing *Arrival City* in about 2007, there was a lack of understanding that the big migration flows we experience are at their root the final stage of a population shift that really has been underway since the late 18th century, from subsistence rural life to urban life, and that most international migration is mostly a small subset of that. Public-policy dialogues were much more short-term; there was a lot of talk about push factors and pull factors, and a belief

that we can control immigration by pouring foreign aid into sending countries and that sort of thing.

In some countries, there has been a greater understanding of the workings of international migration, at least in policy circles, during the past 10 years. That's in good part because the European migration crisis and the extreme anti-immigration politics of the United States (US) and many European countries made the issue impossible to ignore. That said, in the big European debates about migration over the last ten years, there has not been a very sophisticated understanding of the issues. A lot of policymakers, on both sides of the issue, still think people migrate internationally because they're destitute or impoverished. Part of what I was trying to do in *Arrival City* was to establish a more complex understanding of

immigration as a constant process that links networks together, rather than just a shift of units of labour.

“A lot of policymakers still think people migrate internationally because they’re destitute or impoverished.”

Could you elaborate on what you mean by a “constant process”?

The way human migration works in practice is not so much that one country sends immigrants to another country, but rather that a network of people in one particular geographic area—a cluster of villages or set of urban neighbourhoods in one country—ties itself gradually to a network of people in a specific geographic area—an urban neighbourhood or even a specific set of streets—in another country. There’s a lot of movement of people and information and money back and forth between those networks over the long term. Temporary migration becomes chain migration and then turns into permanent migration, all facilitated through the sending of money back and forth through remittances (which are of course now the largest source of foreign aid in the world). Knowledge and intellectual capital also flow back and forth; knowledge of future potential immigration experiences, of economic opportunities in work and entrepreneurship, and of course also educational knowledge.

Have you been surprised at the extent that migration has been on the political and sociocultural agenda in recent years in such a polemical way?

I’m not surprised that immigration is a hot-button political issue in many countries, or that people are uncomfortable with newcomers coming in around them. It takes a leap for people to understand that the new people around them are just versions of their own families at some point in the past—we all have a migration experience somewhere in our background—and that they themselves were the strange and misunderstood people once. And while I think that discomfort is natural, I think there’s terrible political manipulation of it that turns into hatred and xenophobia, often to the point of violence and exclusion.

So are you in favour of far more open immigration policies?

I am not proposing open borders and policy-free immigration, or mass immigration on the scale we saw in the early twentieth century. I don’t think that view will ever sell among domestic populations, but I also don’t think it’s good for immigrants themselves. It in a way de-values immigration, and it cheapens the exceptional costs and risks people take on when they

migrate. You need to recognise that immigration and citizenship are things of great value to people, things they strive for and see as great accomplishments.

Immigration is a calculated gamble for families. It involves a complete tearing up and disruption of your entire established domestic life and family connections, and the taking of a huge risk based on whatever information you can obtain from other people in the country that you’re going to. So there needs to be an appreciation in countries of reception that these are not the random detritus of the world washing up on our shores.

“It takes a leap for people to understand that the new people around them are just versions of their own families at some point in the past.”

I think immigration policies that do regard immigration as an honour and a prize to be achieved, that have some control and restriction, recognise this fact that these are people doing something important in their lives and that will benefit the host country. And I think it’s important, and some countries have done it, to develop policies that see them as people making a big investment to become part of the country around them, for whom citizenship and full participation in the life of the country is always the main goal.

Do you still see arrival cities as transition spaces where the next economic or cultural boom will be born? Are you still overwhelmingly positive about arrival cities?

Arrival City is often described as an optimistic book, which leaves some readers surprised that it’s sort of a chronicle of failure. Most of the immigration-settlement neighbourhoods I describe have deep problems and difficulties, and the people I chronicle are mostly struggling against really tough odds.

It’s optimistic because I recognise that success has overwhelmingly been the norm for families and communities that immigrate, though it often takes a generation or two to climb up the ladder. Historically, that is what immigration settlement neighbourhoods have done, and it should be our goal to turn them into these places of social mobility.

Most famous urban neighbourhoods, in any great city, have started out as immigration settlement districts. The norm historically has been that immigration settlement districts are hated and seen as insalubrious and dangerous for many decades after the first people from the sending country settle in them. And then eventually those districts become places that are seen

Interview

Doug Saunders

as attractive and desirable because the immigrants have invested in them and made them desirable to more affluent residents.

Until really the very end of the 20th century, most immigration settlement in Western countries took place in the urban core, in places where the housing price was lower than average because they were seen as unclean or undesirable neighbourhoods for established populations. And those urban districts in the centre were almost perfectly designed for the success and the acculturation and economic integration of the immigrants, because those districts had cheap housing that you could own, had spaces where you could conduct business and had easy transportation links to middle-class places, to established economies. They had populations walking and driving through their streets who were middle class and had money in their pockets and would shop at your little shop or go to your little restaurant or do business in your little factory. And those urban spaces made it quite easy to accumulate both social capital and real capital within your living space, using the materials of the city around you.

“ Immigration is a calculated gamble for families. So there needs to be an appreciation in countries of reception that these are not the random detritus of the world washing up on our shores. ”

What we've experienced since the beginning of the 21st century is what I would call the suburbanisation of immigration and the suburbanisation of poverty. In most Western cities, with some notable exceptions (such as Berlin, where I live now), immigration settlement mainly happens in the suburbs now, particularly in the inner suburbs.

So there is a spatial dislocation that affects social mobility options?

Exactly. The arrival city neighbourhoods of the 21st century have some challenges that were not common to the ones in the 20th century. They're often physically isolated from the established city through poor transportation links, they often have a low overall population density even if they're comprised of apartment buildings that themselves are crowded.

There's a downward spiral that happens in those neighbourhoods, partly caused by the fact that more ambitious immigrants pursue strategies to achieve socio-economic upward mobility. And those strategies often involve moving—shifting their kids and themselves out of the neighbourhood into a more middle-class place. These moves have always been a big part of immigrant success. But in isolated suburban

immigration districts, this creates a downward spiral because the schools in those neighbourhoods start drawing away the more ambitious kids and families. Then the more ambitious teachers start finding ways to get transferred to other schools. And this causes the neighbourhood to be less desirable; it's a downward spiral that is very hard to interrupt.

One of the things I said in *Arrival City* was the thing that makes a particular neighbourhood an arrival city—what makes it a first rung on the mobility ladder for immigrants, usually by providing a lower-than-average housing cost—is the very thing that a generation on will make it fail as an arrival city. Whatever made the housing cheap is going to be the thing that later kicks away the second and third rungs on the mobility ladder. So, you could say the problem that emerged in a big way since I published *Arrival City*, the thing that really amplified this problem, was the world-wide crisis of housing supply.

You published your book in 2011 just as the Arab Spring was starting in Tunisia. You referred to migrants then as a “catalytic class” that not only provided much-needed labour to cities but also brought about necessary political change. Looking at Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Yemen now, if you were writing a new epilogue to *Arrival City*, what would you say?

Yes, but it's not over. The social tensions that caused at least the beginnings of the 2011 uprisings in both Tunisia and Egypt—and maybe to a lesser extent in other places—emerged from tensions between the new populations of the arrival city slum districts and the highly state-controlled official economies of the established city. I would say that those tensions over ownership of and de facto citizenship in urban space continue. There's been some more reasonable ways of dealing with them in Tunisia since then; Egypt, of course, has returned to exactly the same form of regime that it had before. But I think the lesson from that experience is that it's going to happen again because there are still unresolved tensions over who are the real citizens of the cities of those countries. The fact that they have the lowest rates of economic growth in development in pretty much the entire world remains a big problem. But also these questions of urban space and citizenship remain underlying problems in the Middle East and North Africa.

You've said that the failure to accept cities as arrival cities in the West has created waves of religious conservatism, sexual oppression, and organised crime, and that investment in arrival cities is the antidote. How do you feel these investments are going?

When those investments are made, they're very successful. Policymakers tend to see immigration

districts as places whose problems are endemic and therefore require a long-term, multi-generational expenditure in social welfare, in policing, in emergency services. The governments that are smart are the ones that recognise that these are not endemic problems, rather they're specific obstacles placed in the way of a trajectory that is known to the occupants of those neighbourhoods. The residents know where they came from and where they'd like to be, and they very clearly know what obstacles stand in their way, whether it's a poor transportation route or a bad school or racial segregation. And if there's one lesson I hope policymakers took from Arrival City, it's that you don't need these multi-generational expenditures; instead, you can achieve a lot more lasting success with a one-time investment in removing a known obstacle to success, sometimes something as simple as replacing a crowded bus line with a more rapid tram line. Or filling up an empty, unpopulated space so the neighbourhood becomes more desirable, little things like that; one-time investments can save many generations of both public expenditure and of violence and trouble.

Moving on to sanctuary cities... are they only good at stopping people from being deported and detained, or are they also good at integrating and making it a success?

Sanctuary city policies address a larger threat in immigration, which is that it is very unhealthy for a city or for a country to have a large, permanent population of people who have no pathway to citizenship. Such people are forced to live in a grey market, they do not pay taxes, they live in a way that does not allow them to invest in their communities. They can't own their housing, so they're not going to improve their neighbourhoods and they don't become settled or part of a network.

“ It is very unhealthy for a city or for a country to have a large, permanent population of people who have no pathway to citizenship. ”

So if a national policy prevents a large number of your city's citizens from having a pathway to legal citizenship and therefore wanting to invest in their communities, then it is possible for cities to have policies that get around that to some extent by permitting those people to have de facto citizenship. The sanctuary city movement therefore is important for the health of immigration neighbourhoods and of cities themselves, because it solves the problem of a lack of real citizenship by providing some of the instruments and institutions of a de facto citizenship.

In light of rapid changes in automation and AI, do you think the demand for labour pulling people from countryside to city, or across international borders, will be sustained in the coming years?

I do. I think countries that are economically successful are going to attract immigration, regardless of their policies, because when a country is doing well economically, and therefore needs people, it gets people. Nature abhors a vacuum. Every single historical example over the last 50 or 60 years of a country trying to restrict immigration has only succeeded when the economy's doing badly; immigration restriction always fails when the economy is doing well.

Will the new economy change this? There's not a lot of evidence that it will. We know that certain categories of existing jobs will be rendered obsolete by AI and related technologies. But assuming that technology produces a successful economy—which is the only reason to deploy it—then it will also cause an equal or greater number of jobs to be created. We do not know in advance where those jobs will be. But the idea that smart technology will eliminate employment in general, rather than just employment in certain categories, is based on a naive misunderstanding of how jobs are created.

Can you tell us a bit of the focus of your work in the last decade and what you're doing now?

I've continued to be focused on cities and migration and population in a number of books I've written. And during the last couple years, I've focused once again on the neighbourhood level of analysis. This time I'm looking a generation beyond the arrival city to see what happens, not when people arrive from another country, but when they arrive into a new economic reality. What happens a generation on, when neighbourhoods, rather than becoming springboards, instead become traps. How do you free those neighbourhood traps? I'm doing field research in urban neighbourhoods in Russia, Sweden, Germany, Belgium and Spain, and I've earlier done work in southern China and the US.

My working title for the project is Unstuck, playing on the dual meaning of that phrase: you come unstuck in the sense that everything goes off the rails, which we see in many neighbourhoods today, but also we want to be looking for policies that cause things no longer to be stuck.

In an extraordinary change of events Covid-19 has caused reverse migration. For example an expected 600,000 Nepalese migrants returned from India and millions of internal migrants in India returned to rural areas. Is this a phenomenon that you're hearing about elsewhere as well?

I'm also hearing in the Middle East and North Africa there's quite a bit of this return migration, and also

Interview

Doug Saunders

in sub-Saharan Africa. People are returning to their villages, at least temporarily, in Egypt and Nigeria and other countries where people are fearing the coronavirus quarantine measures, if not the disease itself.

From what I can tell, it's the largest reverse-migration phenomenon since the years after 1989 in the Warsaw Pact countries, when we saw a move of people back to the villages, especially in Poland for the reason that the communist regime in Poland did not collectivise agriculture, so there was still family ownership of rural land. As I wrote in *Arrival City*, a lot of families used that rural land as a welfare backstop during a period when the state basically disappeared.

And what we're seeing now with Covid is also a lot like the reverse migration that was observed in sub-Saharan African countries during the AIDS crisis of the 1990s, when we saw measurably large populations shifting back from cities that they'd settled in. And it's certainly what we're seeing now. And I think it confirms a little bit of what I was talking about in *Arrival City*, which is that families who are settled in urban districts, often multiple generations in, always maintain some form of link to the originating village. But these reverse migrations always turn out to be temporary.

Do you think in other ways, Covid-19 has accelerated or decelerated or changed conditions for continuous, inevitable migration?

If the disease is placed under control within a year or two, reverse migration and the curtailment of movement will prove to have been temporary phenomena, simply because the economic and cultural logic of migration will continue to make the larger cities more desirable than otherwise. Second, I think even if it's not placed under control during this shorter timeframe, the effects and dynamics of the disease are going to change, in terms of the geography of the spread. It's already a much more rural disease – while it started in cities, after the initial months, villages became much more dangerous places than big cities. So, I wouldn't want to give a prediction, but I would say that it seems very unlikely that in the long term, or even in the medium term, that this is going to change the 21st century dynamics of human migration.

Are you planning to write a follow-up book to *Arrival City*, and if so, what would the central thesis be?

I'm hoping my current project will result in another book that examines urban neighbourhoods, and in some cases towns, in multiple countries, to look at what you might call *Arrival City: A Generation or Two Later*. It would look at the “trap neighbourhood”—the places where upward mobility, the expectation of a transition to a lower-middle-class life, gets stuck.

This is a huge phenomenon in the middle-income countries, in the so-called BRICS, where millions of people had expected to be in the middle class by now, but are finding it impossible due to housing or labour markets or divisive politics. Their parents moved out of the village and experienced the huge shift that moved them out of subsistence poverty and danger of starvation and into a less deadly form of urban working-class poverty, a vast improvement in living conditions. But their children and grandchildren are still living in in factory dormitories or informal housing or remote apartment districts without a path to the middle class. Their frustration at that lack of pathways to mobility is driving a lot of the political crises in those countries.

“Success has overwhelmingly been the norm for families and communities that immigrate, though it often takes a generation or two to climb up the ladder.”

But it's also striking a growing number of neighbourhoods in the West, where huge shortages of housing supply are driving up prices and causing measurable increases in economic segregation. We don't see it as much, because so much immigration settlement and low-income life is now located in isolated suburbs.

These pathways from low income to the middle class have become beset with barriers in many countries that are affecting not just migration populations, but post-industrial populations. Immigration settlement continues to follow familiar patterns. But second and third generations are experiencing difficulties in the 21st century that they didn't in the 20th century. It's very easy to go from being in absolute poverty to being in a more prosperous urban life, but it's much more difficult now to reach the lower bounds of the middle class, which I would call ability to save and borrow money, to put your kids in post-secondary education, to have enough resources that you're not in danger of falling back in poverty.

So that very minimal definition of the middle class, whether you're in China, or Brazil, or in the US, or Western Europe right now, has become more difficult to attain, and my working hypothesis is that this is a set of barriers that manifest themselves mainly at the neighbourhood level. What we usually think of as national or international crises and issues are best understood as neighbourhood-level problems, and the solutions are often found in neighbourhood policies. That was the message of *Arrival City*, and that's the overarching message of this new project.

Urban spotlights

By Chris Horwood

Note: To promote ease of reading, and in a departure from standard MMC written material and the MMR, in this section we have refrained from providing references. All thematic issues and city examples are taken from online sources, which can be supplied on request. These urban spotlights are not meant to focus negatively or positively on any individual city, but rather provide examples of specific issues. The issues we link to certain cities here are not representative of the city as a whole, and neither are these cities the only examples that could have been chosen to exemplify those particular issues.

Dangerous cities: where migrants and refugees face discrimination and violence

Because they are often less protected legally, are low-income earners, in low status jobs, and living in precarious or poorer parts of cities, migrants and refugees face disadvantages at many levels. Being “outsiders”, they also often face direct hostility, racist discrimination, political scapegoating, or are seen as soft targets for crime where the perpetrators sense they can act with impunity.

South Africa—the self-styled “Rainbow Nation”—was famed for its political solidarity and offer of refuge to people from neighbouring countries. Millions of regular and irregular migrants live in the country along with approximately 90,000 refugees. But South Africa also has a sporadic history of xenophobia, or more accurately **Afrophobia**, which has flared up into lethal persecution of migrants and refugees in urban settings. Riots in **Johannesburg** in early September 2019 led to the deaths of at least seven people, the looting of many shops in the Central Business District and calls for African foreigners to leave the country. In 2008, similarly xenophobic riots broke out in Alexandra township in Johannesburg and rapidly spread to seven of South Africa’s nine provinces, resulting in 62 deaths. Among the dead were South Africans, Mozambicans, Zimbabweans and Somalis. Thousands were injured and many more displaced.

Exclusion cities: where non-integration is non-negotiable

Some cities offer a very conditional welcome to migrants and offer no refuge to refugees. These cities invite labour migrants to engage in a wide variety of jobs that national residents are either unable or unwilling to do. Integration, family reunification, and pathways to citizenship are completely barred to migrants, while multi-culturalism is tolerated only in the work-sphere insofar that it meets the city’s labour needs. Wage differentials mean these cities are attractive to migrants from poor countries who have few options elsewhere and are forced to tolerate poor conditions, personal restrictions, discrimination, and few legal rights.

A staggering 80-90 percent of **Dubai’s** 3 million residents are foreigners, many of whom are migrant workers brought in to work on construction projects or in service jobs. Dubai’s glittering, futuristic metropolis was literally built by migrants from its humble origins as a small town in the 1970s, and it is migrants who keep the city functioning on a daily basis. Most of the city’s construction workers are from India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, while domestic and care services are provided mainly by women from countries such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka. Dubai and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** have long been the subject of widely documented complaints of mistreatment of workers. Migrant workers say they often face harsh work and accommodation conditions, shifts of 12 hours or more—often in dangerously high temperatures—and that companies withhold pay checks or passports to prevent workers quitting their jobs or returning home. Like most Gulf States, the UAE has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not welcome or offer settlement for refugees.

Construction cities: where migrants build and populate new cities

Modern cities are built, serviced, and often populated by migrants. Normally, in countries such as China, Egypt, Malaysia, India, and South Korea, rapid urbanisation and economic growth have prompted rural-to-urban migration as internal migrants move towards new urban construction, manufacturing, and service industries. Many remain in the city. However, in the Gulf States, new cities were built and are maintained entirely by international labour and once their contracts expire they return home, for the most part to Pakistan, Bangladesh, India or Nepal.

In **China**, as the economy exploded following the 1980s reforms, what the cities needed most was cheap labour. Hundreds of millions of young men and women from the countryside poured into the factories and construction sites of China's coastal boom towns. In many cities, such as Shenzhen and Dongguan, the population of migrant workers quickly overtook that of the local urban population. Even in the older **Guangzhou** city internal migrants comprised 40 percent of the city's total population in 2008. There were an estimated 291 million "rural migrant workers" in China in 2019, comprising more than one-third of the entire working population. "Rural migrant workers" are workers with a rural household registration who are employed in an urban workplace and reside in an urban area. The current inflexible household registration (*hukou*) system has been operating since the late 1950, but replaced earlier systems of population movement control.

Migrant workers have been the engine of China's spectacular economic growth over the last three decades, but reportedly they remain marginalised and subject to institutionalised discrimination. Their children have limited access to education and healthcare and can end up living away from their parents for years on end.

Intolerable cities: where gang culture and gang violence force people to flee

There are thousands of criminal and violent gangs operating in cities around the world, but few are having the impact on their societies as those in recent years in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. Despite targeted efforts to combat gang violence, many people continue to live in terror, and large numbers decide to flee, sometimes creating migrant "caravans" that strike out north towards the US border. El Salvador and Honduras have the highest homicide rates in the world. Much of the violence is gang-related but intersects with economic and political instability, causing a sense of desperate homelessness for many urban poor. Women and children, especially girls, as well as LGBTQ+ groups, continue to face high levels of brutal physical and sexual violence. UNHCR estimate that the total number of asylum applications registered by citizens of these three countries to other countries increased more than elevenfold from 2011 through 2017, totalling around 350,000 people. The number of asylum seekers in the United States (US) from the Northern Triangle has increased markedly in the last decade and in recent years surpassed those from Mexico and other South American countries.

In **Honduras, San Pedro Sula** had previously been known as the "murder capital of the world" until 2016 when Caracas, Venezuela, surpassed its homicide rate. It is a major operational and strategic distribution point in the illegal drug trade, particularly to the United States (US), and has high levels of gang activity. Violent street gangs are mostly derived from gangs formed in Los Angeles and deported to Central America in the 1990s, including Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and the 18th Street gang, who have strengthened their position through alliances with Mexican drug traffickers moving cocaine through Honduras. Arms trafficking has also proliferated, with approximately 70 percent of all firearms being illegal. By 2013, the city had 187 homicides per 100,000 residents, an average of about three homicides per day. Some 83 percent of homicides in the city involve firearms. It's also a city where, in the last decade, employment and underemployment rates have doubled, while the number of people living in extreme poverty has dramatically risen. Crime, violence, persecution by gangs, and pressure to join gangs combined with economic stress have led to the migration of large numbers of unaccompanied minors (and adults) to the US border. Data from the US has shown San Pedro Sula as the major source for unaccompanied alien children migrating from Honduras during the last decade.

Pandemic cities: where government lockdowns are transforming city life

Before 2020, the idea of pathogen-related widespread urban lockdown and enforced restriction of economic and social activities was only associated with exceptional, specific, and temporary situations such as the outbreaks of Ebola (exclusively in African states intermittently since 1976) or SARS (mainly China and Asian states since 2002). Globally, such events were quite rare, but the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic has radically altered the story of cities and pandemics. The urban control measures that were applied in Wuhan (population: 11 million) in China, the epicentre of what has become a global pandemic, started with a complete lockdown of the population from 10 a.m. on 23 January 2020. Within weeks, lockdown restrictions began to be applied nationally **throughout the world**, especially in cities where human density and social interaction was highest.

The response to this pandemic has been entirely unprecedented. The last global pandemic, the Spanish flu (February 1918 to April 1920), infected approximately 500 million people in four successive waves, killing between 17 and 50 million people, but did not result in anything like the kind of restrictions witnessed in 2020.

Responses have included curfews, quarantines, and similar restrictions (variously described as stay-at-home orders, shelter-in-place orders, circuit-breaker approaches, *cordon sanitaires*, shutdowns or lockdowns). Countries and territories around the world have enforced lockdowns of varying degrees with some controlling all movements while others have enforced restrictions based on time. Schools, universities, and colleges have closed. All types of recreational venues and most public places have been affected and in many places only essential businesses (such as providers of food and frontline workers) have been allowed to remain active and open. Equally, borders have been closed, asylum seekers refused passage, migrants and refugees deported, and migrants and refugees isolated in detention centres and camps. Migrants in some countries have practiced mass reverse migration, emptying urban centres as they head home. At the height of the first wave of the pandemic, cities in many countries—iconic city centres and congested urban quarters—resembled ghost towns, with military and police ubiquitous, enforcing restrictions. Unlike many thematic spotlights featured in this section, the “pandemic city” characteristic has been the most evenly spread and common experience for **major metropolises everywhere** in 2020. It remains to be seen how the response to this pandemic—and potentially those to others to follow—will affect cities, city life as well as the millions of migrants and refugees in them beyond 2020.

Sanctuary cities: protecting refugees and migrants against state policies.

The term “sanctuary city” does not have a precise legal definition but has come to refer to municipal jurisdictions, typically but not exclusively in North America, that limit their cooperation with their national government’s efforts to enforce immigration law. The movement started in Berkeley, California in 1971 when the city council gave “sanctuary” to anti-Vietnam war navy servicemen. Typically sanctuary cities want to reduce fear of deportation and possible family break-up among people who are in the country illegally. Their policies include prohibiting police or city employees from questioning people about their immigration status and refusing requests by national immigration authorities to detain people beyond their release date, if they were jailed for breaking local laws. Policies can be set expressly in law (*de jure*) or observed in practice (*de facto*).

Glasgow is a noted sanctuary city in **Scotland**. In 2000 the city council accepted its first asylum seekers relocated by the Home Office. The Home Office provided funding to support asylum seekers but would also forcibly deport them (in “removal seizures”) if it was determined they could not stay in the UK. In 2007, local residents upset by the human impact of removal seizures, organised watches to warn asylum seekers when Home Office vans were in the neighbourhood. They also organised protests and vigils which led to the ending of the removal seizures. By 2010, Glasgow had accepted 22,000 asylum seekers from 75 different nations. It is estimated that there are currently approximately 4,000 asylum seekers accommodated in Glasgow—the only city in Scotland to agree to accept asylum seekers under the Home Office Dispersal Programme since it was enacted in 1999.

Return cities: to where thousands of asylum seekers and refugees go back

There are two main forms of return migration: voluntary and forced. During 2019, UNHCR found that despite there being almost 80 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, 5.6 million displaced people returned to their areas or countries of origin, including 5.3 million internally displaced persons and 317,200 refugees. Even if many returnees go back to rural or small-town areas, the search for work and stability often subsequently draws them to cities. In some cases, they remain in the cities into which they are returned by bus or plane and in others they may have come from those cities in the first place. The issue of return and the problems around reintegration, with ample evidence of widespread economic, social and psychosocial needs, has only recently started to receive the attention it deserves as millions struggle to re-establish themselves in their increasingly urbanised home countries.

Afghan citizens form one of the largest protracted refugee populations in the world; many Afghans have lived in exile for decades. A vast majority (approximately 2 million) of registered Afghan refugees currently live in neighbouring Pakistan and Iran where many were born and raised. Despite the ongoing conflict, roughly 2.4 million displaced Afghans returned to Afghanistan since 2014, peaking in 2016 but with new surges of returns from Iran since Covid-19. Most come from neighbouring countries, driven out by fears of deportation and uncertain legal status in the case of Pakistan, and economic difficulty and integration concerns in the case of Iran. Some are expelled. In the European Union (EU), asylum recognition rates for Afghans are falling, and voluntary, quasi-voluntary, and forced returns are on the rise. In Turkey and the Western Balkans, expanded immigration enforcement and harsh conditions drive movements both onwards to the EU and back home. The larger Afghan cities such as Herat, Kandahar, and especially **Kabul**, struggle to offer viable reintegration opportunities to hundreds of thousands of returnees. One UNHCR/World Bank study suggested approximately 11 percent of the 2.4 million people who returned to Afghanistan since 2014 settled in Kabul—representing over 260,000 people and over 6 percent of the city's 4.2 million inhabitants. MMC/4Mi data recently showed that almost half of the Afghan returnees interviewed in various Afghan cities express an intention to re-migrate.

Gang cities: when migrants are involved in urban internationalised crime

Despite populist or nationalist rhetoric to the contrary, studies repeatedly and consistently conclude that there is a negligible correlation between crime rates in host cities or countries and the number of refugees and migrants living there. In some cases, areas become safer following an influx of migrants and refugees. Nevertheless, in specific locations particular communities of immigrants can be deeply involved in crime through gangs. The international nature of some organised gangs such as the Italian or Russian mafia, the Japanese Yakuza, Chinese Triads, Jamaican Yardies, Nigerian gangs, and Latin American cartels means some migrants—often irregular migrants—may be involved in urban crime.

A gang called the Latin Kings first emerged in **Chicago** in the 1940s reportedly to unite all Latinos into a collective struggle against oppression and to help each face problems of racism and prejudice that newly arriving Latino immigrants were experiencing. Young Puerto Rican men on the north side of the city—and Mexican men on the south side—organised into a “self-defence” group to protect their communities. More recently Hispanic gangs form the largest group of ethnic-based gangs in the **United States**. A California Department of Justice study reported in 1995 that 60 percent of the twenty thousand members of the 18th Street gang in California were undocumented immigrants. The 18th Street is a multi-ethnic (largely Central American and Mexican) transnational criminal organisation that started as a street gang in **Los Angeles**. It is one of the largest transnational criminal gangs in Los Angeles, with 30,000 to 50,000 members in 20 states across the US alone. The most violent Hispanic gang is said to be MS-13 and due to their transnational connections with cities in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador these two gangs have turned the Central American northern triangle into the area with the highest homicide rate in the world.

Drowning cities: where the climate is a threat

Almost 20 years ago the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned coastal areas of the impact of climate change. The panel found that through the 20th century, global rise of sea level contributed to increased coastal inundation, erosion, and ecosystem losses. It predicted coasts would be exposed to increasing risks over coming decades due to climate change and sea-level rise and that the impact of climate change on coasts is exacerbated by increasing human-induced pressures. Additionally, adaptation for the coasts of developing countries will be more challenging than for coasts of developed countries, due to constraints on adaptive capacity and resources, even though ultimately adaptation costs for vulnerable coasts are likely to be less than the costs of inaction. Finally, the IPCC found that the unavoidability of sea-level rise, even in the longer-term, frequently conflicts with present-day human development patterns and trends. What the panel found in 2001 and has repeatedly updated since then has been supplemented by new elevation data in 2019 that triples previous estimates of global vulnerability to sea-level rise and coastal flooding. Hundreds of millions of people live below future expected high tides in every scenario (high or low emissions) and some are feeling the impact already.

Low-lying areas in **Lagos**, the **Nigerian** megalopolis that is the seventh-fastest growing city in the world, as well as in the **Ghanaian** capital of **Accra**, are reportedly at risk of permanent flooding. Already, both cities are grappling with more frequent and severe flooding than in the past. Low-lying areas of Accra now flood every year during the rainy season. Sea levels in West Africa are expected to rise faster than the global average. In a region where 31 percent of the population lives along the coastline, generating 56 percent of total GDP, according to the World Bank, this is a “potentially catastrophic problem”.

Eviction cities: where tens of thousands of IDPs are forced to leave their homes

At the start of 2020 there were almost 51 million internally displaced people globally and an estimated 80 percent of them live in or around urban areas. There were an estimated 33.4 million new displacements in 2019 alone. The displaced do not often get a warm reception; they attract minimum assistance and enjoy few rights and have no official global protection status. In addition, uncertainty and precariousness characterise their residency in cities where they may be threatened by forced eviction and repeated intra-urban displacement.

Approximately 2.6 million **Somalis** currently are displaced within their own country. The largest concentration, around half a million, are in the capital, **Mogadishu**. Some have been displaced for almost three decades, others continue to arrive in the city due to conflict and climate factors. They settle on available plots of private land throughout the city. Certain sites house only a few households located on empty housing lots in the inner city. Other sites, especially on the outskirts of the city, are home to thousands of families. A recent assessment identified more than 700 IDP settlements throughout the city, but the exact number is continually changing. Despite Mogadishu having an IDP policy and a Durable Solutions Unit in the mayor’s office, in 2019, approximately 108,000 IDPs in Mogadishu were reportedly evicted from their land and shelters. More than 350,000 were estimated to have been evicted during 2017 and 2018 when evictions spiked, but this long-standing problem remains. Recent National Evictions Guidelines were designed to ensure that any evictions are carried out in a planned and legal way that protects the rights of displaced people, including by providing alternative land and housing options, but these appear to be having little impact: reports suggest that evicted IDPs tend to receive no prior notice, their shelters are destroyed, and they are left on their own to find a new place in the city to live.

Emptying cities: where the pandemic has reversed migration for millions

An unexpected outcome of states' and cities' reaction to Covid-19 has been mass movements out of cities. Some cities have actively deported international migrants, or encouraged premature departures (e.g. Gulf States) as economic activity dried up and foreigners were shunned. In other locations people spontaneously left fearing contagion or to avoid having to stay in the city during strict lockdowns, such as in Italy (e.g. Milan) and China (where 200–300,000 reportedly left Wuhan in a single day). In 2020, the most dramatic and sudden movement of reverse migration was seen in India affecting millions of internal migrants but also hundreds of thousands of international migrants, particularly those from Nepal.

Reportedly, in 2020 **India** has witnessed the second largest mass migration in its history after the Partition of India in 1947. Industrial workers and daily wage earners in densely populated cities such as **Delhi** depended on their daily earnings, which come to a complete halt after late March because of the country-wide lockdown. As the government tried to discipline citizens with a set of behavioural rules and conditions, millions of workers facing destitution, and unable to send remittances home, decided to go back to their villages where they could rely on their families as a safety net. Amid scenes of chaos and desperation, initially all modes of transport were overwhelmed and many people had no choice but to start walking to their home areas, sometime many hundreds of miles from the city. In 2017, national studies of rural-to-urban migration suggested internal migration to cities reached between 5 and 9 million annually, with almost half of these migrants coming from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar states. Some estimates of reverse migration reported over 2.3 million and 1.7 million workers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar respectively were on the move in March and April. Traders' bodies estimate that nearly 60–70 percent of the labour force employed in Delhi left the city during the lockdown.

Smuggler cities: where cities are hubs and centres of excellence for facilitating human smuggling

As the MMR essay on smuggling conducted from cities details, cities offer “myriad services, both licit and illicit, to their residents and visitors, including migrants and refugees”. The importance of cities for a wide range of illicit trades, from the trafficking of drugs or firearms, to trafficking or smuggling of humans, or the obtaining of fraudulent documents has been widely documented and appears to be increasing. The human smuggling economy “exploits the enhanced connectivity facilitated by cities”, not least to organise and coordinate irregular flows of people, but some are better placed than others to do so and within regions and along routes particular urban hubs become more prominent than others. Those that emerge as particularly pivotal in the smuggling industry—known as “superhubs”—are pre-disposed by a range of geographic and socio-political factors and benefit from what has become a multi-billion-dollar global industry.

Izmir, Turkey's third-largest city and one of its largest ports, became a key assembling and departure point for refugees and migrants targeting the Greek islands of Lesbos and Kos during the “migration crisis” that peaked in 2015. An extensive infrastructure sprang up to meet demand, including hotels catering exclusively to refugees and migrants—some specialising in services aimed at specific nationalities or ethnic groups—financial services including money-transfers, and shops selling tens of thousands of life vests, access to boats, and passage. Calculating smuggler profits is inevitably imprecise, but many hundreds of thousands of refugees used and continue to use Izmir and its smugglers to cross the Aegean Sea, often spending thousands of dollars each for the short maritime journey.

Swamped cities: where migration overwhelms urban facilities

Those seeking to restrict migration often use the fear of services and infrastructure overload as a reason to limit access to refugees or migrants. In general, claims that systems are overwhelmed or “swamped” by foreigners are exaggerated, but during certain specific time periods and in specific locations city planners do struggle to accommodate rapid and large influxes.

In the last six years around 5 million Venezuelans have left their country. In absolute terms, Bogotá is the city with the largest number of Venezuelan migrants in **Colombia**. However, municipalities along the frontier with Venezuela, such as **Cúcuta**, are welcoming a disproportionate number of refugees. In these towns and cities, between 16 percent and 38 percent of the population are from Venezuela. Despite under-registration and the changing dynamics of migration, the National Census of 2018 shows that Cúcuta’s population rose by about 50,000 people, an increase of 8.74 percent, well up on the projected average annual growth rate of 0.98 percent for the period between 2014 and 2018. These influxes of Venezuelans are also highly concentrated in locations within Cúcuta and other cities, mostly in the peripheral suburban settlements. In these areas, sudden and uncontrolled urbanisation is limiting the capacity of municipalities to effectively provide public services and conditions for social and economic development. It is too early to say if any economic advantage offered by the new arrivals will offset the challenges they create for the municipalities.

Refugee cities: where refugee camps are so large, they are de facto cities

Of the 26 million refugees in the world today an estimated 60 percent live in cities, but this still leaves 10 million living in camps. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has suggested that typical working definitions for small-city populations start at around 100,000 people. Yet there are refugee camps and closely situated clusters of refugee camps where the population can be two, three or more times this figure. Many are in sufficiently remote locations that the host government with the international community have to run the camps like small cities, maintaining law and order, providing essential services including shelter, food, water, education, and health—all of which require good camp planning.

In 2014 the Dolo Odo camps in Ethiopia were considered to be the second largest in existence while Hart Sheik, also in Ethiopia, hosted more than 250,000 refugees, mostly from Somalia, between 1988 and 2004. There are camps today in the east of Chad hosting collectively around 370,000 Sudanese refugees from the Darfur region. Other huge camps like **Zaatari in Jordan** or Kakuma in Kenya also have well over 100,000 residents. Also in **Kenya**, the **Dadaab** complex is a set of three camps in a semi-arid area in a northeastern region currently hosting approximately 215,000 residents and colloquially known as the “third largest city in Kenya”, after Nairobi and Mombasa. Opened as recently as 2016 in northwestern Uganda, Bidibidi Refugee Settlement has over 230,000 South Sudanese refugees. As of early 2017 it was the largest refugee settlement in the world but by 2018, that distinction was claimed by Kutapalong refugee camp for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh with over 600,000 people living in just 13 square kilometres. An estimated additional 200,000 undocumented Rohingya refugees are living outside the camps in nearby Cox’s Bazar city where together, as of 2020, the whole refugee settlement area totalled around 860,000 Rohingya. With the population of Cox’s Bazar at 2.3 million, the refugees now have a massive presence and influence on the municipal area.

More explicitly, refugee camps can graduate from consisting of tents, to semi-permanent settlements, to permanent, if “accidental”, or unplanned cities. The 5.6 million **Palestinian** refugees today live mainly in 58 official and 10 unofficial camps in **Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip**, accommodating those who primarily fled or were expelled during the 1948 Palestinian exodus after the 1948 Arab–Israeli War, while now their children and grandchildren still live there. Today they can justifiably be described as urban refugees in permanent structures under municipal jurisdiction in “refugee cities”.

Boom cities: where migration drives economic growth

Among economists there is no question that migrants and refugees can and have been the basis for powerful urban-led national growth. In the last two decades, migration has significantly contributed to economic growth in the US, Germany and the UK. In the US, immigrants are two to three times more likely than US-born individuals to start a company or create a patented innovation.

In the years after the start of the Syrian war the southern **Turkish** city of **Gaziantep**, on the Syrian-Turkish border, absorbed half a million refugees from Syria—almost a third of the city's current population. Strongly led by their mayor, city officials focused on integrating refugees, in line with a nationwide approach that eschewed refugee camps in favour of urban absorption. Despite the predictable initial problems of overloaded services and infrastructure, integration appears to have worked well. With the cheap labour and international and national support associated with the refugees, the already successful economy of Gaziantep boomed, benefiting from the additional skilled and non-skilled labour, new businesses, and many thousands of new consumers. It remains to be seen how well integration fares or how problematic such a rapid uptake of refugees will be if or when economic growth falters.

Stand-off cities: where irregular migrants are unwelcome or expelled

There are municipalities that are intolerant of irregular migrants and deport them when they are found. But other city authorities, particularly in advanced economies with functional democracies, find the reality of irregular migrants difficult to address. They may lack the capacity or volition to detain and expel them, and may fear negative media coverage and civil society opposition. At the same time, they may also lack the will or resources to offer irregular migrants rights in terms of urban residency, permission to work, and services normally available to citizens. The result can be a stand-off where homeless migrants camp and congregate in urban centres or squat in vacant buildings, often assisted by local charities while playing cat-and-mouse with the authorities who merely move them on or destroy their makeshift homes.

According to a **French** parliamentary report, irregular immigrants, estimated to make up a fifth of the population of Seine-Saint-Denis, north-east of **Paris**, place severe strain on public services there and create social tensions. Seine-Saint-Denis has long been the French department with the highest proportion of immigrants, and the report warned that the number of irregular migrants may have risen as high as 400,000. The report catalogues what the conservative newspaper *Le Figaro* describes as “the incredible deterioration of social, economic and security conditions” in the area, where 28 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. There are other areas of Paris (and other cities, famously Calais) where tented settlements of migrants are a common sight.

Welcoming cities: where migrant and refugee integration is non-negotiable

Globally, plenty of cities offer refuge and welcome to migrants and refugees. Some offer it by default without targeted policies and even despite harassment and discrimination at the official level. Some do so simply by their diversity and range of opportunities, existing communities and networks; others through deliberate municipal policies in which integration is non-negotiable and resources, services and city planning are geared to inclusivity.

Berlin has long been known as a multicultural and diverse city. Today, it is home to roughly 3.5 million people, of which around 30 percent have a migration background, meaning they themselves or at least one of their parents were not born with German citizenship. The particularly high numbers of asylum seekers in 2015 and 2016 (over 60,000) fundamentally challenged Berlin's response capacities, leading to the establishment of new integration measures in addition to the already existing focus on equal participation. This involved increased civil society being engaged in the integration of refugees and migrants and used innovative measures and pilot programmes. Berlin also appointed a Commissioner for Migration and Integration to head a unit dealing exclusively with those issues.

Photo credit: Ahikam Seri / Panos. Tel Aviv, Israel

A demonstration of African asylum seekers in Tel Aviv calling for authorities to grant them asylum. Although the picture was taken in 2007, asylum seekers in Israel from Sudan and Eritrea continue to face restrictions, detentions and the threat of deportation. This is an example of where cities and nations seek to refuse integration or acceptance of refugees and irregular migrants and practice unlawful activities such as forced deportations and detention in holding camps for years on end. These activities are in contrast to “sanctuary cities” and instead further stigmatise and discriminate against foreigners, in this case targeting sub-Saharan Africans.



Photo credit: Rex Wholster / Shutterstock. Balata Palestinian refugee camp, Nablus, West Bank

Refugee camps can sometimes be urban centres themselves – ‘accidental’ cities that have evolved into urban areas from tented camps some decades earlier. Balata, is typical of the 68 long-standing Palestinian refugee ‘camps’ in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Even tented camps with few structures such as the refugee settlements in Uganda (Bidibidi), Kenya (Daadab) and Jordan (Zaatari) house hundreds of thousands of people each and need to be run as de facto metropolises.



Smugglers' paradise – cities as hubs of the illicit migration business

Human smuggling has developed into a central component of mixed migration flows. Cities, with their infrastructure, connectivity and anonymity, have facilitated this transition and the attendant proliferation of criminality.

By Lucia Bird and Tuesday Reitano¹

Introduction

We are currently living in what the late former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan termed the “urban millennium”.² Over half of the world’s population now live in urban areas, with almost 10 per cent living in megacities (defined as those with more 10 million inhabitants).³ Cities are points of confluence and hubs of connectivity, not only through their geography and transportation infrastructure, but also because of their higher rates of internet penetration and better telephony services. Cities are where an ever-increasing proportion of people come together to live, work, and trade. Cities connect the local to the regional, and beyond it to the international.

Urban connectivity offers significant opportunities for licit trade and brings tangible development benefits, with cities being the engines of economic growth and trade. However, it also creates parallel openings for illicit trade, which exists in the shadows of its licit counterpart and is similarly reliant on the infrastructure cities offer. Cities’ infrastructure embeds illicit trade into international markets, empowering criminal networks to form connections with groups operating elsewhere in the country, or indeed overseas, including through diaspora connections. These connections facilitate the smuggling of both goods and people. The latter has become pivotal to modern mixed migration flows.

Blurred lines

Urban infrastructure also enables criminal networks to cross the blurry divide between licit and illicit markets, laundering illicit funds through banks and legal businesses, and exploiting the services provided by lawyers and logistics companies to move commodities and manage operations. Where state complicity is required, cities also offer a wide range of corruptible officials who can facilitate illicit trade. And as they host dense populations and high concentrations of wealth, cities are normally the destination market for

the majority of illicit goods and services. Thus, while cities are typically hubs of licit commerce, they are also burgeoning markets for illicit industry.

Cities offer myriad services, both licit and illicit, to their residents and visitors, including migrants and refugees. The importance of cities for a wide range of illicit trades, from the trafficking of drugs to that of humans and firearms, has been widely recognised. There has been less focus, however, on the role cities play in fostering connections between illicit markets. Cities engender contexts of poly-criminality which match our understanding of criminal markets as endlessly diversifying to capitalise on new opportunities. The anonymity offered by cities allows illicit trade to operate in the shadows, while their sheer size helps to hide significant illicit trade infrastructure. In some human smuggling hubs, services and goods required to complete the journey are often offered brazenly. In Mogadishu, for example, “travel agencies” openly advertise trips to Amsterdam or other locations for some thousands of dollars, while in Dakar, travel agents offer “help” with French visas for €2,000, and in Izmir, a smuggling town in Turkey, vendors hawk lifejackets by emphasising their important role in the sea voyage to Greece.

Supply and demand

The human smuggling economy is one of a range of illicit markets which exploits the enhanced connectivity facilitated by cities, in this case to coordinate irregular flows of people. It both facilitates and preys upon the innate drive of people to seek out livelihoods, security, and opportunities, both for internal and transnational migration. For refugees, and those on the move due to conflict and violence who have not satisfied a state’s asylum requirements, and who are therefore not recognised as refugees, cities offer a temporary haven, an administrative hub for those submitting asylum claims, and a place to connect with smugglers for those using cities as a stepping stone for longer cross-border journeys.

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2 United Nations (2001) [World entering ‘urban millennium’. Secretary-General tells opening meeting of Habitat Special Session.](#)

3 UN-DESA, Population Division (2018) [The World’s Cities in 2018: Data booklet.](#)

Cities are where people are concentrated and thus it is where smugglers also cluster. As smuggling networks depend on transport infrastructure and may use public transportation systems to move refugees and migrants, they tend to congregate around road and rail hubs, as well as ports and airports. For the most lucrative “full package” smuggling journeys, comparatively wealthy customers are offered fast, safe, intercontinental movement that requires access to airports and fraudulent documents. A significant proportion of fake visas emerge from legitimate consulates, which are based in cities.

Urbanisation is set to continue at a rapid pace, with cities expected to continue to pull in millions of migrants from rural areas. By 2050, some 68 percent of the world’s population is projected to live in urban areas, up from 55 percent in 2018.⁴ In parallel, human smuggling is an extremely fast-growing global criminal activity, as safe and legal routes for migration are insufficiently available, and is likely to expand further following an expected spike in the desire to migrate due to the longer term socio-economic impacts of Covid-19. Even if Covid-19 restrictions on mobility will ease at some point, the availability of legal channels is likely to remain insufficient to satisfy the demand for migration, leading to an increase in irregular migration and further growth of the human smuggling business.⁵ The role of cities in global human smuggling dynamics is therefore set to become ever more important.

Growing trends: urbanisation and human smuggling

Rural-to-urban migration is one of the key drivers of global urbanisation and is a key element of the global movement landscape. Migration plays a significant role in shaping the cities of today, with migration booms simultaneously stretching cities’ public infrastructure and driving their growth. Organised crime is drawn to cities by the same infrastructure that attracts migrants, especially the options it provides for entry and departure.

Cities’ myriad benefits

Given that cities account for a large and ever-growing proportion of the world’s population, it is unsurprising that many of those who embark upon or who have undergone irregular migration journeys—often facilitated by smugglers—live in cities. Among the millions drawn to cities are those who are not looking to settle, but rather seek to use cities, with their connectivity, services, and infrastructure, as launchpads for longer journeys to what is hoped will be a better life. Cities’ attractions range from

food and accommodation while in transit; opportunities to earn, receive and store funds to finance journeys; and sources of fake documents, international SIM cards to keep in touch with families back home, and equipment needed along the journey, such as life vests for sea travel.

The range of ancillary services provided to migrants by smuggling networks can bolster a range of urban businesses. The hospitality sector in the Pakistani cities of Quetta and Karachi, for example, derives significant benefit from the critically important role they play in human smuggling from Punjab over the border to Iran, from where many hope to travel on to the Gulf or Europe. Migrants and refugees who have paid to take the land route through Iran are usually accommodated in Quetta or Karachi before attempting to cross the border. Particularly in Quetta, this ensures that a considerable segment of the local economy—hotel owners in particular—is heavily reliant on the people-moving trade.⁶

Certain drivers of global urbanisation, such as the enhanced connectivity that fuels aspirations for a better life as rural livelihood options dwindle, have also driven the growth of the human smuggling industry. At the same time, forced displacements across the globe have spiked in the last seven years, fuelling further movement.⁷ Yet legal avenues for international migration, particularly for people from developing countries, are often unavailable, unaffordable or administratively impractical. This has triggered a sharp increase in people moving irregularly and, consequently, created a growing need for the services smugglers provide. Cities are the launchpads, transit points, and destination areas of these smuggled journeys. They are also the best place to find a smuggler.

Trading hubs and transshipment points: nodes of criminal business

Cities are built on longstanding trading corridors, paved over by modern roads and transport infrastructure. The imperative to trade in commodities both licit and illicit as a key element of livelihoods throughout history creates the conditions for urbanisation, fostering the growth of cities. This is true not only of modern dynamics, but also of ancient trade routes which shaped the birthplace of today’s cities. Historically, cities grew around rivers, ports and marketplaces, as can be tracked in the architecture of many of today’s modern cities.

4 UN-DESA (2018) [68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN](#).

5 Bird, L. (2020) [Smuggling in the time of Covid-19: The impact of the pandemic on human-smuggling dynamics and migrant-protection risks](#). Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

6 Interviews conducted by The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime in Quetta and Karachi, including with Federal Investigation Agency officials in both cities, January 2017.

7 UNHCR (2020) [Figures at a glance](#).

Cities emerged at locations where goods were transhipped from one mode of transport to another, operating as the transportation nodes of converging trading routes. This transhipment could either be “intramodal (between two carriers of the same mode) or intermodal (between different modes of transport)”.⁸ It is the latter that most commonly creates trading hubs. Port cities, such as Rotterdam and Mombasa, continue to play pivotal roles in global trading mechanics and illicit flows.

Similarly, in the case of human smuggling, cities emerged as hubs in large part because of their transhipment capacity, be it between different smuggling networks operating on the same stretch of a journey (intramodal), or between networks specialising in different modes of travel, such as land, sea, or air (intermodal).

Too much to monitor

Mombasa is a key entry and exit point for flows of illicit goods in Southern and Eastern Africa, although increased law enforcement pressure in the last few years may have displaced some flows to smaller, less supervised, ports. However, even with enhanced scrutiny, corruption, together with capacity constraints, makes comprehensive screening of containers and bulk cargo moving through ports and other points of entry and departure impossible. Illustratively, port authorities in Africa and Europe alike have an average capacity to physically screen less than 2 per cent of containers moving through their facilities.⁹ Ports with high throughput therefore pose a governance challenge and present a huge opportunity for criminal networks to move their commodities, safe in the knowledge that the risks of interception are vanishingly small in the absence of targeted intelligence. The sheer volume of trade flowing by land, sea, and air through key cities such as Istanbul has been repeatedly identified by analysts as an insurmountable obstacle in effective monitoring of illicit flows, be they of drugs or people.¹⁰ Compounding this, in the hierarchy of illicit goods, people moving irregularly are typically seen as less of a priority by states than other illicit commodities, such as drugs and firearms. Consequently, the resources that do exist tend to be focussed elsewhere.¹¹

Trading corridors are intricately bound up with patterns of human movement and consequently also with the operations of the smugglers who facilitate a growing amount of this movement. The historic patterns of human mobility have a symbiotic relationship with the positioning of trade hubs, which drew migrants seeking to exchange goods at buzzing marketplaces, and were simultaneously established by traders settling there. Established trade and migration routes—and

their illegitimate counterparts, illicit flows and irregular movements—thus map over but also shape, and often determine the geographic positioning of, urban centres.

Corruption lubricates illegality

Established patterns of corruption at points of entry and exit, and at national borders, facilitate the movement of illicit flows through cities and between countries. Patterns of corruption are first created to facilitate the movement of higher value illicit goods, such as ivory or illicit drugs. They will rely on a system of bribes paid to customs officers at airports or seaports, and to border officials at national crossings and checkpoints. Once entrenched, these systems of corruption can then also be used to facilitate the irregular movement of people. In many contexts the same route and transport mechanism will be used to move illicit commodities and people, sometimes in opposite directions. For example, Toubou smugglers who transport refugees and migrants in trucks from Niger into Libya, dropping them about 20 kilometres south of Sebha, a town in southern Libya, also transport barrels of fuel back into Niger, capitalising on the lower price of oil in Libya.¹² This ensures profit is made on both legs of the journey.

Cities as smuggling industry hubs

Our understanding of the human smuggling industry has increasingly moved away from tracking routes—which shift quickly based upon a number of factors, including changing law-enforcement focus and the hostility of migration policies—to considering the role played by “hubs”, which, although also dynamic, are more constant over time. These hubs serve as nodes which connect, modify, and define routes, structuring the range of route options on offer. They connect migrants from myriad places of origin with a variety of smuggling service providers at all levels to fit any budget, offering itineraries to countless destinations. These hubs are almost exclusively cities or large towns, not least because migrants themselves inject resources into existing local economies, swelling them in number as well in dynamism, as local populations and industries grow up to cater to the flow of people moving through their community.

For smugglers, cities are therefore areas of recruitment, places to exchange with other networks, and points of ultimate destination where arrangements between smugglers and migrants will, in most cases, terminate.

8 Changmin Jiang, A., et al. (2018) [Transport Networks and Impacts on Transport Nodes](#). US National Library of Medicine.

9 Danelo, D. (2019) [Constructing crime: Risks, vulnerabilities and opportunities in Africa's infrastructure](#). ENACT.

10 Farrell, S. (2015) *Dangerous Liaisons: crime, politics and the deep state in Istanbul*. Paper prepared for the UNODC Safer Cities in a Globalised World project.

11 See the case of Algeria's border policy in: Bird, L. (2020) [Human smuggling in Africa: The creation of a new criminalised economy?](#) ENACT.

12 Reitano, R., et al. (2017) [Integrated Responses to Human Smuggling from the Horn of Africa to Europe](#). The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

In each of these roles, cities are key to regional smuggling dynamics.

Migrants from rural areas which are characterised by longstanding high levels of mobility may well connect with a smuggler known to the community from their area of origin. However, many migrants will travel independently into a city to connect with their smuggler, either hoping to identify one upon arrival, or developing existing relationships initiated through social media, or word-of-mouth interactions. Those who have successfully completed their migration journey are often the best placed to become smugglers themselves, or to recruit new candidates to follow their paths, creating an enduring link between source and destination countries, and cementing the interconnections between hubs and routes.

Socio-political factors, such as differing visa regimes, or a particularly hostile migration environment, also shape the role of particular cities as hubs on the smuggling industry. Tijuana, the largest city on Mexico's northern border with the United States, has long played an important part in both regular and irregular crossings of people from Mexico into San Diego, California,¹³ as well as in the drug smuggling industry. Human smugglers operating in Tijuana offer their services not only to migrants and refugees travelling northwards through Mexico, predominantly from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, but also to deportees from the United States who seek re-enter the country.

A segmented business

The role of cities as points of transit and exchange is shaped not only by the infrastructure and connectivity they offer, but also by the structure of the smuggling industry, which in many areas is composed of discrete groups which specialise in facilitating movement from one hub to the next. These networks often work in cooperation with other groups along the same migration route, and pass people on at each hub. Networks operating in "pay-as-you-go" smuggling markets, which constitute the vast majority of the global smuggling industry, typically specialise in a single mode of transport, namely land, air or sea.¹⁴ This requires refugees and migrants to be handed over to a different network specialised in a different type of transport, giving rise to intermodal transshipment points and smuggling hubs.

Maritime trade

Coastal cities, which are experiencing much of the world's urbanisation, (in a phenomenon known as littoralisation), play key roles as intermodal transshipment points and as

embarkation hubs for maritime smuggling operations. This is partly due to the profit structure of the predominant "pay-as-you-go" model, in which those on the move pay for each leg of their journey separately, generally to different smugglers. The largest investment by smugglers is in the fixed costs for transportation, with only minimal and variable per-head costs for accommodation and food. Smugglers thus benefit from economies of scale, as profits are higher when large numbers of migrants and refugees are moved simultaneously. Smugglers therefore assemble migrants in coastal cities, waiting to gather enough passengers to fill vessels to capacity (or, in many cases, beyond safe capacity). Smugglers and their clients can also blend into the urban setting as they wait for clement weather.

Izmir, the gateway to Greece

Izmir, Turkey's third-largest city and one of its largest ports, became a key assembling point for refugees and migrants seeking to reach the Greek islands of Lesbos and Kos during Europe's so-called "migration crisis" that peaked in 2015.

Izmir produces and exports a range of goods, from foods to textiles, and has significant petrochemical and engineering works. Its more recent industry, human smuggling, has spawned an intricate infrastructure which quickly sprang up to meet demand, including hotels catering exclusively to refugees and migrants, some even specialising in offering services to specific nationalities or ethnic groups, and shops selling a range of life vests to meet every customer's price point. At the peak of the smuggling industry in 2015, several clothing stores in Izmir moved their usual stock to their basements, opting to display and sell only a lucrative range of life vests.¹⁵ To cater to the financial needs of refugees and migrants, a number of travel agencies in Izmir also provide money-transfer services, or escrow accounts into which those on the move make cash deposits that are only released to smugglers upon their clients' safe arrival.¹⁶

Ports in the Horn

While irregular migrants and refugees can cross many land borders unaided, additional help from smugglers is needed for most sea crossings, a necessity which swells the importance of coastal cities as smuggling hubs. Djibouti's port city of Obock, 250 kilometres away from Djibouti City (itself a smuggling hub) is a significant smuggling transshipment point on the Eastern route from the Horn of Africa towards the Gulf States. Ethiopian nationals make up more than 90 percent of those moving along this mixed migration route.¹⁷ While many cross Djibouti's harsh terrain independently, all need to hire

13 UNODC (2018) [Global Study on Smuggling Of Migrants](#).

14 Reitano T. & Bird, L. (2018) [Understanding Contemporary Human Smuggling as a Vector in Migration](#). Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

15 Reitano, T. & Tinti, P. (2015) [Survive and Advance: The criminal economy of migrant smuggling](#). Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

16 Ibid

17 International Organization for Migration (2020) [Journey from Africa to Yemen remains world's busiest maritime migration route](#).

the services of a smuggler for the sea journey towards Yemen. Most will connect with a smuggler in Obock who will facilitate the journey from a number of departure points near the city.¹⁸

The port of Bossaso in Somalia's Puntland state is another key port of departure on the Eastern human smuggling route from the Horn of Africa to Yemen: though it has been changing from year to year, some years a large majority of departures took place from Bossaso, even though the sea crossing from Obock is much shorter. In 2019, some 62 percent of arrivals in Yemen started their sea crossings from Bossaso, with the rest departing from points near Obock, others from Hargeisa in Somaliland).¹⁹ In 2019, an average of 11,500 people boarded vessels each month from the Horn of Africa to Yemen, making the waters between the two “the busiest maritime migration route” in the world.²⁰

Work, money and debt

In their role as transit points, cities also offer refugees and migrants employment: an opportunity to top-up travel funds along the way. Many people do not embark on their journey with all the money required to reach their intended destination. These migrants will seek work to fund onwards travel, and they will typically look for it in cities, where jobs are more commonly available, often in sprawling urban informal labour markets.

Research conducted in 2019 found that 42 percent of 1,689 migrants in transit and potential migrants surveyed in Niger and Mali reported working along the way.²¹ For many migrants, journey costs include payment to smugglers, who in some cases employ their clients.

Exploitation and trafficking

While most migrants and refugees pay their smugglers as soon as they engage them for a leg of a journey, some, lacking the necessary funds, opt for “travel now, pay later” schemes and may find themselves indebted to their smuggler and therefore vulnerable to exploitation and human trafficking.²²

Cities hide informal and illicit economies of significant scale, which offer opportunities for exploitative labour markets, including in informal factories and sweatshops, as well as the tourism and construction industries. These are all hubs for migrant workers, both formal and informal, and for criminal trafficking groups.

As noted above, the relationship between smuggler

and migrant (or refugee) tends to end at the agreed destination, which will typically be a city, often one with a large population offering anonymity and employment.²³ In some cases, however, smuggling networks proceed to exploit their clients in contexts which constitute trafficking, or pass them on to trafficking networks which will offer the only available form of livelihood. Certain mixed migration routes have come to pose a particularly high risk of trafficking to migrants and refugees, including the smuggling route from Myanmar to northern Malaysia and southern Thailand used predominantly by Rohingya Muslims since 2015, and the route through Libya towards Europe.

As many smuggled migrants and refugees are unable to attain regular status upon arriving at their destination, they become stuck in a state of tenuous irregularity, unable to rely on cities' formal support structures, and therefore rendered extremely vulnerable to exploitation by criminal networks, including in the form of trafficking. Cities thus offer the trafficking networks that exploit migrants and refugees both in transit and at their destination a wide range of informal businesses in which to traffic workers. For many networks based in such cities, humans will be one of several commodities trafficked into, through, and from the city for profit.

Smuggled migrants and refugees who become victims of trafficking are vulnerable to becoming involved in illicit activities, since they have scant opportunities to participate in the formal economy. In the UK, there are repeated reports of Vietnamese migrants and refugees smuggled into the country being compelled to work in cannabis farms, leaving them vulnerable to charges of illicit cultivation of narcotics.²⁴

Superhub cities

Of course, cities vary widely, and some play a far larger role in regional human smuggling dynamics, and indeed illicit trade more broadly, than others. Those that emerge as particularly pivotal in the smuggling industry—known as “superhubs”—are pre-disposed by a range of geographic and socio-political factors; they are often positioned at interfaces where geographic or political obstacles complicate human movement. Where such hubs develop, they can engender the growth of the smuggling industry in smaller, connected “spoke” towns which are strategically placed along the journey, such as Izmir, considered above, or Bani Walid in Northern Libya, a mere 180 kilometres from Tripoli, and on the northwards route towards the Mediterranean coast from

18 Tinti, P. 2017. [Migrant smuggling Paths from the Horn of Africa to Yemen and Saudi Arabia](#). ISS Africa

19 International Organization for Migration op. cit.

20 International Organization for Migration op. cit.

21 Malakooti, A. (forthcoming) *The Intersection of Irregular Migration and Trafficking in West Africa and The Sahel: Understanding the Patterns of Vulnerability*. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

22 Reitano, R., et al. (2017) op. cit.

23 World Economic Forum (2017) [Migration and Its Impact on Cities](#).

24 Anti-Slavery (2019) [Precarious Journeys - Mapping vulnerabilities of victims of trafficking from Vietnam to Europe](#); Royal Courts of Justice (2018) [H v Secretary of State for the Home Department – Approved Judgement](#). Matrix Law.

where embarkations towards Europe are co-ordinated.

Turkey is a major gateway for land, sea, and air routes to Europe. Playing a pivotal role in the migration system of the Mediterranean basin for decades, Turkey has served as a funnel for refugees and migrants from Central Asia and the Middle East—mainly Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran, Palestine and India—as well as from the Horn of Africa, heading to Europe. Many of the routes used today have been in operation for decades, used not only by migrant smugglers, but also by traffickers of various types of illicit substances, including drugs such as heroin, which has served to develop a sophisticated and multi-faceted illicit urban economy.

Istanbul

Istanbul has long been a hub for illicit trade, a role shaped by its location as well as by Turkey's porous borders and widespread corruption.²⁵ Before all its scheduled passenger flights were transferred to the new, much larger Istanbul Airport in April 2019, Istanbul Atatürk Airport was the Turkey's most important departure point for air traffic to Europe, with passenger numbers to Europe on the rise since 2010, thanks in part to Turkish Airlines' expansion into new routes in Africa and the Middle East. Significant irregular migration to EU member states was recorded at Atatürk Airport, through both document fraud and the "double check-in" method.²⁶ Turkey's position as the intersection of Asia, Europe and the Middle East came to the fore in the context of the Syrian crisis during which, enhanced by Turkey's free-visa regime with Syria until 2015, Turkey emerged as a key departure point of the European migration surge for those travelling by air.

Istanbul, which straddles the Sea of Marmara to connect Asia with mainland Europe, serves as a central hub for inward and outward migration. Cities play a pivotal role in Turkey's smuggling market, with three in particular hosting the lion's share of smuggling services: Istanbul, Izmir, and Aydin.²⁷

Since the contentious €6 billion deal reached by Brussels and Ankara in March 2016 to stem the flow of migrants and asylum seekers crossing into Europe from Turkey, the numbers of people moving on this route have plummeted since their 2015 peak. However, irregular movement (much of it facilitated by smugglers) surged across land and sea routes following Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statement to Parliament on 22 February 2020 announcing that Turkey's borders with Europe were again open. The speed and scale of this

spike in movement demonstrates how quickly smuggling networks embedded in these long-established hubs can spring back into action.²⁸ A mere week after Erdoğan's announcement, on 1 March, Greece saw the biggest number of refugees and migrants arrive from Turkey by sea in a single day since March 2016.

Since March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the restrictions imposed by Turkish and EU governments to contain its spread, have reduced movement and human smuggling activity in many parts of the world. However, the crisis that will inevitably ravage Turkey's already struggling economy, and drive many in the Middle East and Asia to move in search of better livelihoods, is likely to trigger a renewed surge of migrants and refugees risking their lives on the crossing to Europe. Istanbul's longstanding position as a superhub for human smuggling into Europe is set to come to the fore once more.

Nairobi

Nairobi is a regional superhub for the smuggling industry in eastern Africa. A melting pot of cultures and ethnicities half of whose inhabitants living in informal settlements,²⁹ the Kenyan capital—which is within reach of Dadaab refugee camp, the third largest in the world—offers refugees and irregular migrants myriad options to blend into the city while they obtain the documents needed for onwards travel, or connect with the smugglers responsible for facilitating the next leg of their journey. Nairobi's human smuggling industry is firmly entrenched, and most potential clients will be able to find smugglers of their own nationality willing to co-ordinate their onwards travel. Nairobi's sprawling informal economies offer refugees and migrants a range of employment opportunities, shaping its role as both a final destination and a transit point from which to fund onward travel. Some smuggling networks specialise in facilitating movement out of Dadaab—which is so big it has many of the trappings of a city itself—into Nairobi, where migrants and refugees can more easily organise the next leg of their journey.³⁰

Nairobi is a hub on both air and terrestrial smuggling routes and is connected by road and rail to the port of Mombasa and thence international maritime trading routes. The capital's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport is the busiest in East Africa and is a key regional departure point on the Eastern smuggling and trafficking route to the Gulf States, where thousands of East Africans travel in search of employment. By land, Nairobi is an important consolidation hub on the

25 Radden Keefe, P. (2015) The Geography of Badness: Mapping the Hubs of the Illicit Global Economy. In Miklaucic, M. & Brewer, J. (eds) (2015) [Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization](#); Farrell, S. op. cit.

26 Huddleston, W., Karacay, A. & Nikolova, M. (2015) [Study on smuggling of migrants - Characteristics, responses and cooperation with third countries - Case Study 4: Nigeria – Turkey – Bulgaria](#). European Commission.

27 Kahya, Y. & Sever, M. (2013) *Türkiye'de Göçmen Kaçakçıları*. Ankara: Karınca Yayınları.

28 Damon, A. & Baykara, M. (2020) [Greece stands firm on migrants, as Turkey opens floodgates to Europe](#). CNN.

29 Amnesty International (2009) [Kenya the unseen majority: Nairobi's two million slum dwellers](#).

30 Grant, K., Kimotho, R. & Gerstner, E. (2012) [Asylum Under Threat - Assessing the protection of Somali refugees in Dadaab refugee camps and along the migration corridor](#). Refugee Consortium of Kenya.

southern smuggling route towards South Africa. While quantitative data on this route is limited, mixed migration flows into Southern Africa appear to be increasing, with a significant proportion of these journeys facilitated by smugglers.³¹ Of particular concern is evidence suggesting that the smuggling markets on the southern route are becoming more exploitative.³² Widespread corruption in Nairobi, including among customs, law enforcement and judiciary officials, grease the wheels of not only the human smuggling industry, but also of the flow of drugs (particularly heroin), firearms and other illicit commodities.

Istanbul and Nairobi are only two of the world's numerous smuggling superhubs, a grey list which also includes (but is certainly not limited to) Bangkok, Khartoum, Karachi, and Mexico City. These cities offer crucial opportunities for regional and global connectivity, operating as sprawling marketplaces co-ordinating the illicit flows of people and commodities. These superhubs interconnect to form a global net of shadow trade.

Fraudulent documents

Most irregular migration happens not through the clandestine and perilous land and sea journeys that receive extensive news media coverage, but by ostensibly legitimate travel that crosses the line into irregularity when, for example, employment contracts and visas expire, or fraudulent passports or other travel documents are obtained. This is another industry that clusters inside cities.

Smuggling by air is co-ordinated by well-organised networks which often offer “full package” services—the first class of irregular travel—to migrants who have significant financial resources. Full package services may include both air travel (often on long-haul intercontinental journeys) and travel by land or sea. Smuggling networks based in São Paulo, Brazil, offer such packages to nationals from East Africa and the Middle East, providing fake Brazilian travel documents for initial flights to Latin America, then facilitating overland movement through Mexico to the United States.³³ Networks offering air travel need to interact with the formal economy, including in order to buy plane tickets, and they therefore need to be able to launder money between the formal and informal sectors. For this reason, many run parallel, ostensibly licit companies, such as travel agencies whose main line of business is often thinly veiled behind promotions for

seemingly legitimate cruises; what is actually on offer may be intimidated by the large-font inducement of “no visa required”.³⁴

These networks rely on a range of counterfeiters who can provide their customers with the travel documents they need but cannot obtain on the licit market. Some cities, (often capital cities) that are high-transit zones for irregular migrants and legitimate travellers, have become hubs of the counterfeiting industry, or at least the place where vendors can be found, with document production taking place elsewhere.

In popular tourist destinations such as Bangkok, it is relatively easy for criminal organisations to establish a trade in illicit passports: they buy valid ones from partygoers or backpackers who have run out of money and are looking to make some fast cash. Tourists then report their passport stolen, get a new one and resume their travels after filling in a one-page form on which basis their consulates will issue them a temporary travel permit.³⁵ The “stolen” passports feed a flourishing black market, likely constituting a significant proportion of the 84 million stolen and lost travel documents listed on Interpol's database.³⁶

But the golden ticket of such fakery is a blank passport that has been bought or stolen from the issuing country by seasoned criminals. Fake, doctored, or look-alike passports will always carry a risk of detection, but authentic blank passports, when correctly filled out, are almost impossible to spot. (A useful second-best is a legitimate visa sticker or stamp allowing someone to travel on their own national passport.) The best way to secure these is from foreign consulates in capital or big cities. Consulate staff, who tend to be locally hired rather than foreign diplomats, are targeted for corruption by smugglers ready to pay thousands of dollars for genuine passports. These are used as models that the counterfeiters reproduce, or sold on for three or four times the price to illicit travellers.³⁷ In Khartoum, an extremely important regional hub for human smuggling,³⁸ there is a flourishing black market in fraudulent Eritrean identity documents, and there are reports of genuine passports being issued by the Eritrean consulate under a false identity.³⁹ Eritreans travel overland (predominantly irregularly given that it is almost impossible to leave Eritrea legally) to Khartoum, from where wealthier migrants and refugees will fly out using purchased

31 Maher, S. (2018) Southern Africa. In [Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: A global review of the emerging evidence base](#). International Organisation for Migration.

32 Frouws, B. & Horwood, C. (2017) [Smuggled South: An updated overview of mixed migration from the Horn of Africa to southern Africa with specific focus on protections risks, human smuggling and trafficking](#). Danish Refugee Council and Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat.

33 The United States Department of Justice (2019) [International Law Enforcement Cooperation Leads to Brazilian Takedown of Significant Human Smugglers](#).

34 Reitano, T. & Tinti, P. (2016) *Migrant refugee smuggler saviour*. London: Hurst.

35 Serenelli, L. (2014) [EU, Interpol fight epidemic of stolen, fake passports](#). USA Today.

36 Interpol - [Stolen and Lost Travel Documents database](#).

37 Goodell, J. (2002) [How to Fake a Passport](#). New York Times Magazine.

38 Reitano, R., et al. (2017) op cit.

39 Government of Netherlands (2017) [Country of Origin Information Report on Eritrea](#).

fraudulent documents, while those of more limited means will continue on overland routes towards their final destination.

Another way criminal networks procure false documentation is to counterfeit other identification documents such as birth certificates and use them to obtain passports. A similar approach is taken to counterfeiting the supporting documents required for the work, study, or travel visas used to gain entry into destination countries, such as marriage certificates, school leaving certificates, bank statements, and entry or exit stamps in passports. The fraudulent document market can be extremely specialised, and those who offer the service base themselves in cities where their clients and the examples on which the original documents are most easily found.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Cities are dynamic, characterised by a constant flow of goods and people, including refugees and migrants travelling both regularly and irregularly. Just as cities operate as hubs for licit trade, they are similarly crucial to global illicit trade.

Legitimate businesses and organised crime groups alike are drawn to the infrastructure which underpins cities, relying on physical and telecommunications infrastructure to expand the scale and geographic reach of operations and to diversify across commodities and benefit from operational synergies.

Human smuggling networks exploit the connectivity offered by cities, drawing from their vast pools of potential clients, and relying on the transportation networks they are founded on. Infrastructure development, and the enhanced connectivity it offers, opens up many opportunities for “deviant globalisation”, namely “the unpleasant underside of transnational integration.”⁴¹ Similarly, the growth of cities, and the opportunities they offer to the shadow economy, drives “deviant urbanisation”, strengthening the pivotal role played by smuggling cities in global illicit flows. In many cases it is these illicit activities by urban-based migrant smugglers – despite the rights violations and abuses they are also guilty of – that offer so many refugees and migrants the opportunity to reach their intended destinations and from which, using regular channels, they would normally be barred.

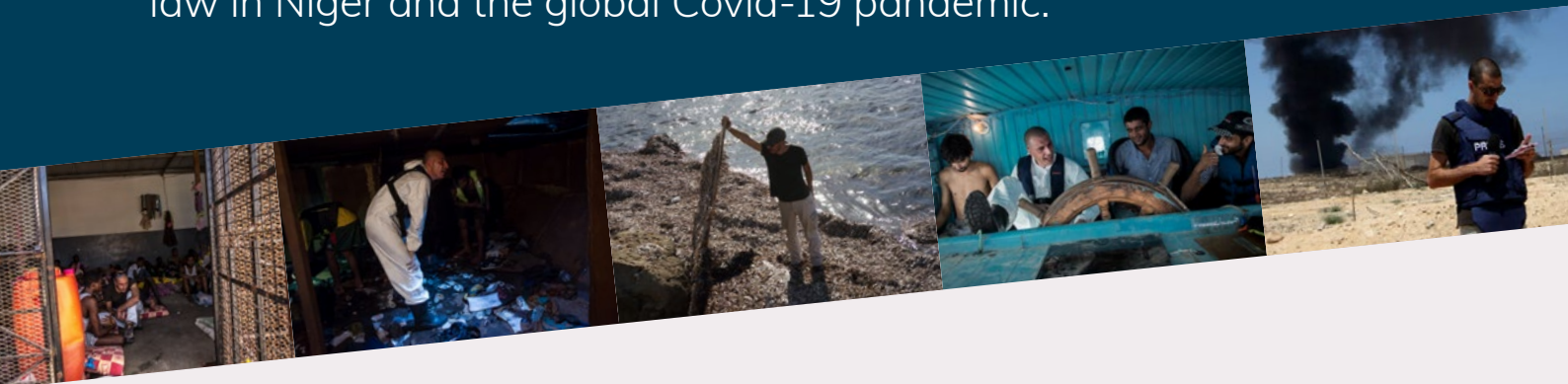
40 A detailed analysis of the document procurement services offered by “migration brokers” in Cameroon, and their relationship with aspiring migrants, can be found in: Alpes, J. (2017) [Why aspiring migrants trust migration brokers: The moral economy of departure in Anglophone Cameroon](#). Africa.

41 Gilman, N. (2018) [Deviant Globalisation](#). Wired.

Interview

The diversity and dynamism of people smuggling

Contrary to the simplistic portrayals by politicians and much of the media, the business of people smuggling is both geographically varied and ever-changing, explains **Mark Micallef**. It is a sector that is constantly responding to trends and events, such as a new law in Niger and the global Covid-19 pandemic.



Mark Micallef is the director of the North Africa and Sahel Observatory at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, where he leads research about smuggling and trafficking networks based on fieldwork conducted in Libya, Niger, Chad, Mali, Algeria, and Sudan. With a background in investigative journalism, Micallef has been engaged with irregular migration from Africa to Europe for more than 15 years. As a journalist, he reported extensively from Libya, both before and after the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi as well as during the 2011 revolution.

To what extent would you say those in mixed migration flows globally depend on human smugglers to move, and has this changed much in the last decade? What trends do you see?

It depends very much between different territories. The harder it is to travel, the more the dependence on human smugglers. We can see this in different areas. Prior to 2017, for instance, in the Aegean route, there were legs where the involvement of smugglers was rather light, and which, however, became much more consistent as European states started implementing various border controls because, ultimately, that's the point of contracting the smuggler: to help you go through obstacles, very often borders or other obstacles put in place by states to try to regulate mobility.

In more difficult places such as such as Libya, for instance, a smuggler is there also to navigate the context. So the barriers there are not necessarily put in place by a state, or different administrations, but [people use smugglers] to navigate the difficulty of the territory, and that hasn't changed. If anything, it's become more difficult.

If we look at a place like Niger, for instance, there we see that even though migrants always needed to use the help of smugglers or drivers that cross the desert because, again, there was a difficulty to navigate the territory, now we're seeing smugglers having to intervene much earlier in the journey because human smuggling has been criminalised since 2015, effective in 2016, and therefore, we're seeing more activity that can be classed as smuggling along that particular route,

even though the overall number of migrants using this route has diminished.

Do you have any estimates or clues to the size of the industry globally, in terms of monetary value?

We've done some estimations, localised estimations, in terms of the size of specific networks, which are now dated, but we've never tried to tackle a comprehensive evaluation. It's sometimes done by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and other organisations trying to take a macro perspective, but for the type of research that we [at the Global Initiative] conduct, I'm not always certain of the usefulness of trying to tackle such a task because I find it's a very difficult exercise in this very dynamic sector. By the time you're finished, you're really describing something that was and that has changed.

“ There's been a very clear and active attempt to conflate smuggling with trafficking and make smugglers out to be traffickers because it's easier to sell a tough-on-crime agenda when we're talking about traffickers than when we're talking about smugglers. ”

Despite the massive public exposure on the issues of irregular movement in recent years, commentators, reporters, and politicians still often describe human smuggling as human trafficking. These are two materially distinct international crimes, and their significant differences are relatively simple to explain. So, is this confusion accidental or deliberate?

No, I don't think it's accidental, particularly at the political level. Impatience and wanting to cut corners also play a part sometimes in the speeches of politicians. But I think there's been a very clear and active attempt to conflate smuggling with trafficking and make smugglers out to be traffickers because essentially it's easier to sell a tough-on-crime agenda when we're talking about traffickers than when we're talking about smugglers. There are some territories where things are blurred. In the Libyan context in particular, there is sometimes a continuum between what is smuggling and what eventually becomes trafficking, or something looking like trafficking. But I don't think that's the issue here. I think there's a political motivation for the conflation.

And to what extent do you think that smuggling and trafficking definitions have been complicated by the violations and rights abuses that have been associated with human smuggling?

Some cases are challenging, particularly in the border areas between Libya, Niger, Chad, and Sudan, where

you've got a number of kidnapping practices or practices that border between kidnapping, indentured labour, labour exploitation. Very often the issue of consent and the migrants being a willing party in whatever sort of agreements featuring labour is not clear. These agreements typically start with some form of consent, but it's not clear whether migrants have the full picture of what they're walking into and then what they walk into tends to be much more onerous, exploitative and abusive than they had anticipated.

We often associate neglect of migrants and refugees, and violations against them, with remote de-populated areas, such as deserts, border areas, forests, or on the seas. But do violations and killings also take place in cities? And can you give us any examples?

Absolutely. In Libya for example a city which is very tightly associated with these sorts of abuses is Bani Walid. Now, by Libyan standards, Bani Walid is a relatively urban town. Some of the abuses reported over the past years have happened bang in the middle of the town, so they haven't happened in the periphery of Bani Walid, but happened in facilities inside the town. Besides Bani Walid, there have been several reported incidents of chronic abuse in places like Zawiya, even Zuwara, maybe to a lesser extent Misrata. In Niger, particularly in recent years, there have been several cases of reported exploitation in southern towns such as Maradi, the capital Niamey itself, so and so forth. So yes, the more remote an area is and the lesser the footprint of law enforcement, the more the chances of these sort of abuses, but [they are] definitely not only exclusive to remote areas.

In Southeast Asia, you've got abusive trafficking situations that are happening in cities as well. In Myanmar, and even in Bangkok in Thailand, for instance, you have migrants who end up in abusive situations. This definitely also applies to European places of arrival, including Malta, Italy, and other European countries where, over the years, we've seen multiple reports of abuse: migrants being rented out substandard accommodation, migrants being forced into labour, forced into prostitution, trafficking situations, or indentured labour situations in various different forms, including in highly urbanised cities.

To what extent have cities in transit countries become concentrations of human smuggling expertise, in terms of organisation, preparation, or facilitation?

There are certain hubs, certain cities and towns, that become associated with human smuggling and build a certain level of expertise. Typically, it starts as a result of geography, so a town happens to develop that profile because it just happens to be in the right place for a particular flow. But then that in itself generates a

momentum in its own right. And, yes, you see networks being developed where a certain logistical expertise or logistical capacity is developed and that in itself then creates its own momentum. Zuwara in Libya is one such centre. Khartoum, for instance, is a great example in East Africa along with Nairobi; both are very important hubs and both are examples of this where you had a historical development of migration flows that then developed a capacity in human smuggling, which in turn created its own momentum.

In the Sahel, I would say Bamako is another example along with towns such as Timbuktu and Gao in the North of Mali. Of course, Agadez in Niger is a key example. Burkina Faso is becoming much more important, as well as different cities in Mauritania of late, and then, of course, you've got various places in Algeria. Algiers itself has become more important over recent years, and in Morocco, Rabat is a hub, of course.

What about Europe? Would you classify countries like Italy and Greece and Malta as transit locations in so far that they are not the preferred destination countries for many migrants and refugees?

Yes, but when it comes then to the expertise of smugglers in these countries, it's different in different areas and it's usually down to opportunity. So, for instance, if we take the case of Malta, Malta did develop an expertise in smuggling back in the 1990s and early 2000s, where at the time there was a need, basically, for migrants wanting to get out of Malta, to obtain the services of smugglers. But eventually, that died out, especially after Malta joined the European Union and the Schengen zone. Irregular migrants, who still had a status of irregular migrant, could more easily transit to mainland Europe, which was ultimately their target. Then when it comes to places like Italy and Greece, you have the development of a smuggling infrastructure in various different places in both of these countries. In Greece, it started on the islands where people first land with very strong networks: in places like Lesbos connected to Athens for example. From these hubs, smuggling networks are then able to push migrants towards the borders with Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, and so and so forth, sometimes connected across that region, all the way to Hungary and Austria.

And then in Italy itself, over two decades, we have seen the significant development of different networks, responding to different flows in the Central Mediterranean itself. Then you've got smuggling networks who are at the receiving end of flows coming from Tunisia. Now this has gone up and down over the years, but the connection was never lost. And then you have smuggling networks that are at the receiving end of flows of migrants coming from Libya. And very often, they're distinct and you've got concentrations in different parts of Sicily, in Calabria, in the south of Italy, in Rome, all the way up to places like Milan.

Is there evidence that organised crime, specifically the mafia, is involved?

When it comes to organised criminal activity directly involved in smuggling, not only is the evidence very weak in that area, but to me it would stand to logic that smuggling itself isn't a very lucrative activity that would attract serious organised criminal activity around it. But there have been overlaps between organised crime and the exploitation of irregular migration in agriculture, for instance, and definitely so in sexual exploitation in various parts of Italy. In Naples, there's evidence of this and Rome, and in different parts of Sicily, and even in the north.

“ Smuggling itself isn't a very lucrative activity that would attract serious organised criminal activity around it. ”

Do you think migrants and asylum seekers are vulnerable to under-the-radar labour and sexual exploitation in transit and destination cities? And if so, does this mainly occur in cities of the global South?

It definitely also occurs in the global North, particularly in the examples I've just been mentioning. You have plenty of examples in various European countries where migrants are exploited, sometimes systematically. In Italy, in Malta, in Greece, in Spain, these are all places where there have been cases of forced labour and forced sexual exploitation. It's occurring very often in the city, right under the noses of the authorities. Particularly when it comes to sexual exploitation, and there is where you have an overlap with organised criminal activity, because often that sort of activity requires protection.

You have written about how Italy and the EU encouraged an anti-smuggling business to emerge in Libya amongst certain militia groups. How important was this to the steep decline in the numbers of new arrivals in the last two years?

I think it was critical. I think this is the reason why we've seen that steep decline since 2017. To this day, various countries insist on trying to explain the decline in terms of the jump in activity by the Libyan Coast Guard, but the data just doesn't bear this out in any shape or form. You look at the coasts, the activity of Libyan Coast Guard between 2016, 2017, and 2018. Yes, you will see some increased activity, but definitely not in proportion with the decline we saw after 2017 in the Central Mediterranean. The fact is that the massive shift that took place, took place on land, and it can be pinpointed to the events of October 2017, when a war broke out in the coastal town of Sabratha, which at the time was the number one departure point for migrants leaving

Libya. Then there were other factors, including, the biggest direct European input in this: the criminalisation of human smuggling in Niger. So while these structural changes were taking place in the coastal areas of Libya, the intervention in Niger had the effect of reducing the flow of migrants crossing from Niger into Libya. And so you need to see these two factors together.

You've suggested Libya is using anti-smuggling operations to "launder their reputation". Can you elaborate?

By 2017, after all the aftermath of the 2014 civil war in Libya, two things became distinctly toxic at the international level, particularly at the European level: one was terrorism and the other one was human smuggling. So, you had a carrot and stick system. One hand, they were being stigmatised and punished and jeopardising the possibility of legitimising themselves for the future through any association with human smuggling. On the one hand, a carrot was being provided through which they had the chance to directly legitimise their operation if they retreated from the protection of human smuggling and started to police it instead. Indeed, they saw it as a chance to launder their reputation.

It was strongly rumoured that Italy was instrumental in financing some militia running the anti-smuggling arrangements. Have you come across more concrete evidence?

I think we came close to the evidence that Italy was involved, but never really hard evidence. But beyond the actual evidence and the smoking gun that Italy was directly involved in brokering a deal with a UN Security Council-sanctioned smuggler, Ahmed Al-Dabashi and his militia, the framework in which these changes were taking place still puts Italy firmly in the frame, in the sense that the Government of National Accord, which was co-opting these militias ultimately, was acting in the framework of the MoU signed with Italy.¹

Although the impact of Covid-19 and the global response to it is still very ongoing, can you already see any impact on both irregular movements using smugglers and the smuggling industry itself?

Initially, after the pandemic reached North Africa, we saw various internal flows within Libya grind to a halt. We saw movement between Niger and Libya grind to a halt, same thing with Chad and Libya, even though the flow there is not very important. Same again between Sudan and Libya. But then in the weeks after that, we started seeing adaptation. So different routes starting to be used, some smugglers trying to diversify their

operations. For instance, in Niger we saw smugglers using routes from Niger to Chad and then back into Libya again, which we hadn't seen for some time, as well as similar adaptations in Libya. With regards to a surge, or perceived surge of departures that took place more or less at the same time as the Covid crisis erupted in Libya, there was actually no surge. If you look at the numbers of departures in the first quarter of 2020, you should see that the departures in March and April remained within the same levels as the previous months. However, the arrivals in Europe picked up. There was a particular three-to-four-week period between mid-March and the beginning of May in which arrivals picked up. The reason for this was the activity of the Libyan Coast Guard basically ground to a halt in some points as a result of the Covid crisis. Different Coast Guard officials were unwilling to go out on rescue or interception missions, so their activities dropped.

“Initially, after the pandemic reached North Africa, we saw various internal flows within Libya grind to a halt. But then in the weeks after that, we started seeing adaptation. So different routes starting to be used, some smugglers trying to diversify their operations.”

Do you think the longer-term impact of Covid-19 will affect movement generally and the smuggling groups that profit from it, or will it all bounce back to normal within a few months or a couple of years?

How this will evolve over time is a very interesting question. A bit hard to answer obviously because it will draw on a number of macro-economic changes. But the Covid crisis is going to have and is already having a massive economic impact across the globe. North Africa and the Sahel are not shielded from this, quite the contrary, actually. The impact the crisis has had so far on the price of oil has very direct and very immediate implications on the entire region. And so, no, I don't think that in the coming years we will see a return to the status quo, but we might actually see new push factors, not necessarily of a massive impending new wave of irregular migration the likes of which we had seen in 2015, but there are new push factors on the horizon.

¹ On 2 February 2017 a memorandum of understanding on development cooperation, illegal immigration, human trafficking, fuel smuggling and reinforcement of border security was signed between Italy's prime minister and Fayeze al-Serraj, the head of the UN-backed Government of National Accord.

Unsafe havens – displacement within and between cities

Because of the opportunities they offer for employment and social connections, cities predominate as destinations for refugees and migrants. But they are far from risk-free, and when crisis strikes or events turn against them, many have no choice but to move on again.

By Karen Jacobsen, with Chris Horwood¹

Every year across the world countless thousands of people are forced to move within or between cities for a wide variety of reasons. This essay explores how IDPs, migrants and refugees are affected by such involuntary intra- and inter-urban displacement. Both forms of displacement are somewhat invisible and, for the most part, difficult to measure because municipalities rarely keep track of them.²

Most of the principal causes of urban displacement can be grouped into four broad categories: urban development (such as gentrification or infrastructure growth), armed conflict and other forms of violence, disasters (such as those caused by flooding and earthquakes), and organised state activity (such as deportation and detention).

Recent years have seen a growing recognition that in the event of conflicts or disasters triggered by natural hazards, settled or transiting migrants and refugees are often disproportionately affected and may “fall through the cracks of emergency preparedness”, mainly because relief and recovery systems and host state actors “do not always readily identify or understand migrants’ unique needs.”³ Since many IDPs, migrants and refugees head to cities in destination states, these gaps are especially evident in urban settings, where the stakes are especially high:

Rapid and badly managed urban growth and the forced movement of people to and within cities stretches urban systems and the capacity of authorities and host communities to deal with displacement. Urban crises may also trigger new and secondary displacement, creating a downward spiral of vulnerability and risk. How displacement and urban change are managed therefore makes the difference between systemic resilience or risk of collapse.⁴

Of course, urban displacement affects a much wider range of people than just displaced people, migrants and refugees. This essay looks at these various groups, types of displacement and possible displacement outcomes as illustrated in the table opposite.

Precarious living

In host countries with very large refugee populations but no or few formal refugee camps, such as South Africa, Egypt, India, and Lebanon, almost all refugees live in informal settlements located in and around towns and cities.⁵ Internal and international migrants in many parts of the world also live in marginalised and insecure urban areas, often informal settlements or slums. These areas tend to be particularly susceptible to disruptions that cause secondary displacement, the forced movement of refugees and migrants from their chosen destinations. Of the 7 million internally displaced people in Syria, for example, at least half have experienced multiple displacements as a result of armed conflict or the inability to survive in depleted host communities.⁶

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2 Anzellini, V. et al. (2020) [Global Report On Internal Displacement 2020](#). International Displacement Monitoring Center.

3 This recognition is embodied in the International Organization for Migration’s [Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative](#), which aims “to improve the ability of States and other relevant stakeholders to prepare for, respond to, alleviate suffering, and protect the dignity and rights of migrants caught in countries in situations of acute crisis”. MICIC (2015) [Background Paper – Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative – IGC Plus Consultation](#).

4 Anzellini, V. et al (2019) [Global Report on Internal Displacement 2019](#). IDMC.

5 In the case of Lebanon there are various “camps” or long standing settlement areas for the almost 500,000 Palestinian refugees, but the newer Syrian refugees mainly live in cities.

6 REACH (2015) [Syria: Latest Case Study Assesses Secondary Displacement In Idlib Governorate](#)

Urban group	Type of displacement	Possible outcomes
Residents displaced for the first time	Primary	Displaced within the city or to another city (as IDPs) or out of the country (i.e. become refugees)
Internal migrants or IDPs, i.e. nationals who migrated or were displaced to cities, and then are displaced again	Secondary	Displaced within the city or to another city or return to rural village or out of the country (i.e. become refugees)
International refugees & migrants in cities who are displaced (again, in the case of refugees)	Secondary	Displaced within the city or to another city or out of the country, in some cases through deportation Voluntary return home or onward movement in the case of migrants
City residents, IDPs, internal or international migrants or refugees, feeling compelled to flee the city, but unable to leave	None (involuntary immobility)	Stuck within the city boundaries and among the most vulnerable

Two very different countries exemplify the types of low-income and marginal housing areas migrants and refugees often find themselves in. In China’s burgeoning cities, millions of internal migrant workers live in ghetto-like sprawling enclaves, “semi-urbanised villages” where “crime, illegal construction and public health problems have become big headaches for municipal governments”.⁷ In Kenya, rural-to-urban migration drives the growth of Nairobi’s numerous (40+) slum settlements, which house over half of the city’s population of more than 3 million people. Nairobi is home to some 16 percent of Kenya’s 500,000 registered asylum-seekers and refugees. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 81,000 reside in Nairobi and other urban locations, mostly in the poorer settlements.⁸

The triggers of intra- and inter-urban displacement affect migrants and refugees alike. Every city has its own distinct conditions, but in many cases multiple triggers come into play. For example, Mexico City has a high earthquake risk, is also expanding rapidly both in terms of population and economic growth, and is home to the Sinaloa drug cartel, whose violence can compel people to leave their homes, as it does to a larger degree in cities in the Northern Triangle.⁹

The distribution of risk within cities is not equal. Earthquakes, for example, can strike anywhere, but people living in the poorest areas will normally be much more affected when they occur as such districts take longer to recover. Displacement from such districts is likely to be more extensive, and return less likely.

Urban development

Urban development includes the gentrification (or “beautification”) of neighbourhoods, or the creation of new infrastructure (such as airport expansion, roads, or power plants), or the construction of malls, new housing areas, or special economic zones, and in some cases the creation of entirely new cities.¹⁰ With urban development comes the displacement of poor people—including migrants, internally displaced people (IDPs), and refugees—either because they can no longer afford rents when the value of housing increases and have to move, or are made to move against their will (see box on evictions below) by private landowners or the state.¹¹

7 Deng, F. & Huang, Y. (2004) [Uneven land reform and urban sprawl in China: the case of Beijing](#). Progress in Planning.

8 UNHCR Kenya (2020) [Urban Areas](#)

9 Council on Foreign Relations. (2019) [Central America’s Turbulent Northern Triangle](#)

10 According to the US [National Community Reinvestment Coalition](#), “Neighborhoods experience gentrification when an influx of investment and changes to the built environment leads to rising home values, family incomes and educational levels of residents. Cultural displacement occurs when minority areas see a rapid decline in their numbers as affluent, white gentrifiers replace the incumbent residents.”

11 People are often relocated when the state makes claims of eminent domain, i.e. when the law allows the state to take private property for “the public good” – which often includes development projects. See Kim, I. et al (2017) *Eminent Domain: A Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press.

Forced evictions

Globally, millions of people are forcibly and illegally evicted in cities every year.

*Forced evictions take place all over the world. Communities are often evicted in the name of development or regeneration. Building roads, railways or even tourist resorts are common reasons given for forcibly evicting people from their homes. Who's at risk? For the most part, people lacking security of tenure [...] they could be migrants, asylum seekers, people marginalised from society, uneducated and unaware of their rights.*¹²

The impact of forced evictions can be profound and long-lasting, “undermin[ing] efforts to help marginalised and vulnerable people escape poverty and secure durable solutions to their displacement.”¹³

UN-Habitat, which set up an advisory group on forced evictions in 2004, has noted that in many countries, unlawful evictions of squatters, low-income renters, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups with inadequate or no legal security of tenure are carried out with relative ease.¹⁴

Examples are numerous, especially in cities of the global South. In 2019, 108,000 IDPs in Mogadishu were evicted from their land and shelters. “This number is down from more than 200,000 in 2018, when evictions spiked, but demonstrates that much of the problem remains.”¹⁵ As well as forced evictions, an increasing number of people in Somalia are fleeing their homes for a range of other reasons, including “incessant fighting, recurrent droughts and floods, and the worst locust invasion in 25 years, “leading to severe overcrowding and an intensifying risk of Covid-19” among IDPs.¹⁶

In Nairobi, construction of a new road led to 30,000 evictions from the sprawling Kibera slum, but the government’s promises of relocation did not materialise and many who lost their homes ended up living on the streets.¹⁷ In South Sudan, evictions are a “constant risk” for many groups, IDPs in particular, and even more so during the current Covid-19 crisis.¹⁸ In Jakarta, government slum-removal programmes purportedly designed to improve livelihoods and reduce flood risks displaced 25,533 people. The Indonesian government provided education, transportation, and health subsidies but these failed to improve the displaced people’s poverty levels.¹⁹ In Nigeria, the Lagos state government’s slum redevelopment and upgrading from 2007-15 was accompanied by evictions and demolitions.²⁰

Their lack of rights, and the fact that they are often afraid to go to the authorities to report discrimination or other unfair practices, leaves migrants and refugees especially susceptible to evictions, including those that are politically motivated.

For example, in 2018, as Lebanese politicians became increasingly vocal in their calls for Syrian refugees to return home, 13 municipalities forcibly evicted some 3,664 Syrian refugees from their homes and expelled them from the municipalities, apparently because of their nationality or religion, while another 42,000 refugees “remained at risk of eviction”.²¹ In other documented cases, urban authorities forcibly (and illegally) evicted thousands of IDPs and internal migrants from Afghan cities.²² It is challenging for IDPs in Afghan cities such as Kabul to establish tenure over adequate housing, “which puts them at constant risk of secondary displacement, mainly in the form of evictions.”²³

12 Amnesty International (undated) [Forced Evictions](#).

13 Norwegian Refugee Council (2020) [An Unnecessary Burden: Forced evictions and Covid-19](#).

14 UN-Habitat (2007) [Forced Evictions - Towards Solutions? Second Report of the Advisory Group on Forced Evictions to the Executive Director of UN-HABITAT](#); See also: UN-Habitat (2005) [Forced Evictions - Towards Solutions? First Report of the Advisory Group on Forced Evictions to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat](#).

15 Yarnell, M. (2019) [Durable Solutions In Somalia: Moving From Policies To Practice For IDPs In Mogadishu](#). Refugees International. [According to Amnesty International](#), between January and July 2020, some 33,400 IDPs were evicted in Mogadishu.

16 Amnesty International (2020) [Somalia: Internally displaced people surviving by “the grace of God” amidst COVID-19](#)

17 UNHCHR (2018) [Kenya: Stop forced evictions from Nairobi’s Kibera settlement, say UN rights experts](#)

18 Norwegian Refugee Council, op. cit.

19 Sholihah, P. & Shaojun, C. (2018) [Impoverishment of induced displacement and resettlement \(DIDR\) slum eviction development in Jakarta Indonesia](#). International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development,

20 Adama, O. (2020) [Slum upgrading in the era of World-Class city construction: the case of Lagos, Nigeria](#). International Journal of Urban Sustainable Development.

21 Human Rights Watch (2018) [“Our Homes Are Not for Strangers”: Mass evictions of Syrian refugees by Lebanese municipalities](#). According to this report, UNHCR estimated that an additional 13,700 Syrians had been evicted in 2017 for failure to pay rent, disputes with landlords, and “safety and security” evictions. Lebanon’s Ministry of Social Affairs told HRW that 7,524 Syrians were evicted from the vicinity of the Rayak air base in 2017 and another 15,126 had pending eviction orders.

22 IDMC (2014) [Still at risk - Security of tenure and the forced eviction of IDPs and refugee returnees in urban Afghanistan](#).

23 Anzellini, V. et al (2019) op. cit.

There is no comprehensive data on global urban displacement caused by development, and even less on how migrants and refugees are affected (there are only country-specific or regional assessments).²⁴ But given the fact that migrants and refugees often comprise a significant share of the population of affected areas, it can be safely inferred that they are frequently and disproportionately displaced. “Urban development and renewal can also force people out of previously affordable areas to the margins of a city, effectively driving them away from their communities, schools and jobs.”²⁵

Rights deficit

Migrants and refugees are less likely than host communities to be able to assert their “rights to the city”; they have little recourse when development projects and developers target their neighbourhoods.²⁶ In China, where millions of internal migrants live in peri-urban locations, their rights are being “progressively subordinated to the state’s pursuit of marketisation of land and urban space.”²⁷ Migrants’ ‘right to the city’ is increasingly used as a lens through which to understand migrants’ agency and how they act to claim their rights.²⁸ “Resistance to this process of displacement—carried out through individual negotiations, petitions, lawsuits, holdouts, public gatherings, and protests—demonstrates the highly contentious, politicised nature of China’s increasingly modern, capitalist-conforming urban landscape.”²⁹

Violence

Armed conflict

In the current civil wars in Syria, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Libya, and Yemen, much of the worst armed conflict and persecution occur in urban areas. Secondary displacement is widespread, as IDPs flee to safer neighbourhoods in the city or to other cities in the same country to escape shelling or warring factions that persecute and expel certain political, religious, or ethnic groups to solidify control. Cities’ denser populations lead to high death rates, and the cost of rebuilding infrastructure, services and livelihoods can inhibit return. In some cases, the devastation is so severe that cities go through a process of “de-urbanization,” as witnessed in South Sudan.³⁰

Sometimes urban displaced populations are specifically targeted by parties to an armed conflict. Examples include a 2015 attack on a camp in Bambari, a city in the Central African Republic, and Boko Haram’s frequent targeting of refugees and IDPs in Nigeria.³¹

International migrants and refugees are especially at risk of secondary displacement when their host country descends into political crisis. For example, a sizable minority of the 1.5 million people who have fled Syria’s civil war are long-term Palestinian refugees. Displaced again for the most part in Lebanon, “they face many similar challenges to their Syrian counterparts but also dissimilarities connected to their Palestinian identity and refugee status.”³²

Since the 1970s, Libya’s economy had been largely dependent on foreign labour. When the political crisis of 2011 hit, thousands of refugees and migrants from North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa who were working in cities such as Tripoli and Benghazi, were caught up in the violence, and their plight worsened when the civil war began in 2014. Many were displaced or expelled from cities, detained in danger zones where they were exposed to shelling and gunfire (see section on detentions below for more details).³³ Today, refugees and migrants continue to arrive in Libya as a destination country or cross Libya en route to the Mediterranean; both groups, whether settled in Libya or stuck in transit, continue to be subject to these forces. The situation in Libya is replicated in other cities in

24 IDMC. (2018) [UnSettlement: Urban displacement in the 21st century](#)

25 Ibid.

26 Recently reclaimed by social movements and progressive municipalities, the concept of “rights to the city” originates in a book by French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henry Lefevre. It encompasses the right to access urban resources and collective participation in urban transformation. See Lefevre, H. (1968) *Le Droit à la ville*, and Isensee, P. (2013) [What Is The Right to the City?](#) RioOnWatch.

27 Shih, M. (2016) [Rethinking displacement in peri-urban transformation in China](#). Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space.

28 The “[World Charter for the Right to the City](#)” provides a progressive framework to rethink cities and urbanisation to achieve enhanced social, well-being and economic prosperity for all residents.

29 Ibid

30 Kang, T. (2019) [Urbanization as a Result of Displacement. A Case Study of Bentiu, South Sudan](#). IOM.

31 UNHCR (2015) [UNHCR condemns attacks on camps in Central African Republic](#); Mbizoyo, A-N (2017) [How Boko Haram specifically targets displaced people](#). ISS Africa;

32 Nørgaard, J. (2016) [Palestine Refugees from Syria in Lebanon: Dynamics of Secondary Forced Displacement](#). Global Campus Arab World.

33 Reuters (2019) [At least 100 migrants walk free from shelled detention center in Tripoli](#).

transit countries that descend into civil war. Today one of the most flagrant cases is Yemen, where migrants and refugees from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan), stuck in transit, are unable to escape the shelling of cities like Sana'a and Aden. In one 2017 event, more than 40 Somalis died when the boat in which they were fleeing was attacked by a helicopter gunship.³⁴

An overlooked outcome – involuntary immobility

Most writing on urban displacement, whatever its cause, reflects a “mobility bias”, giving attention to those who are able to move voluntarily, or even by compulsion when conditions become intolerable, and neglecting the large numbers of people who, even when crisis strikes, simply do not have that option: the involuntary immobile.³⁵ The involuntarily immobile are highly vulnerable and often invisible people who lack the human or material capital needed to move. This often leaves them to confront worsening physical security, shelter, and public services, not to mention dwindling prospects for employment or other forms of income generation.³⁶ For foreign city inhabitants, “language barriers, restrictions on mobility, irregular immigration status, confiscated or lost identity or travel documents, limited social networks, isolation, and attacks and discrimination are some of the factors that hinder the ability of migrants [and refugees] to access protection, move out of harm’s way, or otherwise ensure their own safety and wellbeing.”³⁷

The United Arab Emirates, where almost 90 percent of workers are migrants, offer a stark and large-scale example of involuntary mobility. The Covid-19 pandemic and the oil price crash led to hundreds of thousands of job losses there in 2020, leaving many migrant workers stranded, broke, and having to fend for themselves in labour camps on the outskirts of cities such as Dubai.³⁸

Urban forced displacement sometimes leads to reverse migration in which people flee dangerous cities and return to their rural home areas, or go to rural areas for the first time, or resort to cross-border movement. The phenomenon of gang control and related displacement from cities is widely reported in Latin America. But while African cities like Cairo, Nairobi, and Johannesburg also report an uptick in criminal gangs, there are as yet far fewer, if any, reports of linkages between displacement and criminal gangs.³⁹

Drug cartels and gangs

Armed confrontations involving state security forces and the drug cartels—and related street gangs—that affect many urban neighbourhoods or even entire cities frequently trigger inter and intra-urban displacement, most notably in cities across Latin America.

In Colombia, the urban impact of illegal military action by armed groups has been observed for decades, with “civilians find[ing] themselves repeatedly displaced from one area to another in an attempt to save their lives, invariably finding themselves in adverse and undignified conditions.”⁴⁰ In 2003, many people who fled rural areas of the Pacific coast in the late 1990s for the supposed safety of the city of Buenaventura were repeatedly displaced there because of armed violence.⁴¹

Crime and violence in Medellín, Colombia’s second largest city, have been on a rebound since 2016 after years of relative quiet. At the end of 2019, the city had 240 different gangs with some 5,000 members, the majority of whom are loyal to the Oficina de Envigado.⁴²

According to extensive field research conducted in the early 2010s, across the Northern Triangle—El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala—as well as in Mexico, urban and suburban areas emerged as “principle hotspots of forced displacement” resulting from organised-crime violence, with most movements being urban-to-urban, both within the same city and between different cities.⁴³

34 Beaumont, P. (2017) [More than 40 Somali refugees killed in helicopter attack off Yemen coast](#). The Guardian.

35 Schewel, K. (2019) [Understanding Immobility: Moving Beyond the Mobility Bias in Migration Studies](#). International Migration Review.

36 Ibid.

37 Migrants in Countries in Crisis Initiative - MICIC. [Background](#). (Online)

38 McQue, K. (2020) ‘I am starving’: [the migrant workers abandoned by Dubai employers](#). Guardian.

39 In Cairo neighborhoods with high densities of migrants and refugees, such as Kilo Araba wa Nus and Hay el Ashr, Sudanese refugee youth form or join gangs. See Forcier, N. (2009) [Divided at the Margins: A Study of Young Southern Sudanese Refugee Men in Cairo, Egypt](#). Center for Migration and Refuge Studies, The American University in Cairo. See also: Miranda, P. (2018) [Getting by on the Margins in Cairo. Refugees in Towns Report](#). Refugees in Towns.

40 ACT International (2003) [Appeal – Colombia](#).

41 Jenns, A. (2020) [Global flows and everyday violence in urban space: The port-city of Buenaventura, Colombia](#). Political Geography.

42 Colombia Reports (2019) [Crime and security in Medellín, La Oficina de Envigado is a drug cartel and criminal organization founded as an enforcement and collections arm of Pablo Escobar’s Medellín Cartel](#).

43 Cantor, J. (2014) [The New Wave: Forced Displacement Caused by Organized Crime in Central America and Mexico](#). Refugee Survey Quarterly.

In 2019, some 454,000 Salvadorans were displaced by conflict and violence, of which 85 percent were displaced by gang violence.⁴⁴ Internal displacement in El Salvador is not always sustainable, “and may not neutralise the threats that force people to flee. This means that many are repeatedly displaced.”⁴⁵

Violence is endemic in Honduras, especially in major cities such as Tegucigalpa, where gangs, or *maras*, often control entire neighbourhoods. The country’s cities are home to tens of thousands of IDPs, many of whom are repeatedly displaced internally, before opting to travel north in an attempt to reach the United States (US).⁴⁶

Natural hazards and disasters

Inter- and intra-urban displacement, including secondary displacement, also occurs when neighbourhoods are destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by flooding and other hazards, be they manmade, such as the collapse of trash mountains or fires, or natural, such as earthquakes, tsunamis or, in the 2001 case of the eastern DRC city of Goma—home to thousands of IDPs who had fled conflict—volcanic eruptions. Such hazards become disasters in the absence of preparations sufficient to mitigate their destructive power or to protect populations from their effects.

*IDPs in informal settlements are particularly vulnerable to disasters and renewed displacement, given that their initial flight is likely to have worsened their pre-existing vulnerabilities and increased their impoverishment.*⁴⁷

Climate change

As sea temperatures rise due to global heating, the risk of powerful hurricanes and flooding rises, threatening coastal areas. With more people living in coastal cities, catastrophic floods are increasing in number and scale. A recent study based on new global elevation data concluded that the number of people vulnerable to sea-level rise and coastal flooding was three times greater than previous, widely used estimates.⁴⁸ Within individual cities, the risk of flooding and other disasters is not equally distributed: in cities like Rio de Janeiro, New

Orleans, Dhaka, and Karachi, the areas most at risk for flooding are the informal settlements and low-income neighbourhoods, where migrants often make up the majority of the population, and where housing, road, sanitation and water infrastructure tend to be sub-standard.⁴⁹

Climate change is also predicted to trigger secondary displacement in certain cities to where many people have already fled to escape the rural ravages of global warming:

*Some cities will be unable to sustain the influx. In the case of Addis Ababa, the World Bank suggests that in the second half of the century, many of the people who fled there will be forced to move again, leaving that city as local agriculture around it dries up.*⁵⁰

Lagos, the largest city in Nigeria (and indeed Africa) is growing exponentially, but this growth—and subsequent investment in roads and other infrastructure—is reducing the city’s water run-off capabilities.⁵¹ The poor areas of Lagos, where the majority of the city’s migrants (and most other residents) live, are at increased risk of displacement due to flooding (many areas of Lagos are below sea level) and lack of investment in the city’s drainage system.⁵² Urban flooding is also a problem for non-coastal cities as a result of increased rain associated with climate change coupled with ageing and decrepit urban infrastructure.

Earthquakes

Similarly, in cities struck by earthquakes—such as Port-au-Prince (Haiti) or Kathmandu (Nepal)—the poorest areas are most affected because of lax or poorly-enforced construction regulations, and displacement lasts longer, and in some cases is permanent. Again, such areas tend to be populated with recent internal migrants and IDPs who moved due to other environmental and economic stresses. While disasters wreak massive economic damage, recovery depends on the urban and national response, and on how this response evolves over time. There is now a substantial body of research on when and whether city residents who are displaced return to their original areas or move away permanently.⁵³

44 IDMC (2019) [El Salvador](#).

45 Ibid.

46 MSF (2018) [Cycles of violence in Honduras](#).

47 McCallin, B. & Scherer, S. (2015) [Urban informal settlers displaced by disasters: challenges to housing responses](#). IDMC.

48 Kulp, S. & Strauss, B. (2019) [New elevation data triple estimates of global vulnerability to sea-level rise and coastal flooding](#). Nature.

49 Dias, A. et al. (2018) [Estimation of exposed population to landslides and floods risk areas in Brazil, on an intra-urban scale](#). International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction. See also: World Bank, (2018) [Flood Risk Management in Dhaka: A Case for Eco-Engineering Approaches and Institutional Reform](#), and, Reuters (2017) [Pakistan – Karachi Confronts Rising Flood Risk](#)

50 Lustgarten, A. (2020) [The great climate migration](#). New York Times Magazine.

51 Urama et al. (2019) [Impact of extreme climate events on poverty in Nigeria: a case of the 2012 flood](#). Climate and Development. See also: Akinwale, O. (2018) [Urban Slums in Nigeria: Ensuring healthy living conditions](#). Urbanet.

52 Urama et al. op. cit. See also Adama, op. cit.

53 See, for example: Lindell, M. (2013) [Recovery and Reconstruction After Disaster](#). Encyclopedia of Natural Hazards.

Beirut blast

The long-term impact of the explosion that devastated Beirut in early August 2020, killing up to 200 people and leaving 300,000 homeless, will be felt not only by Lebanese citizens, but also by a large number of the 1.5 million Syrian and 500,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon, many of whom are dependent on humanitarian aid.⁵⁴ The dead included dozens of refugees, and many refugee families who lived in the industrial areas near the port where the blast took place saw their homes obliterated. According to an official of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the refugees “were already vulnerable, not just because of their situation as refugees but also because of the spiralling economic crisis and coronavirus crisis and measures that had impacted the whole country.”⁵⁵

Covid-19

Globally, the Covid-19 pandemic has prompted secondary urban migration on a vast scale.⁵⁶ In India alone, more than 100 million migrant workers have had to return home, mostly from cities, after coronavirus measures left them jobless, or after landlords evicted them.⁵⁷ UN human rights experts have criticised the Indian government for failing to address the migrants’ “dire humanitarian situation”, with many going hungry, lacking shelter and being subjected to police brutality.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of Indian and Nepali labourers are stranded in Gulf states and keen to return to their home countries.⁵⁹

Reports that countries in many regions of the world are forcibly returning migrants as part of their responses to the pandemic led the UN Network on Migration to call in May 2020 for such practices to be suspended “in order to protect the health of migrants and communities, and uphold the human rights of all migrants, regardless of status.”⁶⁰

Deportations

Deportations and detention of migrants or failed asylum seekers is an often-overlooked form of intra-city displacement. Some have argued that deportations should be seen as a form of forced migration.⁶¹ Establishing the global scale of deportations is not straightforward as statistics are not always readily available outside of Europe and the US, but some efforts have been made that reveal many hundreds of thousands are detained and removed each year, many but not all, from cities where they have attempted to settle, often irregularly.⁶²

Detentions and deportations occur in a wide variety of ways; some carefully following the national rule of law while others take place in an extra judicial manner that violate individual rights as well as international agreements. Examples are numerous and widespread, from the hundreds of thousands of forced deportations of Ethiopian migrants from Saudi cities since 2013, to Eritrean and Sudanese deportations from Israel in the last decade, to current reports of deportations of Tunisians from Italian cities to Tunis or of Afghans being deported from Greek cities back to Turkey.⁶³ In 2020 the US also re-started direct flights from US cities to Mexico city for deported migrants and asylum seekers.⁶⁴

For some years in the US, the Trump administration has actively promoted extrajudicial approaches to deportation of migrants and asylum seekers as the most efficient way to deal with “illegal” immigration.⁶⁵ This Review documents more extrajudicial and illegal (by national and international law) actions by state authorities in the overview of Normalisation of the Extreme (page 250).

54 Kimball, K. et al. (2020) [Beirut explosion imperils Lebanon's refugee population—and aid routes to Syria](#). Foreign Policy.

55 Ibid

56 A fuller exploration of the impact of Covid-19 on migration and cities can be found in the essay on page 210.

57 UN News (2020) [India must follow Supreme Court orders to protect 100 million migrant workers: UN rights experts](#).

58 Ibid.

59 Roy, R. (2020) [India Prepares Large-Scale Repatriation of Workers Stranded by Pandemic](#). Wall Street Journal; Mandal, C. (2020) [At least 500,000 migrant workers want to return home at the earliest, says report](#). Kathmandu Post.

60 UN Network on Migration (2020) [Forced returns of migrants must be suspended in times of COVID-19](#).

61 Gibney, M.J. (2013) [Is Deportation a Form of Forced Migration?](#) Refugee Journal Quarterly

62 For example, see [Deportation Global Information Project](#) and the [Global Detention Project](#).

63 See (Israel) Amnesty International. (2018) [Israel: Forced And Unlawful: Israel's Deportation Of Eritrean And Sudanese Asylum-Seekers To Uganda](#), and (Italy) Castelfranco, S. (2020) [Italy Resumes Migrant Deportations](#), VOA and (Greece) DW.(2020) [Migrants accuse Greece of forced deportations](#).

64 Federal News Network (2020) [US starts flights to take deported migrants to Mexico City](#).

65 AA News. (2018) [US: Trump calls for extrajudicial deportation process](#).

Conclusion

Forced (and often secondary) displacement within or between cities, affecting IDPs, refugees and international migrants, is an often overlooked and under-studied topic within the field of mixed migration. However, it is a daily reality on the ground for many refugees and migrants arriving in, or transiting through, cities, as part of mixed migratory movements. Their situation should not only be understood better, but also be taken into account in urban policy planning and development as well as in humanitarian responses, especially since there is little evidence that the different causes of intra-urban secondary displacement—economic development, urban violence and conflict, climate-related disasters and deportations—will disappear any time soon. In fact, with predicted urban growth and expected impacts from climate change they are more likely to intensify. There is wide agreement amongst researchers and practitioners that increasing the resilience of urban neighbourhoods can mitigate at least the displacement consequences, potentially by reducing dislocation and displacement in the first place, but also by enabling previously displaced people to return.⁶⁶

Preventing the secondary displacement of international migrants and refugees may not be a priority for urban or national governments, who, if they are concerned at all, are likely to care more about their own urban citizens and internal migrants. However, since international and internal migrants often live in the same neighbourhoods and informal settlements, addressing the issues that cause secondary displacement will benefit both citizens and non-citizen migrants and are de facto the responsibility of urban managers.

66 Kirbyshire, A. et al (2017) [Mass displacement and the challenge for urban resilience](#). Overseas Development Institute.

Vulnerable in cities

As a case study of the vulnerability of migrants and refugees to urban disasters, this summary highlights those affected by the explosion that ravaged Beirut in August 2020.¹



On 4 August 2020, a large explosion occurred in the port of Beirut, killing at least 191 people and injuring over 6,500. Around 40,000 buildings were damaged, up to 300,000 people may have lost their homes, and at least 70,000 their job. The precise cause of the blast is pending investigation but has been attributed to 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate which was unsafely stored in a port warehouse. The photo above gives a sense of the devastation the explosion caused.

A number of cadastres, or districts, of Greater Beirut are affected, some of which are home to vulnerable or poor internal, migrant workers, or refugee communities—mainly from Syria. Approximately 500,000 people live in Beirut governorate (over 2.4 million people live in the wider municipal area, including suburbs such as Bourj Hammoud and Sin El Fil), among them around 36,000 reportedly “vulnerable” internal migrants, 36,000 Syrian refugees, and 5,770 Palestinian refugees.

Reports in the days immediately after the explosion suggested that a large proportion of the victims could have been Syrian refugees; the Syrian embassy claimed initially that a quarter of the dead were Syrian.² Later, UNHCR confirmed that 15 Syrian refugees lost their lives and that 185 were injured, but could not comment on dozens of refugees that remained unaccounted for.³ Meanwhile OCHA reported at least 14 confirmed refugee fatalities as of 21 August, and around 250 injured, 57 of them severely. Whatever the exact figures, the tragedy is profound, all the more so given that most of the refugees in Beirut have

fled bombings and urban warfare in their home country to seek refuge and eke out a living in a city that, while welcoming refugees, is struggling itself. In early September, a number of migrant boats arrived in Cyprus with Lebanese nationals and Syrian refugees looking for better chances outside of Lebanon.⁴

The explosion occurred as Lebanon faces a deep economic and political crisis and a growing number of Covid-19 cases. Poverty, unaffordable housing, and barriers to accessing healthcare were pre-existing issues for vulnerable host, migrant, and refugee communities alike. Inequalities in accessing services and opportunities based on gender, age, sexual orientation, and a minority background were also highlighted in a comprehensive ACAPS report on the explosion.⁵

In Beirut governorate, at least half of each refugee population group was living below the poverty line prior to the worsening of the socioeconomic crisis that began in September 2019. With so many houses, belongings, and jobs lost in the blast, this sudden economic shock adds to months, if not years, of financial challenges for the poorest households.

Political protests that have taken place on the streets of Beirut since October 2019 surged following the explosion, with people calling for the resignation of the government. The government of Hassan Diab resigned on 10 August, following resignations by several cabinet ministers, leaving Lebanon in a politically precarious situation.

1 Unless separately referenced, this case study directly reproduces or paraphrases sections from: ACAPS (2020) [Lebanon: Analysis of humanitarian needs in Greater Beirut - 25 AUG 2020](#).

2 Ibrahim, A. (2020) [‘We lost everything’: Syrian refugees caught up in Beirut blast](#). Al Jazeera.

3 MMC email communication with UNHCR in research for this report.

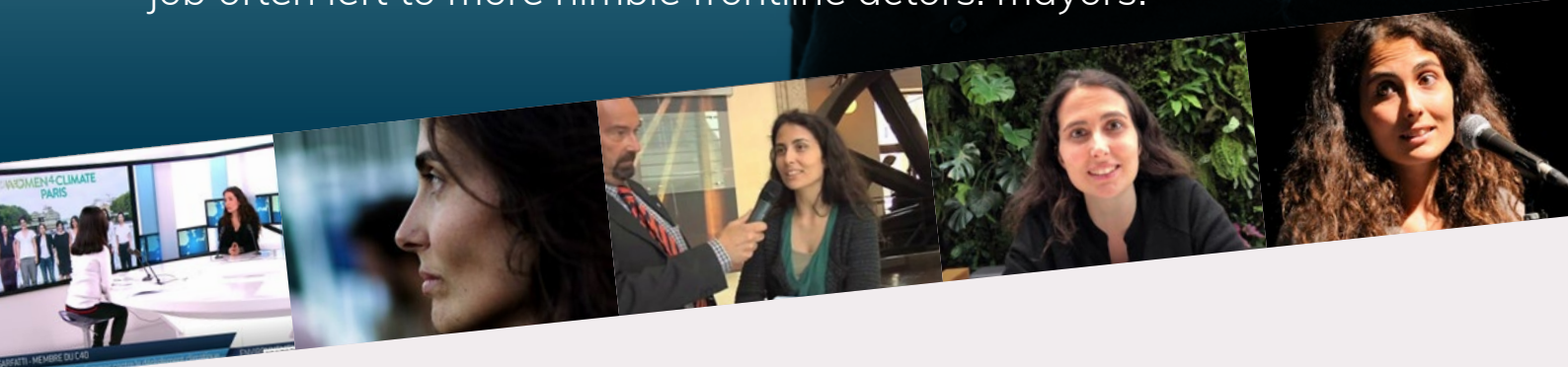
4 Wallis, E. (2020) [5 migrant boats arrive in Cyprus in 3 days](#). Infomigrants

5 ACAPS (2020) op. cit.

Interview

Filling the void

Well-meaning climate action may have unintended and adverse consequences for the most vulnerable residents of cities, including newly arrived migrants and refugees, warns **Caterina Sarfatti**. Tackling these inequities, and devising policies that address both climate change and migration in a cohesive manner, has never been more urgent. In the face of government foot-dragging, it's a job often left to more nimble frontline actors: mayors.



Caterina Sarfatti is the head of C40 Cities' Inclusive Climate Action programme, which provides cities with a clear roadmap and support to plan, build consensus and deliver bold climate action. She was project manager for the 2016 C40 Mayors Summit in Mexico City and also served as C40's deputy director for Europe. Before joining C40, Sarfatti worked as policy advisor and project manager in the mayor of Milan's international relations department, working on smart cities and environment, social innovation and social cohesion, migration and integration.

Large cities, wherever they are, are a powerful magnet for the majority of international migrants and refugees. Are multicultural international cities with high proportions of residents born outside the country, cities like New York and London, going to be the norm in the future?

Yes. Existing projections shows that cities are becoming more and more diverse. In particular, so-called second and third generations of migrants are always more present in cities across the world. I think diversification of people, biographies, cultures, languages, is absolutely to be seen across the world's cities more and more in the future, regardless of certain political pushes towards closure and traditional identity protection.

C40 is a network of the world's megacities committed to addressing climate change and promoting smarter cities. How do these issues intersect with issues around migration, refugees and inclusivity?

C40 has established an inclusive climate action program to support our mayors and cities, exchanging knowledge, practice and information around how to make their climate policies more equitable, fair and accessible for all. The impacts of climate change and the climate crisis, very much like the impact of many other economic, social, and health crises, affect the most discriminated and the most vulnerable much harder than others. Evidence shows that people living in informal settlements, women and children, the isolated

elderly, and people of colour are the most impacted by droughts, by violent climate change impacts, by flooding, by heat waves, by air pollution. And so systemic discrimination plays out in how climate change impacts people.

“ **Systemic discrimination plays out in how climate change impacts people. It is a priority of many of our mayors in C40 to ensure that when they design, develop, and implement climate policies and projects they have equitable outcomes and equitable impacts. And of course, this relates also to migration.** ”

On the other hand, climate action may have inequities: we often speak about the risk of climate gentrification, where, for example, transport and new buildings policies, if not designed well, can negatively impact low-income families and groups. Inequities are by design, never by nature, thus it is a priority of many of our mayors in C40 to really ensure that when they design, develop, and implement climate policies and projects that they have equitable outcomes and equitable impacts. And of course, this relates also to migration.

Do you see climate change having a particular impact on migrants and refugees in cities?

We know that climate induces mobility both internally in countries and between countries. There are different projections. The most known one is the one of the World Bank that projects potentially 200 million more migrants forced to move due to the impacts of climate change across the world by 2050. But also, when immigrants come to cities, they can be impacted negatively or positively by climate action and environmental policies. For example, we're seeing it really now during the Covid-19 pandemic. In many cities, the essential transportation workers, health workers, food workers, waste workers are often migrants and immigrants. So, they play an incredibly important contribution in the society but not always have the protection and support that this contribution deserves. Mayors are taking action to face these inequities and improve the overall resilience and fairness of these systems.

There's a bit of controversy about the relationship between global climate change and migration. Some see climate as a major current and future driver of

mobility. Others think this is exaggerated. What's your view?

Isolating climate change as the only driver of mobility and migration flows is challenging indeed. There is very interesting research out there that looks in particular at flows in regions. World Bank's Groundswell report looks at potential projections of mobility in regions, in particular in Latin America, Africa and Southeast Asia.¹ The report makes a projection of 143 million people that will move internally within countries' boundaries if climate change is not mitigated. So there is evidence that this will happen: it's not research from radical NGOs, but it's research from the World Bank that actually shows that climate change and the impacts of climate change will cause people to move forcibly, in particular, internally in these regions. But isolating climate change as the only driver is a challenge because, of course, other drivers play in the decision or the forced decision of a person to move. Drivers related to the political context, to the cultural context, to the economic context, and so forth.

Can you give an example where climate change may play a strong role in this mix of drivers?

One key example is the war in Syria and the massive flow of Syrians after the initial riots and then the war in 2013 and onwards. Experts have identified Syria as one of the first climate-related conflicts because there is evidence that shows that the first riots and the first economic issues that then resulted in that incredible human tragedy that we have seen in Syria were actually due to a major drought in the region that was unexperienced in the past hundreds of years. This may have been the root cause for people to move in the region of Syria and compete for access to basic goods and resources. This brought to anger and unemployment, lack of access to essential services and the first socio-economic challenges and demonstrations. Of course, that was not the only driver and the reaction to the riots exacerbated the situation.

And those people have ended up cities inside and outside the region, so there's a direct relationship there with city growth, do you agree?

Exactly. Cities are directly affected, at both ends, both because they can be drained of people if people move from cities, but also because there can be very rapid urbanisation and an uncontrolled growth of cities that can happen due to this forced movement. There are other examples, like Dhaka, Bangladesh which is a city that is very much impacted in terms of internal displacement related to climate change and especially flooding.

1 Rigaud, K. et al (2018) [Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration](#). World Bank

Issues around climate change and migration are both often at the top of international political and social agenda, particularly at the city level. Are they competing with each other for attention and distracting from each other, or are they part of the same challenge?

It's a spot-on question for us, we have been working exactly around this. Definitely, you're right when you say that they are top of the agenda and key priorities of mayors and cities. I wouldn't define them as competing, but it's not immediately evident what the actual nexus is between climate and migration. They are two major areas of potential action of cities as a cohesive and integrated policy area of development. But I think it's changed in the last couple of years, in particular, we have contributed to the development of an initiative called the Mayors Migration Council that has been launched at the end of 2018 that sees the direct participation of a small group of very engaged and leading mayors. One of the areas we have been working on with these mayors is really to better understand this nexus between climate and migration, and how mayors can understand the fine talk and the policy implications about this nexus, and there are mayors that are providing interesting insights, such as the mayor of Freetown (Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, interviewed on page 230 of this Annual Review), the former mayor of Athens (Giorgos Kaminis, the special envoy on climate and migration for C40 and the MMC), the mayor of Milan (Giuseppe Sala) and the mayor of Bristol (Marvin Rees, interviewed on page 258 of this Annual Review).

“It's not immediately evident what the nexus is between climate and migration. They are two major areas of potential action of cities as a cohesive and integrated policy area of development. We have been working with these mayors to better understand this nexus, and how mayors can understand the fine talk and the policy implications about it.”

For example, as mentioned before, in sectors such as transport, waste, and food mayors are working to make sure that in policy development and policy action, workers can be protected and supported and therefore, also immigrant workers, as they're part of these sectors, and that recognising, regularising, and formalising workers in these sectors is key. This has been initiated by some mayors across the world as part of their work on inclusive climate action and on recovering in a sustainable and inclusive way from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Why such an intense focus on cities? Shouldn't nation states provide the leadership and legislation on major issues like this? Or is it a failure of national leadership and decisiveness on these issues that mean that cities and particularly mayors need to take a strong lead?

My personal opinion is, yes, that both on climate and on migration, mayors usually fill a void. We have seen it in particular in the climate movement and the climate sector, and we're also seeing it during this pandemic, that when national governments fail to collaborate and to work together and take ages to collaborate and work together, mayors are much more faster at responding to the needs of their residents. And this is true for health, for migration, for climate. And by doing this, they are natural leaders in the global stage and global horizon. When the Paris Agreement, for example, was established, 1,000 mayors and local leaders played a critical part to ensure that the agreement had as part of its goal to keep global warming way under two degrees centigrade, and more closely to 1.5 degrees centigrade. Similarly, we're seeing it with migration, because cities don't have the power to actually legislate around immigration, but are the first responders on the frontline, they are the ones that have to deal with integration policy, with inclusion policies, with welcoming and reception policies. They are the ones taking a stand at the international level to really ask for more progressive legislation.

“Rotterdam has worked closely with Hanoi around the development of their adaptation, resilience and flooding management plans. You really see a win-win, where you have expertise and competencies flow between cities, but also you open up the possibility of the internationalisation of local economies.”

What about the vulnerability of large coastal cities and the impact of climate change? Can you identify some vulnerable cities of concern to C40? And what are or what will be the results of these impacts of climate change?

According to one of the first assessments that we did of our member cities, about four or five years ago, virtually all of our cities declared that they are suffering already from the impacts of climate change. They all said, in some way or form, they have to adapt and increase the resilience of their communities and societies. So, I would say all coastal major cities are at risk. And one of the very first initiatives of C40 was the establishment of a network around delta cities. So mayors and cities really are exchanging practices and challenges around this issue of being coastal cities.

On this front, it's where some of our most interesting examples of collaboration have stemmed. For example, and this is one of the first examples of collaboration between C40 cities: Rotterdam—which, as you can imagine, is a globally recognised city on adaptation and resilience with lots of internal experience on this—has worked closely with Hanoi in Vietnam around the development of their adaptation plans and resilience plans and flooding management plans. And this has resulted in the possibility of small and medium enterprises from Rotterdam to actually work and support Hanoi city in developing their resilience infrastructure. You really see like a win-win, where on one hand, you have expertise and competencies flow between cities, but also you open up the possibility of the internationalisation of local economies.

Would you say that in your analysis there is an extent to which migrants and refugees face more challenges than other residents of cities or alongside other residents in cities because of climate change?

As you can imagine, intersectionality plays a key role in the impacts of the climate crisis as different discriminations play out. Women of colour that are already discriminated against, from a gender perspective, from a racial perspective, can be much more severely impacted by the climate crisis. An example that I always give is that after Hurricane Katrina, two-thirds of the jobs lost as a result of that hurricane were lost by women. We can assume that most of those women that lost their jobs were actually women of color. So, as you can see different levels of discrimination play out and this also happens with regards to migration and refugees. Vulnerability is not dependent on their status as migrants or refugees, but cultural, economic and social discrimination play a role in them being negatively impacted by the climate crisis. In particular, people living in informal settlements are even more impacted because of poor access to services, discrimination with regards to land ownership, etc.

In terms of per capita carbon footprint, does C40 view high-density, large cities as the preferred model for human settlement?

It's an interesting question. We're an organisation of mayors, so we're driven by our mayors, and so our external strategy and communication is the strategy that our mayors define. I don't think from a staff perspective we take a particular stand around density. I know this is a never-ending debate between urbanists around the world, and the pandemic has brought this up again. My personal view is that density is not the issue. I don't think the solution of crisis like the current pandemic or climate is new urban sprawl, it's really how you organise density. And I think it's interesting, the leadership that some of our cities are taking in the aftermath of Covid-19, as we see Paris, Milan, Portland, Montreal, and many others adopting this idea of the “15

minute city”—cities where you have very well-organised neighbourhoods in terms of services and transport where people can access fundamental basic services in less than 15 minutes, or by walking or by cycling. And this increases equitable access to jobs and services and therefore equity, but also increases resilience in the face of shocks and crisis.

What do you think about the short- and longer-term impacts of Covid-19 and governments' responses to the pandemic? What impact do you think it may have on issues of inequality and inclusion for migrants and refugees in cities, and the progress to the Global Compact for Migration?

This is a huge question. Well, definitely, there will be an impact. First of all, what we're seeing from our citizens, from our mayors, is wanting to be at the frontlines of this pandemic and responding to the crisis immediately by guaranteeing fundamental services, by providing food, by quickly adapting waste management guidelines and policies, by ensuring that homeless people could have shelters, etc. Of course, talking to our mayors and to our cities we're seeing that the pandemic may have profound potential negative impacts on sustainability and equality. But on the other hand, we're also seeing a much stronger awareness of people in cities, for example on the importance of cleaner air quality, the importance of environmental protection, the importance of having access to public space and green spaces... There is also an increased awareness of the importance of needing a green and low-carbon recovery from Covid to ensure it's a just and sustainable one. Mayors are talking about creating a new normal, not going back to business as usual, and ensuring better and stronger equity and sustainability in cities. It really shows the leadership of some of our mayors around the world in taking this opportunity—because although it's an incredible, enormous human tragedy—they can try to make sure that this tragedy leads to building back better, rather than going back to the past.

“ We're seeing that the Covid-19 pandemic may have profound potential negative impacts on sustainability and equality. But we're also seeing a much stronger awareness of people in cities on the importance of environmental protection. ”

Risky cities, mean streets

Refugees and migrants in urban settings often face greater dangers, including crime, discrimination, and harassment, than other residents, and yet they frequently stand accused of bringing criminality to their cities of destination.

By Karen Jacobsen¹

This essay explores the security threats migrants and refugees confront in cities, and the extent to which they exacerbate insecurity in the neighbourhoods where they live or even, as alleged by certain populist politicians, create problems due to their alleged inherent criminality. The essay also considers how governments, civil society actors and urban residents work to mitigate threats and increase protection.

Myriad threats

By dint of their (often precarious) legal status, race, ethnicity, and gender, refugees and migrants are exposed to a variety of threats to their safety and wellbeing that in many cases place them at a similar level of risk that led them to flee their home countries.

For women, urban migration presents both empowerment opportunities and risks. Many women migrate to escape a lack of opportunities and the gender-based violence, and their households cooperate because women are seen as more responsible and more likely to send money home. Once in arrival cities, women migrants and refugees might still face the risk of domestic violence, for example in cases where conservative husbands would frown upon them working outside the home, as well as a toxic mix of threats from crime, gender-based violence and harassment, and xenophobia.²

Violence and crime

Migrants (both internal and international) and refugees tend to live in specific areas of cities. These can be established immigrant enclaves, slums in older, congested areas of the city proper, or informal settlements or areas of rapid urbanisation at the edges of urban agglomerations. In such peripheral areas, access to social services is

typically poor, municipal governance is weak, and the police are often unhelpful, unavailable or simply corrupt, resulting in scant official protection.³ These problems increase the risk of crime and violence for all residents. For example, intermittent electricity and the resulting areas of darkness at night present opportunities for criminals.

Do areas where migrants and refugees are concentrated have higher rates of crime and violence than other areas? Findings are mixed and vary greatly from city to city. One study in the UK, for example, found that crime rates were substantially lower in immigrant enclaves than in neighbourhoods without sizeable immigrant population shares.⁴ A study in Colombia, by contrast, found that the arrival of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the cities of Bogotá and Pasto was followed by an increase in homicides, a rise possibly explained by the lack of economic opportunities for IDPs, and the violence IDPs were exposed to prior to arrival.⁵ Eastleigh, a district of Nairobi heavily populated by Somali migrants and refugees, is the most vibrant economic enclave in East Africa but also a centre for gun dealing.⁶ Many cities in Latin America and the Caribbean are afflicted by drug cartels and related gang violence, and in South Asia, cities like Karachi, where 62 percent of housing is informal,⁷ experience spasms of violence targeted at specific ethno-religious groups.⁸

Whether refugees and migrants are at greater risk of falling victim to crime, extortion, and violence than other residents depends on the local city context, but the evidence indicates that they generally are. According to UN-Habitat, migrants and refugees in informal settlements are more susceptible to violence and violent crime because they are “physically, politically, and

1 Karen Jacobsen is the Henry J. Leir Professor in Global Migration at Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. She was assisted in the preparation of this essay by graduate students Dani Douglas and Eric Smith.
 2 Rosenberg, J. (2016) [Mean Streets: identifying and responding to urban refugees' risks of gender-based violence](#). Women's Refugee Commission
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 7 Hasan, A. & Arif, H. (2018) [Pakistan: Urban Housing Issues](#). Asian Coalition of Housing Rights.
 8 Muggah, R. (2012) [Researching the Urban Dilemma: Urbanization, Poverty and Violence](#). International Development Research Center.

economically marginalised”.⁹ This vulnerability can stem from refugees’ and migrants’ appearance: their race or ethnicity, or the way they dress and speak, often makes them easily distinguishable from the host population. Apart from being potential victims of discrimination and xenophobia, refugees and migrants may also become targets for criminals and gangs who often count on their victims’ reluctance or inability to speak out.

Police perils

An important risk factor for migrants and refugees is their legal status. Irregular and undocumented migrants and asylum seekers are at much greater risk than other residents of being arrested or extorted when stopped by police. In many cities, even documented migrants and refugees are reluctant to report crimes because they fear the police and other government authorities more than they trust them as a source of protection. In Nairobi’s sprawling informal settlement of Kibera, where 50 percent of the population is made up of migrants, some residents describe the police as “slow, inept, corrupt and unlikely to properly investigate criminal cases for successful prosecution.”¹⁰ In Bangkok, Burmese migrants said they feared moving about in public because of how often they had to pay bribes to avoid being arrested for not having documentation—they felt they were “used as ‘ATMs’ for the Thai police.”¹¹ In Johannesburg, Somali refugees face regular raids by the police who confiscate goods from street traders, arrest those without identity documentation, and issue fines. In a survey of Somalis in a Johannesburg area (Mayfair), 65 percent of respondents said they had experienced a harmful act against them or their property by non-Somalis, and 75 percent said they had been subject to police interrogation, had their documents destroyed or been forced to pay bribes.¹² Somalis’ experience of state pressure in Kenya, where “state security concerns have increasingly permeated public discourse on refugee issues”, is also one of the factors behind the movement of some Somalis to Uganda.¹³

The reluctance of refugees and migrants to interact with law enforcement creates power imbalances that enable

unscrupulous landlords to exploit or discriminate against migrants without fear of police interference. Some landlords reportedly charge migrants and refugees rent above market rates, evict them, and even demand sex.¹⁴

Workplace woes

This aversion to engaging with police also contributes to the risks faced by migrants and refugees in their urban workplaces. Many are self-employed, hawking goods on the street, or employed in so-called “3-D” sectors: those that are dirty, dangerous and discriminatory, such as garment factories (sweatshops), domestic work, private security, and construction.¹⁵ Migrant workers are at particular risk of exploitation because employers are able to withhold wages or discriminate without fear of being reported.

In Qatar, where demand for migrant labour has soared ahead of the 2022 World Cup and its numerous construction projects, workers not only have to toil in dangerously high temperatures but also face abuses partly linked to the kafala recruitment system. This obliges migrant workers to be “sponsored” by an all-powerful employer before they arrive in Qatar and to obtain permission before changing employer or returning home. Many migrant workers in Qatar are caught up in forced labour, debt bondage, physical abuse, non-payment of salaries, and unacceptable living conditions, as well as gender-based violence—especially in the case of female domestic workers.¹⁶ The kafala system is in place across the Gulf States, as well as in Jordan and Lebanon. The vulnerabilities and abuses facing hundreds of thousands of labour migrants in the Middle East and Gulf States has been the subject of extensive research and advocacy in recent years.¹⁷ Despite some claims that the system is being reformed or even abolished in places, “the system’s most critical vulnerabilities still remain.”¹⁸

Refugees are not recruited to the same extent as migrant workers but, like migrants, they are often employed in 3-D jobs and face the same xenophobia, discrimination and harassment by police, as well as poor working

9 UN Habitat (2007) [Global Report on Human Settlements 2007 – Enhancing Urban Safety and Security](#).

10 Mutahi, P. (2011) [Between illegality and legality: \(In\)security, crime and gangs in Nairobi informal settlements](#). South African Crime Quarterly.

11 Franck, A. (2015) [A\(nother\) geography of fear: Burmese labor migrants in George Town, Malaysia](#). *Urban Studies*

12 Schaffer, M. (2013) [Gender Dynamics and Women’s Changing Roles in Johannesburg’s Somali Community](#). *St. Antony’s International Review*. See also Crush, J., et al. (2017) [Comparing Refugees and South Africans in the Urban Informal Sector](#). Waterloo (Canada): Southern African Migration Programme.

13 Iazzolino, G. (2014) [A safe haven for Somalis in Uganda?](#) Rift Valley Institute.

14 Gupta, H. (2015) [Home Sweet Home: Housing practices and tools that support durable solutions for urban IDPs](#). Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

15 The International Labour Organization estimates that there are 164 million migrant workers across the globe, some 59% of the international migrant population. Females primarily employed as domestic workers and in the garment industry, make up 42%. Migration Data Portal (2020) [Labour migration](#).

16 Renkiewicz, P. (2016) [Sweat makes the green grass grow: The precarious future of Qatar’s migrant workers in the run up to the 2022 FIFA World Cup under the kafala system and recommendations for effective reform](#). *American University Law Review*.

17 For example, Amnesty International (2020) [Lebanon: New kafala consultation an opportunity to protect migrant workers’ rights](#), and Amnesty International (2019) [Qatar: Pledge to end abusive ‘kafala’ system must truly transform workers’ rights](#).

18 Migrants Rights (2020) [Reform the Kafala System](#).

conditions, and delayed or unpaid wages.¹⁹ Refugees are often denied work permits, or only permitted to work in certain industries. In 2016, Amman and the European Union (EU) signed the Jordan Compact to provide 200,000 work permits for Syrian refugees in tariff-free export manufacturing in Jordan. The aim was to “attract investment to Jordanian export manufacturing and create jobs for refugees.”²⁰ After signing, the Jordan government decreased the number of migrant worker visas given to Egyptians and began to enforce sanctions on those without valid visas, “render[ing] migrants’ work lives more precarious and decreas[ing] their access to decent work.”²¹ Thus, migrant workers and refugees face similar risks, but they manifest in different ways, and as in this example, promoting one group can sometimes disadvantage the other.

Trouble in transit

Many mixed migration routes feature transit hubs, which often have long traditions of smuggling, both of people and goods. In the past ten years, as the numbers of refugees and migrants—and mixed migration routes—have increased, the human smuggling industry and its profits have grown too. Some hubs, like Benghazi in Libya, lie in conflict zones where armed non-state actors in control of the city are deeply involved in migrant smuggling, and where war economies are tied to smuggling.²²

For several decades at least, smuggling has played an important role in the histories and economies of transit cities such as Izmir in Turkey and Agadez in Niger. In such hubs, the human smuggling business was for a long time seen by many people living in those cities as benign and necessary for livelihoods and survival, threatening to no one, enabling people’s mobility, and creating jobs and income for the cities.

The case of Agadez

But many of these cities have seen dramatic changes since Europe declared a migration “crisis” in 2015. For example, Agadez, is a longstanding transit hub for sub-Saharan Africans headed north to work in Libya and Algeria and, to a lesser extent, those aiming to reach Europe. Historically, the Nigerien state tolerated the facilitation of these flows, and transporting people across Niger into North Africa was a lucrative, and

socially acceptable profession: Agadez used to boast some 50 migrant “travel agencies” employing 7,000 people; thousands of civil servants, soldiers and customs officials benefited from the business of moving people.²³ By 2015, the industry was contributing some 60bn CFA francs (\$110 million) to the Agadez regional economy per year.²⁴ Travellers sometimes had to spend long periods in Agadez, often confined to residential compounds, waiting for funds or means of transport, and there was some forced labour and abuse, but things were to get a lot worse for migrants there.

In 2015, under pressure from an EU keen to externalise its inward migration controls, Niger passed a law banning migrant smuggling. After the law began to be enforced the following year, the number of migrants traveling north from Agadez plummeted from an estimated 333,000 in 2016 to 69,000 in 2017.²⁵ The law’s economic impact on Agadez was devastating, with a huge loss of revenue and jobs. But new security problems emerged too—for both the city and those passing through. The new law empowers Nigerien security forces to stop citizens of West African countries and detain Nigerien drivers simply for being together in a vehicle headed north. Transporting or hosting West African nationals can lead to fines of up to 30m CFA francs (\$50,000) and 30 years in prison. For refugees and migrants, transport routes have become far more dangerous as smugglers avoid the main roads and use tracks across the desert to Libya, leading to more deaths and more passengers abandoned. The cost of passage has increased by as much as four times.²⁶

The case of Agadez illustrates how cities with established smuggling traditions can benefit from smuggling, but also how sudden policy changes can disrupt smuggling economies without improving the situation for either refugees and migrants or the city.

Stranded

Changes unrelated to government policies have also made smuggling more dangerous, both for transit cities and migrants. The growth in profits and diversification of the smuggling industry create new risks in cities, as rival crime or smuggling syndicates compete (often with state actors involved), as seen in Mexico and Latin America.²⁷

19 A Jordan survey of 41,000 people found that of employed Syrian respondents, 37% were craft and trade workers (such as construction), 25% service and sales workers (domestic work and street vendors), and 23% in occupations such as manufacturing; garbage collectors). About half (46%) of women and a quarter (23%) of men were unemployed. Tiltne, A. et al (2019) [The living conditions of Syrian refugees in Jordan: Results from the 2017-2018 survey of Syrian refugees inside and outside camps](#). Fafo Institute. Jordan Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation.

20 Gordon, J. (2020) [Refugees and Decent Work: Lessons Learned from Recent Refugee Job Compacts](#). International Labour Organization.

21 Ibid.

22 Micallef, M and Reitano, T. (2019) [The anti-human smuggling business and Libya's political end game](#). GI/ISS Africa.

23 International Crisis Group (2020) [Managing Trafficking in Northern Niger](#).

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Rojas, R. (2020) [Latin America's Lucrative People-Smuggling Networks](#). Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project.

When refugees and migrants get stuck in transit, they become an unsettled and highly marginalised population, particularly when they are undocumented. After the Balkans route was shut down in 2016, cities such as Belgrade had thousands of stranded refugees and migrants who had no desire to remain in Serbia but were unable to move on.²⁸ Other transit cities, such as Izmir, have had different experiences, with some refugees and migrants electing not to make the journey across the Mediterranean to Europe and instead remaining in Izmir.²⁹

Scourges or scapegoats?

Considerable and frequently sensationalised public discourse revolves around the risks refugees and migrants allegedly bring to cities, with heated rhetoric emanating from certain politicians and the media about their supposed connection with crime, terrorism and transnational gangs. Such xenophobic aspersions have been a key feature of Donald Trump's discourse since he declared his candidacy for the 2016 US presidential election. And in Italy's 2018 election campaign, politicians steered public debate towards the nexus between migration, crime and security.³⁰ Similarly, in South Africa, politicians rail against migrants as sources of crime and violence, while in Kenya they add the accusation of terrorism, following various attacks in recent years.³¹

Three main types of security risk have been associated with refugees and migrants living in cities across the world: transnational gangs, street crime, and terrorism and extremism. This section explores each in turn.

Transnational gangs

Transnational gangs are criminal organisations that are spread across multiple countries, often committing crimes in one country, while planning crimes in another. These are not mere street gangs: they are much larger in size and power and are considered security threats by national governments who mobilise responses against them. The members of such gangs may include many migrants, both documented and undocumented. In the United States (US), there are at least five transnational gangs, the most notorious being the Salvadoran *Mara Salvatrucha*, better known as MS-13 (*mara* is the Spanish word for gang).³² Like other transnational gangs, MS-13

is involved in "a myriad of criminal activity, including murder, extortion, narcotics and weapons trafficking, human smuggling/trafficking and prostitution and other crimes with a nexus to the border."³³ In 2019, the US Department of Homeland Security made over 4,000 gang arrests, detaining more than 400 MS-13 members. In 2018, more than 6,000 gang members, including 1,332 MS-13 members, were deported from the US, a 24 percent increase from 2017. MS-13 is based in California but operates in cities throughout the US and in the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.³⁴

Crimes committed by groups like MS-13 receive extensive press coverage in the US, but on a national level their reach is limited: at their peak, estimated US membership never exceeded 10,000.³⁵ Nonetheless, the presence of transnational gangs in cities creates significant security concerns, both from gang activities and the responses of security forces. In the past few years, poor, migrant-dominated areas of Rio de Janeiro, Nairobi, Cape Town, and many Mexican cities have all had armed police or military interventions targeting gangs, where civilians were killed and injured too. In 2018, a record number of people were killed in police operations in Rio de Janeiro state, with 1,375 fatalities between February and December.³⁶ The military intervention in Rio's northern zone in 2018 was followed by a pledge by the state's new governor to "slaughter" criminals.³⁷

General crime

Most studies exploring the relationship between migration and crime focus on Europe and the US. Almost all of those relating to the African continent focus almost exclusively on South Africa. In both cases, findings cannot safely be extrapolated to other regions or countries.

In the US and EU, there is no evidence that migrants and refugees have a higher propensity to commit crimes than native-born citizens. A meta-analysis of 51 studies in the US found no relationship between immigration and crime;³⁸ neither did a study of crime in Europe after the refugee "crisis" of 2015-2016.³⁹ A study of crime statistics in Italy between 2007 and 2016 found that crime rates had fallen across the country, while the share of people granted asylum since 2013 had increased exponentially. The study found that the share of crimes perpetrated by

28 Lažetić, M. & Jovanović, T. (2017) *Belgrade, Serbia - A case of refugees in towns*. Feinstein International Center.

29 Ogli, N. (2019) *From Seeking Survival to Urban Revival. A case study of refugees in towns: Izmir, Turkey*. Feinstein International Center.

30 Di Carlo, D., Schulte-Cloos, J. & Saudelli, G. (2018) *Has immigration really led to an increase in crime in Italy?* LSE blog.

31 Hairsine, K. (2019) *South Africa's politicians feed anti-foreigner violence*. DW; Freeman, L. (2019) *They're All Terrorists: The Securitisation of Asylum in Kenya* in Tschudin, A. et al (eds) *Extremisms in Africa Vol 2*. Bryanston (South Africa): Tracey McDonald Publishers.

32 For a list, see Wikipedia entry: *Transnational gangs*

33 US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (undated) *Combating Gangs*

34 Ibid.

35 Lind, D. (2019) *MS-13, Explained*. Vox.

36 Instituto De Segurança Pública (2020) *Data visualization* Rio de Janeiro.

37 Child, D. & Simoes, M. (2019) *In Rio, military intervention leaves behind a troubled legacy*. Al Jazeera.

38 Ousey, G. & Kubrin, C. (2017) *Immigration and Crime: Assessing a contentious issue*. Annual Review of Criminology.

39 Fasani, F., et al. (2019) *Refugee Waves and Crime: Evidence from EU countries* in *Does Immigration Increase Crime? Migration Policy and the Creation of the Criminal Immigrant*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

foreign residents in a given region, on average, matched the same decreasing trend for the overall crime rate in Italy. In Germany, foreigners make up 13 percent of the population but account for over 38 percent of crime suspects.⁴⁰

There is also no evidence that cities with a higher share of immigrants have more crime than others. In the US, studies have found no relationship between crime rates and the foreign-born share of a population, including in border cities and “sanctuary cities.”⁴¹ In Texas, border towns have lower crime rates than non-border cities of comparable size, and those rates were falling before the border wall went up.⁴² Studies of sanctuary cities show no increase in crime rates after sanctuary policies were put in place, and the rates of violent crime, property crime, and rape are not higher in sanctuary cities than other comparable cities.⁴³

Although news media often produce sensational coverage of serious crimes involving street gangs with significant immigrant memberships, crimes committed by immigrants and immigrant gangs generally represent a very small proportion of a country’s overall offences. After a Sudanese gang committed a murder in Melbourne in 2018, former prime minister Tony Abbot claimed that Sudanese-born people in Victoria constituted less than 0.1 percent of the population, but were responsible for “well over” 1 percent of all crimes committed in that state. (He then called into question the integration of all African migrants in Australia).⁴⁴

In slum areas of the global South, migrants and refugees may form street gangs that commit crimes. From the migrants’ perspective, gang membership may be a tactic of resilience and survival—especially for younger migrants and refugees—in the absence of state-provided security and services.⁴⁵ In Cairo, young Sudanese refugees (albeit a very small portion of the Sudanese population) formed gangs as a way to address common grievances, but these gangs have become more violent over the years, and sometimes clash with rival groups. In Nairobi’s Kibera, where at least half the residents are migrants from rural areas of Kenya, there are eight major gangs. As in Cairo, youths join gangs as a way to provide “informal security networks” due to

corruption and a lack of trust in the police.⁴⁶ In Nairobi’s neglected slums, residents are “forced to rely on gangs for service provision, at a fee. They turn to [...] gangs to resolve matters of justice, law and order. Gangs have [...] emerged as key players in the provision of security, less as contributors to the disorder in slums and more as actors that mitigate the absence of government.”⁴⁷

Extremism and terrorism

Some urban neighbourhoods with large immigrant populations in large cities are labelled by the media and politicians (and thus many citizens) as “no-go zones”. In Europe especially, the label has been applied to Muslim-dominant areas where it is alleged that Sharia law prevails and police do not have control.⁴⁸ For example, Molenbeek, Belgium’s second poorest municipality and home to many Moroccans and Turks, gained notoriety because of its connections to those who carried out the Paris and Brussels terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2016.⁴⁹ Government documents revealed 51 NGOs in Molenbeek were suspected of having links to terrorism, and 46 residents were monitored for terrorism links.⁵⁰ But many residents of so-called no-go zones—especially those who live or work in these neighbourhoods—reject the term, pointing out the ordinariness of the neighbourhoods, and the small proportion of migrants and refugees who become extremists or suspected terrorists. Between 2014 and 2018, out of hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants that entered the EU, there were 104 suspected terrorists, of which 28 carried out attacks that claimed the lives of 170 people.⁵¹ Similarly, in the US, some observers and commentators have calculated there is only a 1 in 3.7 million chance of being killed by a foreign-born terrorist, and a 1 in 3.86 billion chance of being killed by a refugee in a terrorist attack.⁵² There is no evidence for the argument that migrants have a higher propensity than non-migrants to join terrorist organisations. While some migrant-dense neighbourhoods have seen connections to extremism, the labelling of these neighbourhoods as no-go zones is not factually accurate and often politically motivated.

40 Federal Republic of Germany (2019) [Police Crime Statistics 2019](#)

41 Orrenius, P. & Zavodny, M. (2019) [Do Immigrants Threaten U.S. Public Safety?](#) Journal on Migration and Human Security.

42 Aguilar, J. & Ura, A. (2016) [Border Communities Have Lower Crime Rates](#). Texas Tribune.

43 Gonzalez, B. et al. (2017) [The Politics of Refuge: Sanctuary Cities, Crime, and Undocumented Immigration](#). Urban Affairs Review; Martinez-Schuldt & Martinez, D. (2019) [Sanctuary Policies and City-Level Incidents of Violence, 1990 to 2010](#). Justice Quarterly; Misra, T. (2017) [Sanctuary Cities Are Safer and More Productive](#). Bloomberg City Lab.

44 Koziol, M. & Cunningham, M. (2018) [‘There is a problem’: Tony Abbott questions all African immigration amid gang violence debate](#). Sydney Morning Herald. See also: Baidawi, A. (2018) [Australia’s Prime Minister Warns of ‘Gang Violence’ by African Migrants](#). New York Times.

45 Lewis, T. (2009) [Sudanese refugee youth ‘gangs’ in Cairo](#). Forced Migration Review.

46 Mutahi, P. op. cit.

47 Ibid.

48 Bridge Initiative Team (2020) [Factsheet: No-Go Zone Conspiracy Theory](#). Georgetown University.

49 Wemple, E. (2015) [Belgian minister’s statement revives talk of ‘no-go zones’](#). Washington Post.

50 Kroet, C. (2017) [Belgium’s Molenbeek home to 51 groups with terror links: report](#). Politico.

51 Bensman, T. (2019) [What Terrorist Migration Over European Borders Can Teach About American Border Security](#). Center for Immigration Studies.

52 Nowrasteh, A. (2017) [Terrorists by Immigration Status and Nationality: A Risk Analysis, 1975–2017](#). Cato Institute.

Pushback: how governments and civil society respond

Public perceptions that migrants and refugees bring crime, extremism, and terrorism to their country are fuelled by disinformation and selective statistics.⁵³ While some governments may actively work to reduce the spread of disinformation, some more cynical political leaders manipulate it to their advantage. In the runup to the UK's 2016 referendum on EU membership, groups campaigning to leave the bloc blamed immigration for a range of problems, warning Britain's National Health Service (NHS) would become "unsustainable" under pressure from a growing immigrant population, despite NHS evidence to the contrary.⁵⁴ In the US, President Trump frequently overstates the number of "illegal" immigrants in the country and associates crime with irregular immigration with no evidence.⁵⁵ Stigmatising migrants in this way increases their risk of being profiled by law enforcement, as evidenced by the overrepresentation of migrants and refugees among criminal suspects.

International organisations, NGOs, and migrant communities try to combat this stigma. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has run campaigns such as *No Stranger Place* and *From Far and Wide* to highlight communities in Europe and Canada that have taken refugees into their homes, and its social media campaigns featuring celebrities also boost its messaging efforts.⁵⁶ Civil society groups facilitate events where migrants and hosts do things like eat a meal together, with the goal of fostering relationships that counter preconceived notions.⁵⁷

Beyond such campaigns, migrants and refugee leaders actively work to address problems of extremism and gang violence in their communities and to protest unfair practices. As the following examples illustrate, these actions range from counselling and employment programs, to street protests. In Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, the Rohingya refugee-led organisation Shanti Mohila provides counselling services to victims of sexual assault and gender-based violence.⁵⁸ In Kampala, Uganda, the Somali Community Association works to create employment opportunities for young Somalis who they believe may otherwise resort to violence.⁵⁹ In Cairo, in 2013, some Ethiopians were caught up in a violent

backlash from Egyptians after Ethiopia diverted the Nile for the construction of a vast dam. Ethiopian refugees demanded UNHCR make a statement to clarify that they had no connection to the actions of the Ethiopian government.⁶⁰ In Durban, South Africa, where Congolese refugees face frequent xenophobic attacks, the Christ Assembly Church of Africa holds rallies to foster solidarity. The pastor advertises the church as "comprised of many nationalities" and works to protect members from anti-foreign attacks."⁶¹

Conclusion

Location matters. Urban neighbourhoods often come with higher risks of crime and violence for migrants and refugees, and worse working and living conditions. Migrants and refugees are less willing to engage with the criminal justice system or other forms of government assistance, and when they do, they rarely receive adequate recompense. Risk is exacerbated along racial, ethnic, and gender lines. Disinformation and political rhetoric often stigmatise migrants and refugees as criminals, terrorists, and gang members, leading the public to believe they pose a danger despite the lack of evidence. This stigmatisation increases the risk migrants face and the likelihood of their becoming crime suspects. Urban responses need to not only address service provision and humanitarian response, but also how to better tackle negative stereotypes that stigmatise migrants and refugees that are perpetuated through disinformation, in line with Objective 17 of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration: "eliminate all forms of discrimination and promote evidence-based public discourse to shape perceptions of migration."

53 Banulesca-Bodgan, N. (2018) [When Facts Don't Matter: How to communicate more effectively about immigration's costs and benefits](#). Migration Policy Institute.

54 Cooper, C. (2016) [EU referendum: Immigration and Brexit - what lies have been spread?](#) The Independent.

55 Qiu, L. & Sherman, A. (2016) [Donald Trump repeats Pants on Fire claim about '30 million' illegal immigrants](#). Politifact.

56 UNHCR (2020) [Countering Toxic Narratives About Refugees and Migrants](#).

57 Ibid

58 Betts, A. Easton-Calabria, E. & Pincock, K. (2020) *The Global Governed? Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

59 Ibid

60 Miranda, P. (2018) [Getting by on the Margins: Sudanese and Somali refugees – a case report of refugees in Towns: Cairo, Egypt](#). Feinstein International Center.

61 Makanda, J. & Naidu, M. (2020) [Religion and identity de/construction among forced migrants: the case of the Congolese refugees in Durban, South Africa](#). Journal of Refugee Studies. See also Meth, P. (2017) [Informal Housing, Gender, Crime and Violence: The Role of Design in Urban South Africa](#). British Journal of Criminology.

Interview



Beyond emergency

Migrants and refugees tend to end up in the world's cities by default, because of a lack of better alternatives or coherent migration policies, argues **Giuseppina Nicolini**. A more joined-up response that gave greater roles to small towns and local authorities, coupled with a thorough overhaul of current reception and integration systems, would help overcome the current, uncoordinated, and counterproductive emergency mentality and achieve the widely shared goal of managed, safe and orderly migration.

Giuseppina Nicolini is an Italian politician who served as mayor of the Sicilian commune of Lampedusa e Linosa, the southernmost municipality in the country, from 2012 to 2017. Her term in office coincided with the arrival of thousands of refugees and migrants on the island of Lampedusa. As a result of her efforts to promote integration and solidarity, in 2017 she was awarded the Félix Houphouët-Boigny-UNESCO Peace Prize.

What role does Lampedusa play in the journeys of refugees and migrants, which for the most part continue to terminate in cities?

Lampedusa is a border town. It's a place of arrival. But it is important. Because Lampedusa has somehow become the symbol of all other Lampedusas in the Mediterranean Sea, like Lesvos, the other Greek islands, and many others. It is true that migrants do not stop here. And there are actually not many here now, in 2020. It is because being here is not their objective, they are people who carry out this journey to reach further into Italy and elsewhere in Europe. Having said that, what happens in places like Lampedusa is extremely important for cities, because initial reception matters. Making sure that the first interaction with refugees and migrants is as dignified and humane as possible will make the challenges linked to integration, which will play out later, often in cities, much easier to overcome.

During your term as mayor, the sanctuary you and NGOs working to support migrants offered was temporary, but there were some parallels with what certain sanctuary cities are trying to do around the world, weren't there?

Yes, I would say so. Lampedusa has become a symbol during a dramatic phase of our history of migration, mostly because we managed to re-affirm the right to life of people who arrived here. Before the Pope came to Lampedusa in July 2013 nobody was speaking about migrants' deaths at sea. Migrants' deaths were not only covered by the water of the sea, but also by the silence of public opinion, by their indifference. The important thing, I believe, is that Lampedusa helped to remind public opinion that these people had the right to be rescued and that they could find a place to start their lives over, they had a place where they could claim their right to exist. This is an extremely important step, which comes before refugees and migrants reach cities, or anything else really.



“ **What happens in places like Lampedusa is extremely important for cities, because initial reception matters.** ”

Do you think your fight against the Italian government and your criticism of its lack of support for, or solidarity with, migrants is similar to the antagonism between some sanctuary cities in the US and the federal government?

Yes, but the difference is that, in the US, President Trump went as far as retaliating against sanctuary cities, while this has not happened in Italy yet. In Italy, Lampedusa continues to remain a symbol and continues to denounce the absurdity of [former deputy prime minister and interior minister Matteo] Salvini's closed ports policy. And then we had Palermo, Naples, and other cities. We had those mayors who refused to implement the decrees that foresaw the de facto denial of fundamental rights, such as access to health services and documentation, to refugees and migrants. So there has been resistance and, therefore, I think we can indeed draw parallels. What brings these different things together is the absence of national and regional migration policies, which, in my opinion, is becoming more and more a global phenomenon, and which is creating a surge in antagonism of cities and other local realities versus national authorities. This is because it is cities which, at the end of the day, have to deal with refugees and migrants' needs and vulnerabilities.

“ **Lampedusa has become a symbol during a dramatic phase of our history of migration, mostly because we managed to re-affirm the right to life of people who arrived here.** ”

As mayor of Lampedusa you pioneered a more welcoming response and solidarity towards migrants and refugees, while others on the island appear to have grown tired of the new and seemingly endless arrivals. In 2017 you lost the mayoral election to Salvatore Martello, a candidate with a left-wing but anti-migrant agenda. Would you do it again? Based on your experience, what lessons might you offer to mayors of cities where migration is a top issue?

I may exaggerate here, but I think that yes, I chose to do what I thought was right. And in doing so, I believe I did the right thing. Not just for refugees and migrants, but also for the people of Lampedusa. Also, I took away fertile ground from the racist and xenophobic populist agenda, from extreme right parties which, without

migration, would not have had any political space over the past 20 years.

Having said that, I don't think you should be a kamikaze. I tried for instance to gain strength through contributing to the creation of a network of mayors of border towns and big cities, exactly because these situations are linked. The mayors of Lesvos and other landing spots in Sicily are linked with other small municipalities, like Riace, in Italy, but also with the mayors of Barcelona and Paris. We started building a network because we thought the big cities could help us, small local authorities, to build better infrastructure and offer better services for both refugees and migrants and our own citizens. This will later pay off for big cities, since a dignified initial reception establishes, for me, a sort of citizens' pact with newcomers, which later on will play a critical role in their integration in destination cities.

“ **The absence of national and regional migration policies is becoming more and more a global phenomenon and is creating a surge in antagonism of cities and other local realities versus national authorities.** ”

Are you suggesting that an elected mayor should promote particular principles, such as making their city welcoming to migrants and refugees, even when large proportions of their constituents disagree? How will that lead to a harmonious city?

The fact is that if you lose an election after having been a “symbol”, you make headlines. But there are many places in Italy where mayors carry out very progressive migration agendas off the radar while maintaining the support of their citizens. But this doesn't make the news. I could mention quite a few examples of this in Italy. Small villages and towns in the central regions of Italy, especially—but not only—those that are being abandoned, where schools are closing and children of different age groups are taught together because there aren't enough of each group. In some places, schools remain open only thanks to the children of migrants. This is just an example, but I could mention many similar situations. So, all this to say that I think in Italy we know and understand this duality of solidarity and opportunity for both migrants and the local population. What is missing is a vision which allows the translation of these local successes into policies that could be replicated and further expanded elsewhere, for the benefit of both migrants and local situations.

Given that most migrants and refugees head for towns and cities, should it be city managers and

mayors, rather than central governments, that take the lead in formulating relevant policies and programmes?

I believe that cities, but also towns and even villages, should be playing a bigger role. I strongly believe in the key role that small localities could play—for opportunistic reasons, if you like—because there you can simultaneously fight against depopulation and the ghettoisation of migrants, which is often a problem in big cities. What is happening right now is that, in the absence of policies, people end up by default in big cities. It happens more or less automatically: in big cities it's easier to find work, so migrants head there. If instead we managed to build a more articulated approach, which, in the process, would allow small towns and local entities to play a more prominent role, you could aim at reception and integration which will be much more spread out territorially. In my opinion this would be a much better approach. Of course, to do that you need central authorities to give resources and invest in building the tools needed at local level. We are not there yet.

“ We cannot have a functioning system without some common guidelines. What is a right in Paris needs to be a right in Palermo, as much as it is in Madrid and everywhere on European soil, and this is not the case today.”

So you envision a more prominent role for cities and small towns but against a central normative framework which allows and promotes a more decentralised management of migration issues?

So far, what has emerged is the strength, the dynamism and the resistance of small towns and cities. This is why I believe that migration management needs to be embedded in the local social fabric. For that, it is important to continue supporting initiatives coming from cities and local institutions and help them to play an even more prominent role. But also, national migration policies are needed and, of course, some European guidelines. Because while respecting the specificity and attitude of each local situation (which will call for different solutions), we cannot have a functioning system without some common guidelines. What is a right in Paris needs to be a right in Palermo, as much as it is in Madrid and everywhere on European soil, and this is not the case today. What is needed is a reform which completely changes the parameters of our reception and integration system, from disembarkation to long-term integration, access to work, etc. This will also contribute to overcoming the present emergency approach which,

characterises our approach to migration management. Recently, in Italy, there has been a lot of discussion around the regularisation of migrants, and residence permits for irregular migrants. In the end, after much discussion, only a few hundred migrants will actually benefit from this. We cannot continue this way. This continues to be an emergency approach, uncoordinated, where, more often than not, local institutions and mayors are left to themselves.

“ Overcoming the current emergency approach is the first step toward developing a climate of trust and defeating fear.”

So this emergency response approach not only prevents cities from playing a more prominent role, it also creates challenges for proper interaction between refugees and migrants and cities?

Yes. Overcoming this emergency approach is the first step toward developing a climate of trust and defeating the fear. The same fear that is the breeding ground of xenophobic and racist propaganda is at the origin of this absurd antagonistic climate around migration issues and which caused the misfortune faced by mayors like me. It is about finding political solutions, thinking in terms of managed, safe and orderly migration.

Photo credit: Hossein Fatemi / Panos. Kabul, Afghanistan

The effects of war and civil conflict drives people into cities as internal refugees or IDPs. They struggle to survive often doing menial work or depending on hand outs from others including international organisations. Many conflicts are protracted and often unwanted internally displaced persons can shift within their refuge city multiple times, be forced out of the city, go to another or even decide to try cross border movement in their desperation to find a solution.





Photo credit: Shutterstock. Clockwise: Mumbai, India; Alexandria, Egypt; Jakarta, Indonesia; New Orleans, USA

These four cities along with hundreds of others around the world will be affected by climate change. The unavoidability of sea-level rise, even in the longer-term, frequently conflicts with present-day human development patterns and trends. New 'elevation' data in 2019 that triples estimates of global vulnerability to sea-level rise and coastal flooding. Hundreds of millions of people live below future expected high tides in every scenario (high or low carbon emissions) and some are feeling the impact already.



Climate exposure – the complex interplay between cities, climate change and mixed migration

Many cities are already facing significant exposure to climate change impacts and will continue to do so. Beyond the irony that many climate-induced migrants face new climate threats in the cities where they come to seek refuge and opportunities, in the absence of effective national or international responses it is evident that cities will predominantly have to keep finding their own solutions.

By Chris Horwood¹

As they are for the majority of those on the move, cities are also magnets for climate-induced migrants and refugees. Climate change and environmental impacts such as increased rainfall intensity, storm surges, flooding, rising sea levels, reduced groundwater, drought, and urban heat islands are already affecting many urban systems worldwide. Two-thirds of the world's megacities are in regions that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, but not all cities—and not all parts of any given city—are affected equally.² Where migrants and refugees live and work in cities will often define the level of impact and their vulnerability to climate change. But what options do they have? This essay explores these issues and offers a review of what is being done at the international as well as municipal level to address them. What might the future look like in relation to urban climate change impacts and migration? To what extent—in terms of resilience, adaptation, and mitigation—will we witness a new era of dysfunctional nations being eclipsed by the rising power of cities?

Magnets for climate-induced migrants and refugees

Flows of migration and forced displacement, both internal and international, now almost exclusively head to cities. Urban centres and cities are the destination of choice for almost everyone on the move for whatever reason. For the millions who are forced to move because of weather-related events, causal attribution appears clear cut: “nearly 1,900 disasters triggered 24.9 million

new displacements across 140 countries and territories in 2019 [...] three times the number of displacements caused by conflict and violence.”³ People are twice as likely to be displaced by a disaster now than they were in the 1970s.⁴

For many of the others on the move, the reasons for movement—the drivers and compulsions to relocate—are often directly or indirectly intertwined with climate shocks and stressors. As the predicted impacts of climate change and other environmental factors start to bite, this is increasingly the case. Nevertheless, the “multi-causal understanding of migration prevalent in contemporary scholarship has become widely accepted, as has the idea that—given the tangle of factors playing out in migration processes—it is almost impossible to point to individuals or populations whose mobility is determined solely by environmental change.”⁵

Without explicitly or exclusively identifying environmental factors (and their close companion, resource scarcity), studies of “root causes” of migration and forced displacement show environmental issues to be important factors, but to varying degrees.⁶ “The nexus climate–migration is increasingly understood as a matrix of mobility responses characterised by different combinations of voluntariness, aims, geographical scope and duration.”⁷ Environmental stressors are characterised as acting as a threat multiplier, causing tipping points or acting as triggers not only in complex

1 Director of Ravenstone Consult and independent consultant

2 Danilenko, A. et al. (2010) [Climate Change and Urban Water Utilities: Challenges and Opportunities Working Water Note 24](#). World Bank Sustainable Development Network.

3 IDMC (2020) [GRID report 2020](#). The majority (17 million) were displaced in India, Philippines, Bangladesh and China and by extreme storms and flooding.

4 IDMC (2015) [Disaster-related displacement risk: Measuring the risk and addressing its drivers](#).

5 Clark, N. & Bettini, G. (2017) [‘Floods’ of migrants, flows of care: Between climate displacement and global care chains](#). The Sociological Review Monograph.

6 Foresight (2011) [Final project report – Foresight: Migration and global environmental change](#). London: The Government Office for Science.

7 Clark, N. & Bettini, G. (2017) [op.cit.](#)

geopolitical situations, but also in the decision-making processes that lead people to move.⁸

In 2015, the UN Refugee Agency stated that “both the sudden and slow onset impacts of climate change are expected to increase internal and cross border displacement of people and affect human mobility strategies.”⁹ In other words, climate factors have already played a significant role in mobility and are expected to continue to do so. “Environmental, economic and political degradation are connected—though the categories are permeable.”¹⁰

For **refugees**, resource scarcity and resource competition exacerbated by climate change can play a strong contributory role in the conflicts they are forced to flee. In 2007, then UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon described the conflict in Sudan’s Darfur region as the world’s first climate change conflict.¹¹ There have been claims, albeit disputed, that the Syrian war was triggered by climate impacts.¹² While climate change does not directly **cause** armed conflict, analysts agree that it may indirectly increase the risk of conflict by exacerbating existing social, economic and environmental factors.

For **international migrants**, environmental changes and loss of rural livelihoods contribute to an economic context that pushes them across borders. Climate change, and the resulting unsustainability of farming and grazing as livelihood options, have for some time become the leading causes of **internal mobility** from rural areas towards cities in Africa and Asia.¹³

The face of urban climate change impact

To what extent are cities currently affected and expected to be affected in the future? And how will this affect migrants—whether internal or international—living in cities, who in many cases may have moved to urban areas to escape the effects of climate change and environmental shocks and stresses in rural areas in the first place? The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change (IPCC) has stated that rapid urbanisation and rapid growth of large cities in low- and middle-income countries “have been accompanied by the rapid growth of highly vulnerable urban communities living in informal settlements, many of which are on land at high risk from extreme weather.”¹⁴ Furthermore, according to C40—a network of megacities committed to addressing climate change—many key and emerging global climate risks are concentrated in urban areas. “70 percent of cities are already dealing with the effects of climate change, and nearly all are at risk. Over 90 percent of all urban areas are coastal, putting most cities on Earth at risk of flooding from rising sea levels and powerful storms.”¹⁵ Additionally, many cities are affected by higher average temperatures exacerbated by the heat-island effect,¹⁶ droughts, and the impact of drier weather on the lakes and rivers that serve them.¹⁷

Taking urban water as an example, groundwater supplies are under stress due to decreasing precipitation rates and increasing volume of extraction, not to mention increased industrial, agricultural and household pollution. Extreme water shortages increasingly affect cities such as New Delhi, Los Angeles, Cairo, Cape Town, Amman, and São Paulo, and hundreds more. The World Bank suggests that in the second half of this century, many of the people who came to Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa, will be forced to move again and leave the city as local agriculture around it dries up and food shortages start to bite.¹⁸ In Lima, Peru, with its almost 10 million inhabitants, water supply is irregular, and a fifth of the population is cut off from the drinking-water network.¹⁹ Sana’a in Yemen, widely predicted to be the first capital to completely run out of water in the next decade, currently provides less than half its population with piped water; the rest get water through private tankers, costing 5-10 times more.²⁰ Purchasing water at inflated prices is increasingly common for those in the poorest areas of cities, including migrants and urban refugees. In Jordan, one of the world’s most arid countries, water consumption has reportedly surged by over 20 percent due to its hosting

8 Yale Climate Connections (2019) [Why climate change is a ‘threat multiplier’](#) (audio)

9 UNHCR (2015) [Climate Change And Human Mobility Solution Agenda –Resilience–Paris Cop 21](#). Advisory Group on Climate Change And Human Mobility.

10 Brown, O. (2008) [Migration and Climate Change](#). International Organization for Migration.

11 Ban, K. (2007) [A Climate Culprit In Darfur](#). Office of the UN Secretary-General.

12 Lelley, C. et al. (2015) [Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought](#). Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

13 Dev, M. (2011) [Climate change, rural livelihoods and agriculture \(focus on food security\) in Asia-Pacific region](#). Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai.

14 Revi, A., et al. (2014) [Urban areas](#) in: *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

15 C40 (undated) [Why cities? Ending climate change begins in the city](#).

16 ‘Heat islands are urbanised areas that experience higher temperatures than outlying areas. Structures such as buildings, roads, and other infrastructure absorb and re-emit the sun’s heat more than natural landscapes such as forests and water bodies.’ Source: US Environmental Protection Agency (undated) [Heat Island Effect](#).

17 Exploring the correlation between the deaths of 1,300 Nepali workers between 2009 and 2017 and rising temperatures in Qatar, climatologists and cardiologists concluded that the deaths were likely to be caused by heatstroke. See Kelly, A. et al. (2019) [Revealed: hundreds of migrant workers dying of heat stress in Qatar each year](#). The Guardian.

18 Lustgarden, A. (2020) [The great climate migration](#). New York Times.

19 Purvis, K. (2016) [Where are the world’s most water-stressed cities?](#) The Guardian

20 Ibid.

Essay

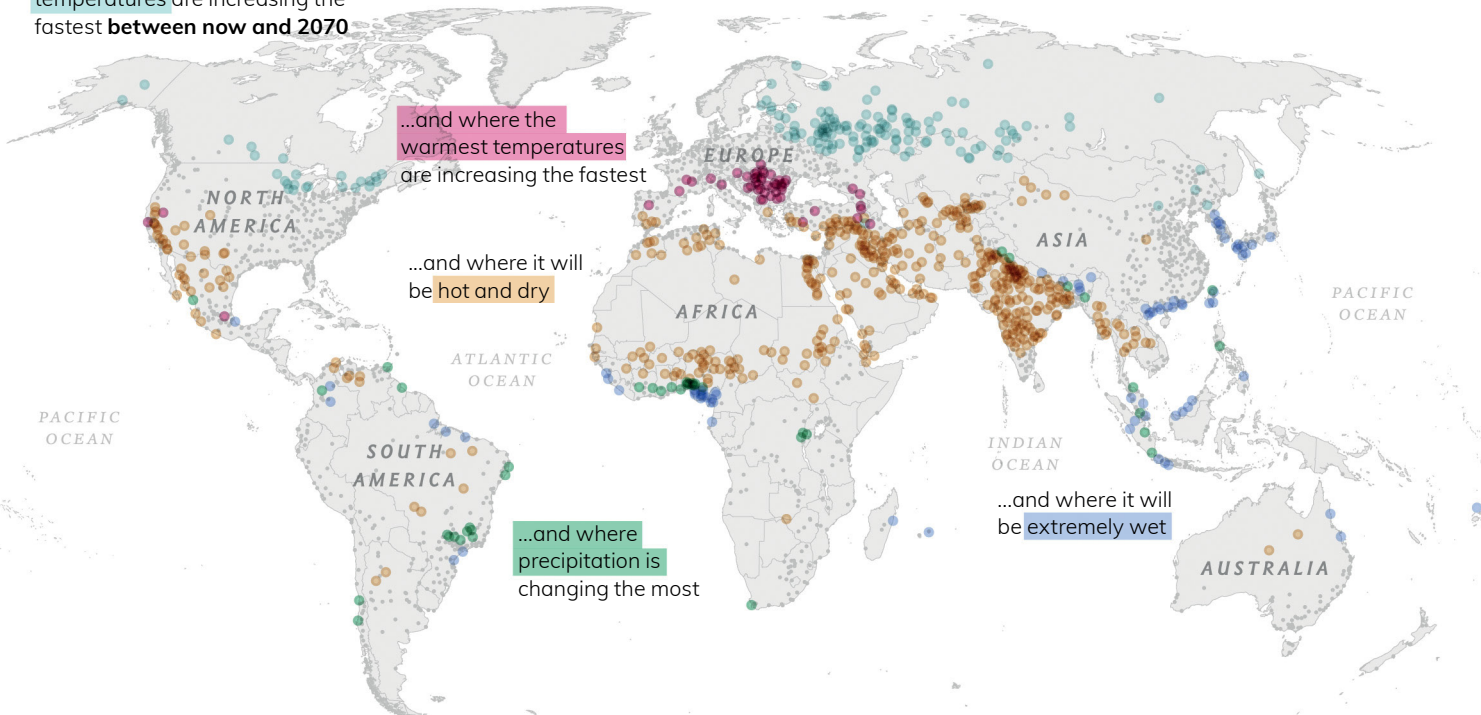
high numbers of refugees.²¹ As urban populations grow—often including many internal migrants—so too does the number of people living in settlements that are not connected to a formal piped water supply. As of 2018, over 1 billion people in the world were reckoned to live in slums, and their general lack of access to affordable and clean water carries serious health consequences on top of the increased immiseration water scarcity causes.

Unequal impact

There is compelling evidence that climate change compromises basic services, infrastructure, housing, livelihoods, and health in cities across all regions of the world.²² But the facts that not all cities are affected equally, and that not all parts of given cities are affected equally, has direct implications for migrants and refugees.

Major cities affected by changing weather in the next 50 years.

Cities where the coldest temperatures are increasing the fastest between now and 2070



Source: National Geographic²³

Wealthier and well-managed cities will be better equipped to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of future climate stressors; they are normally situated outside the global South and East—where the majority

of migrants and refugees reside. Highly vulnerable regions include sub-Saharan Africa as well as South and Southeast Asia.²⁴ Developing countries are more likely to disproportionately experience the negative effects of

21 Federman, J. & Akour, O. (2019) [Trapped in Jordan. Syrian refugees see no way home.](#) AP News

22 UNEP (undated) [Cities and Climate Change.](#)

23 Elliot, K. & Borunda, A. (2020) [See which cities will feel the brunt of climate change.](#) National Geographic.

24 Wade, K & Jennings, M. (2015) [Climate change & the global economy: Regional effects.](#) Schroders.

global warming. Such vulnerability is assessed via “the share of the population living in coastal areas below five metres of altitude, the share of agriculture in national GDP, and a country score from the ‘vulnerability index’ compiled by the Notre Dame University Global Adaption Index, [which] measures the degree to which a system is susceptible to, and unable to cope with, adverse effects of climate change.”²⁵

Equally, within cities where steep socioeconomic gradients exist between wealthier, better provided-for districts and the urban poor, the less advantaged face unequal access to urban services, facilities, utilities, and protection. Various essays in this Review discuss the inevitable and disproportionate accumulation of migrants and refugees in poorer districts of their “arrival cities”, where they tend to live in informal settlements and work predominantly in the informal economy.²⁶ Even where social mobility is possible, they initially rub shoulders with existing urban poor and face disproportionately reduced life outcomes in terms of income, housing, safety, education, and health, with findings during the Covid-19 pandemic offering particularly stark evidence of this.²⁷ The importance of physical location, assets, and capital in mitigating, self-protecting from, and adapting to climate risk in cities is directly relevant to internal and international migrants who are normally disadvantaged in all categories.

Assessing migrant vulnerability

Developing a more precise picture of which communities face particular vulnerabilities in discrete cities is a more granular exercise that is beyond the scope of this overview essay, not least because of the endemic deficiency of specific data and the absence of any standardised approach to gathering relevant data.²⁸ The reality of millions of irregular and often “invisible” migrants and undocumented urban refugees in a wide variety of cities globally (North and South) compounds the data problem. Insufficient data and a dearth of specifically localised data has been repeatedly highlighted in research as well as in major global declarations and initiatives, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), UN-Habitat’s New Urban Agenda, and the Global Compact for Migration (GCM). It is a gap that needs to be filled if a better understanding of migrant and refugee climate vulnerabilities in cities is to be achieved.²⁹

However, an alternative approach could be to accept that such detailed understanding is not needed if it can be

safely assumed that the fate of most urban refugees and migrants will be similar to that of other urban residents who live in informal settlements or low-income and low-infrastructure areas and who have low-paying jobs, often in the informal economy. But such an assumption may be misplaced: the experiences of **internal** migrants in Guangzhou or Moscow, compared with those in Phnom Penh, Nairobi, Maputo, or São Paulo, will be substantially and materially different. Still, there will be commonalities in terms of the likelihood of internal migrants in all these cities being close to the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder and often living in precarious environments with the fewest assets and resources to protect themselves from impacts of climate change and extreme weather events.

Equally, the conditions and status of **international** migrants will vary considerably between, for example, those in Gulf State capitals and those in Lagos, London, New York or Bogotá, precluding any blanket statements about their vulnerability to current or future impacts of climate change. The same applies to the experience and quality of life of **urban refugees**, so it would be hard to meaningfully group refugees living in Berlin, San Francisco or Toronto with those in Jakarta, Cairo or Amman as having the same experiences and risks.

Voting with their feet?

Despite the heterogeneity of experience and vulnerability between refugees and internal and international migrants globally, the fact remains that the vast majority of refugees reside in the global South, and at least 60 percent of those live in cities. Moreover, virtually all urbanisation is currently taking place in the global South, and as millions move from countryside to towns and cities, most will arrive at the ladder’s lowest rungs. South-to-South international migration is more prevalent than South-to-North: “most Africans migrate within Africa, rather than toward Europe or North America: in East, Central, and West Africa, more than 80 percent of international migrants come from a country in the same region.”³⁰ Lastly, irregular migration is also likely to be more prevalent in the global South. Concerning the number of irregular migrants, there are no reliable figures or even guesses, except for some much-quoted estimates in the US and Europe.³¹ But if one considers the common occurrence and frequency of undocumented, foreign-born people living in cities in Central and Latin America, throughout South, Southeast, Central and Far Asia, as well as in Africa and the Middle East, the number

25 Wade, K & Jennings, M. (2015) [Climate change & the global economy: Regional effects](#). Schroders.

26 See the essays *Unsafe havens - displacement within and between cities* on page 164 and *First responders: what cities offer migrants and refugees* on page 200.

27 See the essay *Hot zones: the first global pandemic of the urban migrant district*, on page 210, and *Risky cities, mean streets: exposure to rights violations and reduce protection in cities*, on page 178.

28 See the *Data on Urban Migration* report on page 133.

29 Ibid.

30 Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. & Carella, F. (2019) [The Position of “the South” and “South-South Migration” in Policy and Programmatic Responses to Different Forms of Migration](#). Berghahn Journals.

31 Estimated to be around 11-12 million in the US and around 4-6 million in Europe.

is likely to be high. The majority of these are also very likely to be in the lower socioeconomic decile in whatever location they find themselves.

If cities are increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate shocks and changes and if cities in the global South are disproportionately vulnerable, then it can be said that most refugees and migrants globally face similar—if not greater—vulnerabilities than cities' resident urban poor.

When the impacts of flooding, landslides, storms, drought, water scarcity, disease, and high food prices become overwhelming, what options do, or will, urban refugees and migrants have? What happens when cities become intolerable for them?

Those who lack capital or networks or capacity to move will experience forced or involuntary immobility and will have no choice but to struggle, and might depend on government or charitable support for survival. In some cases, such immobile vulnerable groups may constitute humanitarian emergencies. In other cases, they will conceivably join with other immobile and poor groups of city-dwellers to engage in the civil protest, social unrest, or even conflict that some researchers see as the inevitable outcome of intensified climate change.³²

A recent paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research using a global dataset covering 1970–2000 established that rising temperatures are, in fact, associated with reduced rural-urban migration in poor countries and increased rural-urban migration in middle-income countries.³³ The researchers linked this outcome to “rural-urban earnings differentials and liquidity constraints, which limit the mobility of the poor”.³⁴ The results suggest that the global warming will, “encourage further urbanization in middle-income countries such as Argentina, but could slow urban transition in poor countries like Malawi and Niger”.³⁵

Others who have the requisite capital and networks may practice secondary movement—as many of those in mixed migratory flows do already—for a variety of reasons. Environmental factors may come into play here, even if only as “stress multipliers” (enhancing economic drivers, for example) rather than as primary drivers. Such secondary movement can take the form of inter- or intra-city mobility, a return to rural areas, or even travel across national borders. As other essays in this

Review highlight, all kinds of mobility are being practiced already, and as urban vulnerability increases due to the intensifying impacts of climate change, they will surely increase in scale, as predicted by the IPCC and others.³⁶ At the same time, options to move may shrink as regular or irregular, viable and accessible alternatives reduce in number and as mobility becomes more restricted by border controls and other forms of prevention.

Fragmented and politicised response

Despite the high-level exposure, raised awareness and hand-wringing that climate change issues have elicited in the last two decades, the world continues on a dangerous trajectory in terms of carbon emissions and global heating. What were once seen as unacceptable levels of global heating to be avoided at all costs have become the new baseline targets to return to. Meanwhile, while increased international attention has been paid to climate change in relation to cities and the need to improve global management of migration, some states continue to challenge the anthropogenic nature of climate change, and most international efforts focus on the less politically contentious concept of “disaster prevention”.

For example, the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, established in 1999, works towards implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, a roadmap for preventing new and limiting existing disaster risks.

Two newer efforts have worked to link crisis and disaster to mobility. The Nansen Initiative, a state-led consultation process that ran between 2012 and 2015, focussed on “disaster-induced cross-border displacement.”³⁷ It was the precursor of the ongoing Platform on Disaster Displacement that seeks to implement the recommendations of the Nansen Initiative's protection agenda.³⁸ Additionally, the (also state-led) Migrants in Crisis Initiative was set up in 2014 to improve responses to the needs of migrants in countries (as well as cities) experiencing conflicts or natural disasters.³⁹

Organisations such as C40 Cities and 100 Resilient Cities (2013–2019) have linked climate change to cities, while the Mayors Migration Council is the most recent municipal governance network to have a specific focus on migration issues in cities.⁴⁰ Alongside these initiatives, high-profile declarations and landmark statements about migrants, migrants in cities, and cities and climate change are found in the New Urban Agenda, the SDGs

32 Mach, K. et al. (2020) [Climate as a risk factor for armed conflict](#). Nature.

33 Peri, G. & Sasahara, A. (2019) [The Impact of Global Warming on Rural-Urban Migrations: Evidence from Global Big Data](#). National Bureau of Economic Research.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Revi, A. et al. (2014) [op. cit.](#)

37 The Nansen Initiative (undated) [About us - Towards a protection agenda for people displaced across borders in the context of disasters and the effects of climate change](#).

38 Platform on Disaster Displacement (undated) [About us](#).

39 MICIC (undated) [About MICIC](#).

40 C40 Cities (undated) [About C40](#); 100 Resilient Cities (undated) [Overview](#); Mayors Migration Council (undated) [Our Mission](#).

and the GCM. To date, the issue of migrants and refugees in cities affected by the impacts of climate change has not been a primary focus of research, data collection or commentary.

“Dysfunctional nations, rising cities”⁴¹

Although some—perhaps many—cities on the frontline of climate change may be unaware of all these international initiatives, conferences and declarations, the concepts of mitigation, resilience and adaptation that have grown out of the new thinking have in recent years guided policy approaches and international assistance at national and city level.⁴² In the absence of other solutions, including cutting carbon emissions—which may already be too little, too late for some climate change processes—cities have been forced to protect themselves where they can from the current and expected impacts of climate change. Evidently, some cities are better resourced and have better planning capacity to do so than others. Many may be too overwhelmed by more everyday management issues to consider protecting residents against future risks, especially those seen as living in their cities temporarily or irregularly, such as refugees and migrants. Beyond the bitter irony that many climate-induced migrants face new climate threats in the cities where they came to seek refuge and new opportunities, it is evident that cities will predominantly have to keep fending for themselves and find their own solutions. Cities will likely face many different iterations of the impacts of climate change with unpredictable repercussions. The urban crises that climate change could cause or contribute to may become a source of destabilisation and civil unrest, with potentially increased discrimination and destitution for the cities’ poorest residents, including those who arrived within mixed migratory flows.

Global “climate injustice” means leaders of towns and cities thousands of miles from the biggest polluters must bear the brunt of the worst impacts of climate change. Thanks to dysfunctional and paralysed global and national systems of mitigation and response, mayors and city managers might once again have to take the lead in effective response and cross-border city-to-city exchanges, cooperation and action.

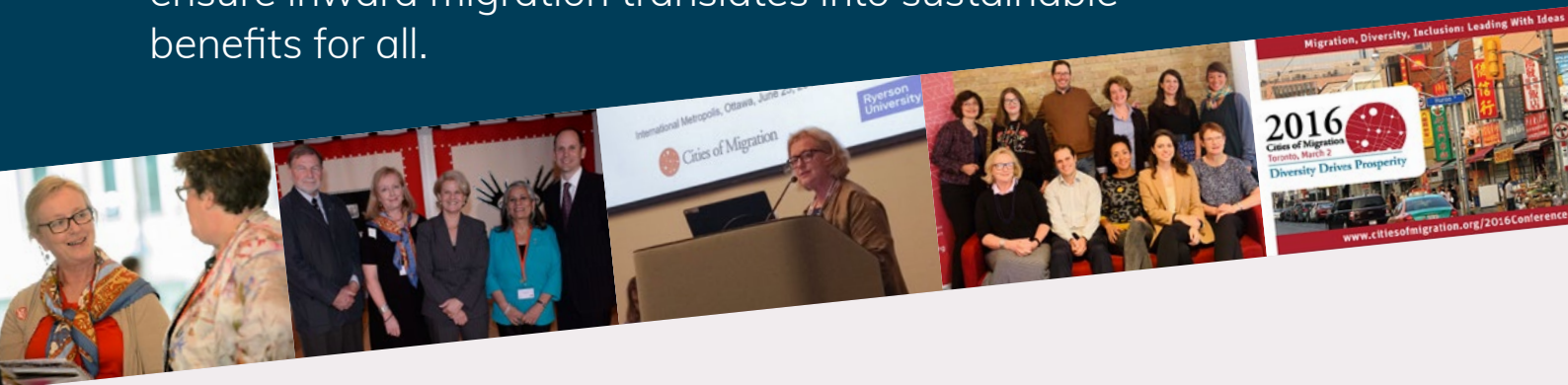
41 This phrase is borrowed from: Barber, B. (2013) *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

42 Pachauri, R. et al (2014) [Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report](#). Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change; see also (among many examples): World Bank Group (2011) [Guide to Climate Change Adaptation in Cities](#).

Interview

Beyond the open door

A welcoming attitude towards new arrivals is only one of many prerequisites for successful urban migration, explains a “very optimistic” **Kim Turner**. Cities need to rethink resource allocation, adapt their infrastructure, engage existing communities, celebrate diversity, tackle injustice, and partner with the private sector to ensure inward migration translates into sustainable benefits for all.



Kim Turner co-founded the Cities of Migration initiative in 2008 at the Maytree Foundation, Toronto.¹ Until she retired earlier this year, Turner was a senior research associate at Ryerson University’s Global Diversity Exchange. Previously, she led the Nonprofit Library Commons project at Imagine Canada.

Would you agree that all forms of mobility—be they forced or voluntary, internal or international, in the global North or South—have essentially become urban affairs? Or has migration always been an urban affair?

Yes, I think it is increasingly an urban affair. Cities are at the epicentre of the settlement and integration of migrants and refugees worldwide; that’s where the majority of the world’s population live and work. The role of cities has never been more important and continues to be under-appreciated. Until recently, cities haven’t been invited to the policy table, certainly not at national or international levels, where they might be contributing to the kind of discussions that are under way now, such as on the global compacts, etc.

As migrants and refugees concentrate in larger urban centres, is there a risk that cities become islands of diversity and multiculturalism and thus fundamentally different from the rest of the countries that they’re situated in?

I think that there is a risk, yes. As islands of diversity, cities are places where a lot of the most important innovations and creativity and national wealth and prosperity are being generated. These impacts need to be dispersed more broadly across countries. I think it is very problematic in Canada, for example, where we have a growing divide between our urban and rural or regional context. Canada’s proactive immigration strategy has been less successful in settling migrants outside the big cities, and that’s exacerbating regional disparities. I think we’re starting to see some fracture lines politically and culturally as a result of those differences.

¹ In the spring of 2020, the initiative moved to Ryerson University’s Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration & Integration.

“ Cities are at the epicentre of the settlement and integration of migrants and refugees worldwide... The role of cities has never been more important and continues to be under-appreciated. ”

At the national level, do you foresee political, or social-cultural, collisions ahead?

We will have to do more to adapt. In Canada, for example, attitudes towards our diversity are on the whole positive but recent events, the [Covid-19] pandemic and certainly what's happening south of the border in the US right now [with the Black Lives Matter protest movement], are helping us understand that these are not settled issues. Recognising our diversity also means recognising its inequalities, its racial disparities, its ethnic disparities. In our embrace of multiculturalism and the values of good governance (and maybe also because of our famous politeness), we've been reluctant to own up to our own challenges around race and class. In Toronto, over 51 percent of the population is foreign-born, we are a majority minority city, within which the so-called "visible minority" [a technical term used by Statistics Canada] is also the majority. In our big cities, this is something we're fairly comfortable with but in the regions, where we don't have that kind of diversity, it's a different situation. This will become problematic as significant economic challenges emerge as a result of natural demographic change.

“ Recognising our diversity also means recognising its inequalities, its racial disparities, its ethnic disparities. In our embrace of multiculturalism we've been reluctant to own up to our own challenges around race and class. ”

You mean the depopulation?

Yes, depopulation—mainly of working-age populations to the cities, as well as low birth rate and a bulge in retirees—is having a significant economic impact on smaller and regional cities. The out-migration of young people is one of the great tragedies of the regions, as is the collapse of the manufacturing industries that were the lifeblood of so many regional centres. These are economic challenges that cannot be addressed by a natural population growth. Increased immigration, and specifically efforts to increase immigrant retention in smaller towns and cities, is needed to sustain and return economic vitality to the regions. The challenge is to help regional and rural communities understand how to embrace immigration as an economic development

strategy. It's one thing to attract immigrants to your city, it's another to create the conditions for a successful settlement and integration experience. Immigrants need to feel welcome if you want them to invest in the community and remain. Otherwise, they'll take their talents elsewhere.

“ It's one thing to attract immigrants to your city, it's another to create the conditions for a successful settlement and integration experience. ”

Can a city have too many migrants? Can you see any drawbacks to unconstrained open-door policies, or the growth of migrant populations?

No, all the economic analyses we see here in Canada and elsewhere point to the vital contribution immigrants make, how essential they are to economic growth and prosperity. But practically, it requires a significant outlay of resources to ensure that newcomers are well integrated, that they receive the services they need to help them integrate into their communities. That starts with language acquisition and access to employment, but it takes much more than that. It takes significant efforts to adapt the working infrastructure of the city to make it open and welcoming to newcomers. I think one of the things that immigration is helping us understand is the complexity of creating an inclusive culture where everyone, all groups, all diversities, can feel comfortable and have a role, and that's good for all of us. So we need to engage ordinary citizens, members of the community at large, and embrace a whole-community approach to how we develop and communicate policy solutions to meet these challenges, including how to deal with experiences of discrimination, racism, and exclusion. This requires strong leadership.

What can mayors and other city leaders do to make migration in cities a positive phenomenon?

Local leadership, city mayors, have a very important role to play. They can bring employers to the table, direct policy and financial resources to where it's needed, bring local stakeholders together. Compared to national and state governments, cities are nimble, flexible, responsive. Plus, they have a huge symbolic role to play. It's vital that city leaders, and especially mayors, set a high bar on issues like immigration, antidiscrimination, inclusion. Not just which public services are provided, but also the way in which they're provided; how members of the public service are trained to interact with newcomers and [ensure] accountability for whether those services are delivered in an equitable and respectful way. It's the business

“ Compared to national and state governments, cities are nimble, flexible, responsive. ”

of cities to create wealth, foster the conditions for prosperity, to attract investment, jobs, opportunities, etc. Their engagement with the private sector is a very significant part of that role. City leadership can help employers understand how to recruit and integrate immigrants and uncover opportunities for including them in the local labour market.

Should cities and mayors have a stronger say in national immigration policies?

I think they should; after all, it's mayors that oversee the places where immigrants live, work and pay taxes. Toronto, for example, has been called the engine of Canada's national prosperity; its motto is "Diversity Our Strength." Barcelona, the great intercultural city, has been described as a "living laboratory" of policy innovation related to immigrant integration. One of the things that we've learned at Cities of Migration, over 12 years, is how innovative cities are. Why? because the everyday business of running the city means coming up with solutions where they are needed, finding new ways to provide services, to support social cohesion and public safety. When city mayors stand up and send the right message, as they have in cities like New York, it makes a difference. Many cities are defying national narratives around migration, modelling success when national narratives may be quite negative. On immigration issues, they've earned a seat at the national decision table.

“ Many cities are defying national narratives around migration, modelling success when national narratives may be quite negative. ”

You've spoken before about the need for more tangible evidence of the long-term costs of exclusion, about what happens when discrimination and bias get in the way of opportunity. What, for you, are these costs, and are you seeing them in many cities around the world?

That's what we're seeing now in the United States, for example. When we talk about systemic injustice, systemic racism, systemic inequality, that's precisely what we're looking at: the long-term consequences of ignoring these issues or not dealing with them properly. The injustices work their way into the system

in ways that become more and more intractable. Just look at the niqab ban in Quebec and France. It is an overheated, absurd debate. For a culture that has always had an intellectual appreciation for the absurd, it's extraordinary to me the anxiety that a woman's headdress has created. Of course, the debate has simply surfaced racism already present in the culture but with far-reaching consequences, like toxic populism. The immediate cost of exclusion to cities, of course, is that immigrants, and the skills, experience, and opportunity they represent, will choose to go elsewhere.

“ The immediate cost of exclusion to cities is that immigrants, and the skills, experience, and opportunity they represent, will choose to go elsewhere. ”

What are the critical factors that make migration successful and beneficial as opposed to burdensome conflict-driving at the city level?

It's well-established that language makes an enormous difference, for all the obvious reasons. It allows you to work and to share your skills and experience, to advance in your work, etcetera. Importantly, it also enables integration at the community and neighbourhood level. And it's critical to ensuring that your rights are protected, and that you can advocate for your rights and negotiate that legal framework. However, in our work on cities and migration, what's really emerged is the complexity and multi-faceted nature of integration. Focusing on a single dimension like language, or employment, or housing, without comprehensive long-term strategies that include anti-discrimination policies and community awareness campaigns, promises limited success. Research tells us is that our biases are hard-coded. We all need to work deliberately and conscientiously to overcome them, so they don't negatively impact how we make decisions, personally and in the interest of others, the community as a whole. And that takes hard work, that takes a lot of work. We should really be talking about inclusion, because that's what is really important.

Has Covid-19 set back progress in integrating migrants at national and city levels, both in practical terms and also in terms of people's perceptions of outsiders and the mobility of foreigners?

The idea that a virus knows no borders is pretty interesting. The pandemic has already taught us a great deal about ourselves, from the importance of community trust in bending the curve, to which populations are most vulnerable. Of course, migrants aren't the source of the virus; the virus is amongst us, technically blind

to the race and nationality of the carrier. However, the pandemic has exposed the disproportionate number of racialised communities, ethnic communities that have been affected. That's directly related to housing conditions and proximity factors; it's all about big city density and living conditions. In Toronto, as elsewhere, we can pinpoint Covid by postal code the way we have historically identified poverty at the neighbourhood level. So the pandemic is exposing systemic vulnerabilities that can impact anyone. I see that insight as a positive only if we can be moved to do something about it. I hope more insights about migration will emerge during this time of pandemic. Maybe service workers will finally get the recognition they deserve.

Jumping forward to the future, say 2050, do you see well-integrated, multicultural, multi-national, inclusive cities as the norm globally, or are there going to be forces that oppose this trend?

I believe that our own best interests will prevail and that we're going to see better integrated, more inclusive, more diverse cities. I'm very optimistic. The global movement of people, information, money, culture is unstoppable. At the city level, there is a growing understanding of both the challenges posed by migration and the availability of solutions. There's recognition that cities are leading the way forward. It's promising to think about our young people, who are truly global citizens, who are more open and more equitable, less colour-blind than we've ever been. That's the generation that will be running our cities 30 years from now.

First responders – what opportunities and obstacles face urban migrants and refugees?

Cities across the world face myriad challenges living up to the hopes and needs of their migrant and refugee populations, especially when it comes to providing work, services, and protection in informal settlements. Are the streets of cities ever paved with gold?

By Karen Jacobsen¹

Millions of migrants and refugees arrive in or pass through the world's cities every year to seek refuge or find new opportunities. Such cities may be in the home countries of those on the move, in a neighbouring state, or located tens of thousands of kilometres away. For many, cities initially viewed as mere transit points become permanent homes and evolve into established destinations for mixed migration flows. Generally, it is cities—their municipal authorities and civil society organisations—rather than national governments that are the first to respond to the needs and aspirations of refugees and migrants.

This essay describes how the responses of cities take different forms. Some (as the separate essay on sanctuary cities explores) strive to welcome and integrate refugees and migrants, even if their national governments adopt overtly anti-migrant policies. Other cities simply neglect refugees and migrants, or have no capacity to help them, leaving the newcomers to fend for themselves or rely on the help of other residents, including other refugees and migrants. And some are explicitly exclusionary and discriminatory, in line with the directives of anti-migrant authorities and politicians. Many migrants and refugees will be unaware of which of these types of city they are heading to until they get there.

Resources and options

Whatever the type of welcome they receive on arrival in a city, most refugees and migrants tend to settle in specific neighbourhoods, either those where their compatriots already live and can provide assistance, or, if have the means, in areas that offer better prospects for housing,

services, and jobs. People who have hastily fled their own city, town, or rural village because of armed conflict, persecution, or disaster, generally have fewer resources than those who were able to plan their departure more carefully. This means the forcibly displaced are more likely to end up living in low-income areas with the urban poor.² Refugees and migrants, including the forcibly displaced, come from all social classes and economic backgrounds. Those with more wealth and other resources, or who have professional and business skills—a small minority—have less trouble integrating as they are able to find decent housing, establish their business and occupations, get their children into schools, and access services. But the vast majority are much less well-off, and tend to gravitate to informal settlements or slums within or close to cities.³

The Arab region, comprising 18 countries, hosts over 38 million migrants and refugees and around 15 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).⁴ Together, migrants, refugees, and IDPs represent one-third of the region's population—and a large majority live in cities.

Urban terminology

There is no single globally-agreed definition of “informal settlement”, or indeed of the term “urban”—national governments and their statistical offices vary in the criteria they use for both terms. The UN has come up with a useful way of conceptualising cities as concentric zones of habitation: the “city proper” is the area within administrative (municipality) boundaries; the “urban agglomeration” consists of the built-up area around the city proper; and the “metropolitan area” refers to the

1 Karen Jacobsen is the Henry J. Leir Professor in Global Migration at Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. She was assisted in the preparation of this essay by graduate students Christian Jepsen and Dani Douglas.

2 ICRC (2018) [Displaced in Cities: Experiencing and responding to urban internal displacement outside camps](#).

3 While they may overlap, the two terms are not synonymous: according to UN-Habitat, “slum” covers “a wide range of low-income settlements and/or poor human living conditions”. A “slum household” is widely defined as “a group of individuals living under the same roof lacking one or more of the following conditions: access to improved water, access to improved sanitation, sufficient living area, and durability of housing.” The term “informal settlements” is often used to describe housing or shelters that are illegal (including by violating planning codes, or occupation without legal title) or that fall outside government control and/or state protection. See Diab, Y., El Shaarawy, B., & Yousry, S. (2020) [Informal Settlements in the Arab Region](#). UN-Habitat.

4 UN ESCWA (2020) [Situation Report on International Migration 2019: The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the Context of the Arab Region](#).

reach of economic and social interconnectedness.⁵ This reclassification of cities has led to new ways of thinking about urban growth in an era when the majority of the population of many countries live in cities.⁶ Migrants and refugees, both internal and international, live in all three zones: in slums in older congested areas of the city proper, in informal settlements (sometimes termed “shantytowns”) at the edges of urban agglomerations, and in smaller outlying villages that fall within the city’s metropolitan area. For example, in Lebanon’s second city of Tripoli, Syrians live alongside Lebanese nationals in well-to-do suburbs such as Maarad in the city proper, in informal settlements such as Hay el Tanek on the outskirts, and in the more distant villages of north Lebanon whence they commute to Tripoli for work and health services.

In US cities on the border with Mexico informal peri-urban settlements known as colonias that house migrant communities have increased rapidly, mainly because migration from Mexico and Central America has been met with little expansion of affordable housing. The State of Texas defines colonias as border communities that may lack basic living necessities such as potable water, sewage, electricity, paved roads and safe housing.⁷ In the city of El Paso, some 75 percent of colonia residents were born in Mexico, but most have acquired US citizenship and have resided in the US for an average 18 years. Many work as day-labourers in the construction and service industries, making it hard for them to afford to buy or even rent homes in the urban centre. Moreover, deregulation of the housing market in El Paso county and poor enforcement of housing codes resulted in the expansion of mobile and prefabricated home sales to the colonias.⁸

North vs South

Informal settlements and slums are found in or near virtually all large cities and towns across the global South, and increasingly in European cities too.⁹ In 2013, UN-Habitat estimated that 25 percent of the world’s urban population lived in informal settlements, with 213 million informal settlement residents added to the global population since 1990.¹⁰ In the Middle East and

North Africa, a large proportion of informal settlement residents are refugees and migrants, including IDPs.¹¹ In some smaller cities in countries with very high levels of internal displacement, such as Baidoa in Somalia, displaced people outnumber the host community.¹² The city of El Fasher in Sudan’s North Darfur province had a population of about 540,000 in 2012, with three large IDP camps nearby housing some 149,000 people, with another 34,418 IDPs residing in the town itself.¹³

In the global North, well-enforced zoning regulations mean there tend to be fewer informal settlements of the kind found in the global South. Still, refugees and migrants sometimes create their own ad-hoc settlements or camps, with little or none of the support provided to traditional refugee camps by national governments, the UN and NGOs. Notable examples include the “jungle” camps outside the French port of Calais, or the “Gran ghetto” in the Italian province of Foggia.¹⁴ Italy has dozens of such settlements.¹⁵ Sometime, informal settlement sprung outside of state run facilities like in Moria, on the Greek island of Lesbos. In post-Communist south-eastern Europe, informal settlements have arisen on the edges of cities such as Tirana, Belgrade, Tbilisi and Bucharest.¹⁶

Wherever in the world they spring up, informal settlements result from a combination of increased migration flows and a lack of affordable housing, often in the context of widespread public mistrust of government. Such distrust stems from corruption and lack of transparency in land and construction permitting, inefficient urban planning bureaucracies, and unfair and property taxation.¹⁷

Marginalised neighbourhoods

Migrants and refugees come to cities with the hope of benefitting from the jobs, services and infrastructure that cities offer. But for the many who end up in informal settlements, these urban benefits are hard to come by. With some exceptions, notably in Latin America,¹⁸ city authorities are reluctant to legitimise informal settlements. The resulting marginalisation and poor municipal governance mean everyone, local citizens and new arrivals alike, struggle to find legal jobs that pay adequate wages, while basic services such as water and

5 UNESCO (2018) [Sustainable cities, human mobility and international migration](#).

6 This essay links well to the essay on Inclusive Planning in this Review, page 234.

7 Community Development Department of the Dallas Fed (2015) [Las Colonias in the 21st Century](#)

8 Olmedo, C. & Ward, P. (2016) [Model Subdivisions: The new face of developer lot sales for low-income colonia-type housing in Texas](#). Land Use Policy.

9 ICRC op. cit.

10 UN Habitat (2013) [Streets as Public Spaces and Drivers of Urban Prosperity](#)

11 Diab, Y., El Shaarawy, B., & Yousry, S. op. cit. Note that there is a dearth of aggregated data on the proportions of migrants and refugees living in informal settlements in the cities of the global South, even if statistics about some individual cities are available.

12 ICRC op. cit.

13 Miller, E. (ed) (2009) [Darfur: Profile of el Fasher Town and Abu shouk IDP Camp](#). UN Habitat.

14 Migrants of the Mediterranean (2019), [Going homeless in Gran Ghetto](#)

15 In Italy a study identified 45 such settlements: Mendola, D. & Busetta, A. (2018) [Health and Living Conditions of Refugees and Asylum-seekers: A Survey of Informal Settlements in Italy](#), Refugee Survey Quarterly.

16 After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, these settlements grew as the movement of people increased and property laws became laxer. See: Tsenkova, S. (2012) [Urban Planning and Informal Cities in Southeast Europe](#). Journal of Architectural and Planning Research.

17 Potsiou, C. (2014) [Policies for formalization of informal development: Recent experience from southeastern Europe](#). Land Use Policy.

18 Fernandes, E. (2011) [Regularization of Informal Settlements in Latin America](#). Cambridge (US): Lincoln Institute of Land Policy.

sewage systems, energy supply, and roads are decrepit or overburdened, and access to health and education services is limited. Migrants and refugees, however, can be worse off than the locals. As discussed below, they face additional hurdles to finding decent work and housing, and in some cases, municipalities resist or are legally prevented (by national policy) from providing them with health or welfare services.

Barriers to work

In informal settlements there are few formal sector jobs, i.e. work that is regulated, with normal hours and regular wages, and from which the income is taxed. Most such formal opportunities—and even informal ones, such as domestic work—require employees to commute long distances to the city proper or more upscale areas. In addition, migrants and refugees are often prevented from formal sector work because of national restrictions intended to protect the employment of the local population. In some countries, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers each require different kinds of permission to work. Many countries do not allow asylum seekers to work at all, and migrants are required to obtain work permits that are often hard to come by. For example, since 2016 Egypt has worked with the European Union (EU) to prevent migrants and refugees from travelling to Europe. This effort has been praised by the EU, but as migrants become stuck and new arrivals keep coming, Cairo's poorest neighbourhoods are filling up. Work is difficult to find. Egypt's quota system requires that non-Egyptian workers not exceed 10 percent of semi-skilled or unskilled workers in any company, and 25 percent of skilled workers, and compensation of foreign employees must not exceed 35 percent of total payroll. Only when no Egyptian nationals are qualified for a certain position can foreign workers apply for a work permit to fill it, a process that can take well over a year to complete.¹⁹ Things are no better for refugees, whom Egypt considers "foreigners" and on whom it imposes the same restrictions on rights and services as it does for non-Egyptian visitors.

In Egypt and elsewhere, migrants' and refugees' limited access to formal employment means they often pursue work informally, rendering them vulnerable to exploitation and lower wages, or payment in kind (such as housing) for their labour.²⁰

Limited services

Migrants and refugees in cities need amenities such as electricity, sewage, health care, schools, and financial services just like other urban residents. In the case of health care, and specifically mental health care, their need is often greater, due to the travails of their journeys and their pre-departure exposure to conflict, persecution, or extreme poverty. In addition, many migrants and refugees arrive impoverished and malnourished by losses and debts incurred during their journeys. For many, the most important priority upon arrival is getting their children into school. All these needs are often met in cities, provided by different actors in different ways. But in informal settlements, the provision of services is much more challenging, all the more so in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Access challenges

Services in cities are not always readily available to migrants and refugees. Even if they are legally available, obstacles related to documentation or language can prevent access. Informal settlements are often located far from services, so getting to them can be expensive and time consuming. Access to services can depend on legal status, with registered refugees and migrants having more access than the undocumented. In many countries, public health services and schools are legally accessible to refugees, but governments impose restrictions, in part because these services are under-resourced. For example, in Egypt, the government has reduced public school access for refugee students who compete with Egyptian students for under-resourced classrooms with too few seats. The alternative of private education is beyond the reach of most migrant and refugee families.²¹ Some countries discourage migrants from accessing services regardless of their status. The US has framed migrants as drains on public services since the 1920s, when welfare programs for the poor first began. In 2019, the Trump administration barred access for nearly all migrants who it deemed could become "public charges"—that is, dependent on the government—for food, housing, and healthcare assistance, driving millions who previously qualified for assistance programs out of the system.²²

Other factors also obstruct migrants' and refugees' access to services. Mental health issues can severely limit the ability of migrants and refugees to deal with arrival procedures and bureaucracies. Asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable, since many will have fled violence and persecution in their home country, but both migrants and refugees experience traumatising events on their journeys.²³ Trauma can make it difficult to interact

19 Globalization Partners (undated) [Egypt Work Visas and Permits](#).

20 Rayes, D. (2019) "[Stuck in Transit: Systematic limitations on the integration of Syrian refugees in Egypt and its impact on mental health and well-being](#)." [Tahir Institute of Middle East Policy](#); Potsiou, C. op. cit.

21 Rayes, D. op. cit.

22 Pope-Obeda, E. (2020) [Stigmatizing Foreign-Born Dependency: The Public Charge Rule](#). Solidarity.

23 Médecins Sans Frontières (2019) [Luxor Operational Research Highlights 2018/2019 -Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Migrants](#)

with the local population and even with other migrants.²⁴ The problem is severely aggravated when people have undocumented status, such as asylum seekers who have been rejected for state protection. The undocumented often cannot register for welfare services, meaning their mental health issues go untreated. There are studies around the world of how this problem manifests in cities. For example, one study in Stockholm found that the prevalence of mental illness among undocumented people soared due to untreated trauma arising both from strife in their homelands and from the precarity of their lives in the city.²⁵ In Sweden, almost half of unsuccessful asylum seekers come from the Middle East, and a quarter come from Afghanistan. Their experience in the world's most violent countries created a severe predisposition for mental illness: 68 percent of asylum seekers in Sweden suffer from anxiety, with 39 percent suffering from severe anxiety, compared to 15 percent of the Swedish population as a whole. An estimated 58 percent of rejected asylum seekers suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of isolation and traumatic life experiences, compared to only 9 percent of resettled refugees.

Overcoming obstacles

In cities, obstacles to accessing services are overcome in two ways: migrants and refugees help themselves, often assisted by civil society NGOs, and city authorities step up to address the problem.

Migrants and refugees compensate for the lack of city-provided services through their kinship networks or through small community-based organisations that emerge in the areas where they live. Especially in the global South, such organisations set up schools, and provide health services, social services, and childcare. Migrants and refugees may act as brokers for employment, healthcare, and travel (in which latter case they may be termed “human smugglers”). These kinds of self-help organisations are so widespread that a simple Google search for “refugee community organisations” in any large city in Africa or the Middle East will yield dozens of examples.

Humanitarian response

This agency of refugees and migrants is not new of course: throughout history migrants and refugees have started their new lives by helping each other. In recent years, and especially in the global South, humanitarian agencies have stepped into the limelight, often helping

both refugees and the local poor. For example, since 2012 the countries surrounding Syria—Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon—have received over 6 million Syrian refugees. In many cases, these refugees joined pre-existing migrant communities in the host countries. In Lebanon, Syrian refugees joined the half a million Syrian migrants already living there, often in the informal settlements on the edges of cities like Beirut and Tripoli. Palestinians displaced from Syria joined Palestinians already living in Lebanon. The support provided by international aid agencies for these populations has been vast, especially in the fields of health, housing, education, and food, and is sometimes extended too poor Lebanese citizens as well.²⁶

The international humanitarian response to the Syrian emergency and others like it receive considerable media attention, but globally, and away from the media glare, it is small, locally-based community organisations that do the lion's share of supporting fellow migrants and refugees and helping them survive and thrive. During the Covid-19 pandemic, this ability of refugees and migrants to help themselves was especially apparent in many cities, where services became even less available and migrants were sometime vilified.²⁷

Vital remittances

Migrants and refugees do much to build the service capacity of not only the cities they settle in but also those they left behind. Most migrants and refugees maintain substantial connections to their cities and countries of origin. By sending remittances to their families and sometimes to support community structures, they contribute to the quality of social services. For example, remittances sent by the Zimbabwean diaspora across the world are used in cities such as Harare to build houses, buy cars, and pay school fees.²⁸ As migrants and refugees have begun returning to Harare, many have established businesses that contributed to services offered in the city.

Surge capacity

Population surges are challenging for urban municipalities, especially smaller towns. For example, during the peak of the exodus from Venezuela in 2019, the Brazilian border town of Boa Vista saw an influx of 30,000 Venezuelans, equivalent to more than 10 percent of its usual population. Camps were set up by civil society groups and the Brazilian military. The government attempted to relocate some Venezuelans to other cities such as São Paulo, but

24 Jaspars, S. & Buchanan-Smith, M. (2018) [Darfuri Migration from Sudan to Europe: From displacement to despair](#). ODI.

25 Andersson, L. et al. (2018) [Undocumented Adult Migrants in Sweden: Mental health and associated factors](#). BMC Public Health.

26 Knudsen, A. (2017) Syria's Refugees in Lebanon: Brothers, Burden, and Bone of Contention in Peri, R. & Meier, D. (eds.) *Lebanon Facing The Arab Uprisings - Constraints and Adaptation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. See also Eldawy, D. (2019) [A Fragile Situation: Will the Syrian refugee swell push Lebanon over the edge?](#) Migration Policy Institute.

27 Jacobsen, K. & Simpson, C. (2020) [Refugees tell stories of problems – and unity – in facing the coronavirus](#) The Conversation

28 Venables, N. (2020) [Finding Home in Uncertainty: Returnees, Reintegration, and Reconciliation – A Case Study of Refugees in Towns, Harare, Zimbabwe](#). Boston: Feinstein International Center.

this was met by local resistance in these areas.²⁹ For Boa Vista, the growing number of Venezuelans led to pressure on local schools and other services.³⁰ The use of local resources by Venezuelans—46 percent of whom depended on government welfare—³¹ stoked tensions with the residents of Boa Vista.³²

The case of Boa Vista exemplifies the responses of small cities faced with a major humanitarian influx. Most very large cities—megapolises of more than 10 million inhabitants—are sub-divided into boroughs or districts, each potentially responding differently to arriving refugees and migrants. In some, pre-existing social connections between refugees and migrants and host communities can make integration more seamless. For example, the municipality of Sultanbeyli on the outskirts of Istanbul hosts some 300,000 Syrians. (Greater Istanbul, which has a total population of 15 million, hosts more than half a million of the 4 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, more than any other Turkish city). Despite growing anti-refugee sentiment in the rest of Turkey, Sultanbeyli has continued to provide refugee services because the town's political leaders consider the Syrians to be part of the permanent population and see serving refugees as “a conscientious obligation rather than a legal duty.”³³ The municipality has a five-story refugee centre that offers legal assistance, in-kind aid, health, education and training, and also houses the Istanbul Directorate of Migration Management. With so many refugees in Turkey moving to Sultanbeyli because they have family there, the district has become an amicable place for refugees, and integration occurs more easily because of all the pre-existing social connections.³⁴

In recent years, many countries, especially in Europe, have recognised the importance of enabling migrants and refugees to access services. The Council of Europe's project on the Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants has developed a toolkit to support member states in their efforts to help refugees acquire competences in the language of the host country.³⁵ But individual national governments—perhaps driven by political considerations—vary in their efforts to promote access to services. This is where cities step up, often bucking

national policies. In the US and EU, individual cities, including those known as “sanctuary cities” have effectively overridden national restrictions, either making services available to everyone in the city, or actively trying to overcome obstacles that prevent access, such as language barriers.³⁶ Ultimately, it is the cities themselves who have to deal with communities under their care, and provide services if even in the face of national policy that is restrictive.

Protection risks

The informal settlements where most migrants and refugees live are often unsafe areas, both because they are more likely to be in or close to “dangerous and polluted urban areas: steep-sided hills, flood plains, hillside, waste dumps, and hazardous industries” and because crime rates are higher.³⁷ When it comes to the latter, are migrants more at risk than their neighbours? There is plentiful evidence from a range of cities that migrants are at risk of being targeted both by criminals and the police, and more likely to be subject to discrimination and harassment from employers, landlords and the general public, whether they are going about their livelihoods, trying to find housing, or walking down the street.³⁸ Examples range from the problems internal migrants experience with the police in China,³⁹ to police in South Africa standing by as locals attack migrants and refugees. In Salvadoran cities, police violence against IDPs is normalised as part of the security force's anti-gang activities.⁴⁰ Housing evictions in migrant informal settlements are frequently conducted aggressively by the police, often without the support of social workers or interpreters. In the Italian border town of Ventimiglia, where informal settlements were established after migrants became stranded due to border closures, nearly 25 percent of those who tried to cross the border reported at least one act of violence by Italian or French officials.⁴¹

Few population-based studies systematically compare the experiences of specific cities' residents according to their nationality. One exception is 2017 survey of some 2,000 informal sector entrepreneurs in the South African cities of Limpopo and Cape Town; respondents were more or less equally divided between non-South African

29 The Brazilian government granted two-year residency permits, but not refugee status. Ramsey, G. & Sánchez-Garzoli, G. (2018) [Responding to an Exodus: Venezuela's migration and refugee crisis as seen from the Colombian and Brazilian borders](#). WOLA.

30 Selee, A. & Bolter, J. (2020) [An Uneven Welcome: Latin American and Caribbean responses to Venezuelan and Nicaraguan migration](#). Migration Policy Institute.

31 UNHCR (2019) [Situation Overview: Profiles of Venezuelan Persons of Concern in Boa Vista, Roraima State](#).

32 In August of 2018, a Venezuelan was lynched after being accused of murdering a shopkeeper, prompting hundreds of Venezuelans to flee back across the border. Freir, L. & Parent, N. (2019) [The Regional Response to the Venezuelan Exodus](#). Current History.

33 Elicin, Y. (2018) [Refugee Crisis and Local Response: An assessment of local capacities to deal with migration influxes in Istanbul](#). Hrvatska.

34 Balcioglu, Z. (2018) [Sultanbeyli, Istanbul, Turkey: A case study of refugees in towns](#). Feinstein International Center.

35 Council of Europe (2020) [Language support to adult refugees: the Council of Europe toolkit](#).

36 Bauder, H. (2016) [Sanctuary Cities: Policies and Practices in International Perspective](#). International Migration. For France, see Hagan, M. (2019) [Street schools and school buses: informal education provision in France](#). Forced Migration Review. For Italy, Bianco, R. & Ortiz C. (2019) [The Linguistic Integration of Refugees in Italy](#). Social Sciences.

37 Zerbo, A. et al (2020) [Vulnerability and everyday health risks of urban informal settlements in Sub-Saharan Africa](#). Global Health Journal.

38 These themes are explored in the essay Risky cities, mean streets on page 178 of this review.

39 Tian, M. (2017) [Migrants, Mass Arrest, and Resistance in Contemporary China](#). Chinoiresie.

40 Knox, V. (2018) [An Atomised Crisis. Reframing displacement caused by crime and violence in El Salvador](#). IDMC.

41 Médecins Sans Frontieres (2018) [Out of Sight: Informal settlements, social marginality, obstacles to access to healthcare and basic needs for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees](#).

refugees and South African migrants.⁴² This found that the refugees experienced much higher levels of “business risk” and other security problems. More than a fifth (21 percent) of non-South African respondents (21%) said they had been victims of attacks or assaults, compared to just 4 percent of South Africans; a similar proportion of the refugees (19 percent) said they had been harassed or extorted by the police (compared to six percent of the South African respondents), and 38 percent said they had been victims of theft of income, compared to 19 percent of the South Africans.⁴³ The survey found that the refugees were five times more likely to be subject to demands for bribes by the police. Almost half of the non-South Africans surveyed in Cape Town reported experiencing prejudice as a result of their nationality, compared to only 3 percent of the South African respondents.⁴⁴

Many urban police forces recognise that migrants and refugees are more vulnerable to crime and discrimination, and some try to work with rather than against migrants and refugees. For example, the San Diego Police Department hired nine police service officers from within migrant and refugee communities to act as (non-commissioned) community liaisons and interpreters for the city’s Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong and Somali communities.⁴⁵ Yet the racial and legal status bias that undergirds systemic violence against migrants and refugees means crimes against this population are often underreported, because of their fears of the consequences should they contact the police.⁴⁶

City governments face huge challenges integrating migrants and refugees, from identifying people in need, to providing essential services, to dealing with xenophobia, to establishing adequate protection. Within a city, these challenges can vary from one neighbourhood to another, and the responses of local governments, service providers, and community leaders are equally diverse. These urban complexities increase when cities and towns host diverse populations of migrants and refugees with different needs and capabilities. Border cities like Tijuana in the US, with diverse migrant populations, will have a different experience to a city like Boa Vista, which has mainly received displaced Venezuelans. The cities that offer the best examples of good practice are those that have built collaborations between civil society, city leaders and refugees and migrants themselves. Such collaboration enables effective responses and promotes integration.

Conclusion

A city’s willingness to support migrants and refugees partly depends on the budget support it gets from its national government and on the legal framework and how well it is implemented, especially in areas that host migrants and refugees. For budget and capacity (and political) reasons, city governments are often eager to pass responsibility for assisting migrants and refugees on to NGOs. Such organisations do their best to provide short term relief but are quickly overwhelmed if a large humanitarian influx occurs in a short space of time.

42 Crush, J. et al. (2017) [Comparing Refugees and South Africans in the Urban Informal Sector](#). South African Migration Programme.

43 Ibid

44 Ibid

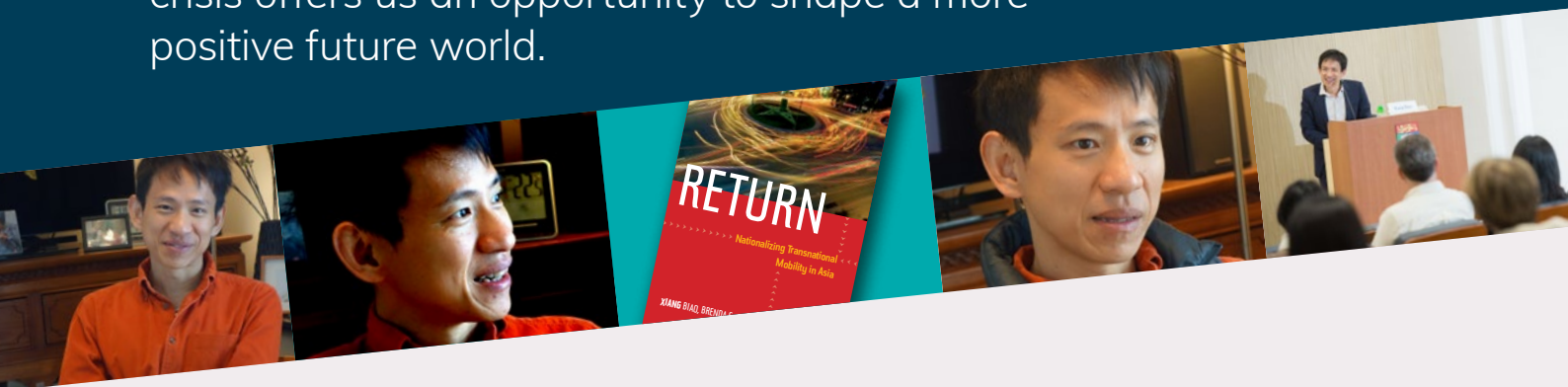
45 Police Executive Research Forum (2017) [Refugee Outreach and Engagement Programs for Police Agencies](#).

46 Bernat, F. (2017) [Immigration and Crime](#). Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Criminology and Criminal Justice.

Interview

Covid as catalyst

The range and scale of changes brought about by the coronavirus pandemic came as a surprise to **Biao Xiang**, who is fascinated with the implications not only for mobility—in all its various forms and inter-relationships—but also for immobility, and what he terms the “redistribution of mobility”. More broadly, the global health crisis offers us an opportunity to shape a more positive future world.



Biao Xiang teaches social anthropology at the University of Oxford and is a director of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany. He has worked on various types of migration—internal and international, unskilled and highly skilled, emigration and return migration, and the places and people left behind—in China, India and other parts of Asia.

As you've been watching the impact of Covid-19 from the start, have you been surprised at the extent of the impact on mobility in all its forms? Or could you have even predicted them?

I was very surprised, and I continue being surprised. I'm surprised for three reasons. Number one: how dramatic the change has been. For example, we witnessed a large-scale panic flight from Wuhan, for example. Immediately after the government announced a lockdown, about 200,000 to 300,000 people were estimated to have fled from the city within a day. A similar thing happened to Milan, in Italy.

The second reason that I was surprised is that a lot of changes are really unintended. The most obvious example is in India: when the government announced a lockdown, on the 24th of March this year, what we witnessed is huge mobility instead of immobility. Huge-scale mobility of internal migrants from cities back to the countryside. They often had to walk for days

to reach their home areas due to the unavailability of public transport.

Thirdly, I was surprised to see how consequential the change in mobility can be on people's basic livelihoods. So once the mobility stopped, we see many businesses had to shut down and the people lost their wages, especially the poorer populations because for them, in order to perform manual work, their main means of production is their body, and in order to bring their body to their work site, they will have to move physically. No mobility, no work, no money.

What I find particularly interesting is what I call the redistribution of mobility. When some people stop being mobile, you need another group of people to become extraordinarily mobile on your behalf. Delivery workers are the most obvious example, but also you have “key workers”, who need to move around frequently in order to provide essential services for the people who now stay at home. So what does

this redistribution of mobilities mean? And how is such redistribution achieved? And to what extent it is achieved through commercial mechanisms pushed by platform companies, and to what extent it has been coordinated by government? These are questions that must be figured out empirically. That is something I did not anticipate either.

“**Shock mobility is often short-lived. Many refugee flows start with shock mobilities, but only a small percentage of shock mobilities led to noticeable refugee flows.**”

Can you briefly sum up what you mean by “shock mobility”?¹

Shock mobility means the pattern of mobility that arises as a response to acute shocks and great uncertainties. For example, if you have a large-scale economic crisis such as the 2008 financial crisis, you witness large-scale return—or reverse—migration from cities; because of loss of jobs, people go back to the countryside. And this time [with the Covid pandemic] you have a large number of people fleeing from the epicentres and they suddenly go back to the countryside, or rush to their second home. And then, during this process, you have all kinds of unanticipated immobilities too. For example, in India again, many people became stranded halfway. They cannot complete their planned mobility because they started the journey without any planning, and they don't have basic resources. Then it became a humanitarian challenge.

I want to emphasise that shock mobility is often short-lived. Many refugee flows start with shock mobilities, but only a small percentage of shock mobilities led to noticeable refugee flows. When the world pays attention to refugees, we are most concerned with the post-shock, long-term problems. I think we need to pay more attention to the short-livedness of the shocks. In many cases, shock mobility will go away after a while. Everything appears to resume normalcy on the surface. But we don't know enough about the implications these short-lived shocks may have for long-term development later on.

Why do you consider immobility more dramatic than movement?

Immobility is more dramatic and consequential in the context of the contemporary global economy. Our global

economy nowadays is based on mobility, is organised through mobility. The defining icon of today's economy, if we're just thinking visually, is not assembly lines or factories; rather, it is cargo ships in the ocean that distribute products across the world, and the moped on the street which deliver goods to individual customers. This is how the global economy manifests itself. It is about mobility.

So once this movement is stopped, it is truly a systemic shock for the global economy. An interesting comparison can be made between the pandemic and the 2008 financial crisis. The 2008 financial crisis was primarily a crisis of the financial sector. But this time, what happened is that the basic human activity—mobility—had to be put on hold. So we feel the impact is much larger than 2008. But the good thing is, probably, this really urges us to rethink the entire economic model more thoroughly than what happened in 2008.

You've identified five types of mobility resulting from shocks like Covid-19: reaction mobility, reaction immobility, survival mobility, limbo mobility and substitution mobility. Why did you choose the term “link-moment” to group these different outcomes? What is it linking to, the future?

The notion of “link-moment” is meant to clarify what added value the concept of shock mobility has. What I want to say is that none of these different forms of shock mobility are unique or take place in isolation of each other. The value of the “shock mobility” concept is not that it points to anything empirically new in itself, but rather to the relationships between existing mobilities, and between mobilities and other social experiences. Thus “link”. The concept of shock mobility also calls attention to the fact that existing mobilities can go through very dramatic transformations in a short period of time in a particular context, thus “moment”. Shock mobility isn't a fixed type of mobility; shock mobility brings these different elements into new relations.

For example: migrants in India rush home. This doesn't mean that these people were not moving around before. Certainly, these people went back home regularly, every few months or every year, because they are circular migrants. Therefore, the fact that that is a rush home is not completely new. What's new is that this mobility emerged precisely because their older, established-pattern mobility was disrupted. They used to go back every few months or every year after receiving their salary, and they go back during the busy agricultural season. But because of the pandemic and the lockdown, their older pattern was disrupted, and the shock mobility is in fact a result of the loss of existing rhythm. It is specific to a moment of acute uncertainty.

1 All references to Biao Xiang's work in this interview are drawn from his blog contributions to the [University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society](#) and its [Coronavirus and Mobility Forum](#).

Then we may ask why the migrants lost their mobility so quickly, and why couldn't they stay in the city as the government instructed them to do? In order to understand this, we have to look into other factors. For instance, they are labourers who receive daily wages, and they rent houses in shantytowns and buy food on a daily basis, which means that they don't have cash to pay the rent and buy food once they stop working. Their only choice is to go home. So, the "link" [in the phrase "link-moment"] means the linkages of all these elements.

“It's up to us to shape the future, but it's incredibly hard. We need imagination, but more than imagination, we need a very careful empirical analysis to gauge what is feasible and what is not.”

You have written that “tomorrow's normalcy will grow out of today's disruption.” How will it help us to analyse potential problems in the decades to come, as you have claimed it would?

This is not an empirically verified statement. That is more a style of thinking, a style that I think is useful to probe possible futures. We have a major disruption, and we have short-term responses. These responses could lead to multiple futures. One possible scenario is the stabilisation of the redistribution of mobility. The increasing demand for delivery work now is the temporary redistribution of mobility as a short-term reaction. Will this become a kind of stable structure—or division of labour—in which some people outsource mobilities and the associated risks to others? There are other possibilities too. For instance, economic transactions can become more localised and the level of mobilities can be reduced. The key point in the idea that tomorrow's normalcy will grow out from today's disruption is to convey a sense of urgency. This is to say, we are standing in a critical point of time, which we may be able to shape what kind of normalcy will arrive tomorrow, precisely because we have this disruption. Multiple possibilities have opened up; it's up to us to shape the future. But it's incredibly hard. We need imagination, but more than imagination, we need a very careful empirical analysis to gauge what is feasible and what is not.

You've speculated on the resilience of capitalism to not only re-set itself after shocks like Covid-19 but also to offer some huge economic opportunities to certain people or firms. Presumably, if there are opportunities, these will be mainly for the already powerful and already wealthy and not for the migrants themselves. Do you agree?

Objectively and empirically, that is a likely scenario. But whether or not there will be further consolidation of

global capital, I'm not very sure. What we actually see is that, after the coronavirus there is new alignment between political power and financial capital. We previously had the image that financial capital overrides sovereign power. Financial capital can move anywhere, and the sovereign powers facilitate globalising capital. But now political power as embodied as sovereign power will have a major role. This is clear when we examine how governments tackle the pandemic, and how the trade war between the US and China is leading to a new Cold War. Financial capital will also be more closely coupled with military considerations. So yes, capital will try to benefit from this crisis, but probably in new forms with closer relations with political power and military power.

“After the coronavirus there is a new alignment between political power and financial capital. Capital will try to benefit from this crisis, but probably in new forms with closer relations with political power and military power.”

You recently wrote, “It can be expected that the longer-term socioeconomic impact of Covid-19 would increase people's wish or need to migrate while simultaneously limiting their resources to do so. And further restrictions on mobility may remain, further limiting people's capacity to migrate.” How do you think these processes will interplay in the future, and can you speculate on what might happen as a result?

This is a speculation, but with a certain [evidential] basis. After Coronavirus, probably you will have more nationalised, localised economies. In China now they're talking about so-called internal circulation, which means that China should rely more on domestic markets and less the international markets. Then you will probably have increased wage differentiation among certain groups of workers and overseas jobs, and also very likely you will have larger-scale unemployment, at least in the short term. Why? China has so many factories which have been doing nothing but producing clothes and household goods for the international market. If suddenly they lose the international market, what do the workers do? The Chinese people themselves don't need so many jeans and they don't need all those Christmas trees!

If you have unemployment, you will have the demand for seeking alternative opportunities somewhere else. But at the same time, you have tighter regulation over mobility at two levels. One is border control, partly because of heightened political sensitivity, for instance associated with China-West relations. At the second level, you will also have tighter control in

the more mundane sense, like you have to report on your temperature when you buy an air ticket, and in the buses you cannot sit immediately next to next passenger etc. All these regulations may be tightened and then the result can be what I call the securitisation of mobility.

I don't think governments are really interested in stopping or reducing mobility. They will try to accommodate mobility, because that's good for social stability and for economic recovery. But they will try to securitise it through detailed regulations and technologies, such as the contact tracing apps, big data, and then probably they will delegate more power to transport companies and to third party intermediaries. This has been my area of research for a while: the mobility infrastructure. So I predict that the mobility infrastructure, meaning a whole social-technological system consisting of middlemen as well as technology, and vehicles or tools, like cars and planes, which make mobility possible, will become more developed and sophisticated. This would help to reconcile the contradiction that, on one hand, the demand for mobility persists, and on the other hand, you want to control the mobility to a very minute and detailed level.

“ Governments will try to securitise mobility through detailed regulations and technologies, such as the contact tracing apps, big data, and then probably they will delegate more power to transport companies and to third party intermediaries. ”

You wrote that the business of detecting and preventing cross-border movements and the business of monitoring and facilitating daily mobilities are reshaping how political powers operate. Could you elaborate on this from a migration management perspective?

What I meant here is how political power will be reshaped at the operational level. We probably won't see many new laws or policy announcements, but important changes may take place at the level of how government cooperate with private companies, what kind of new apps will be introduced, how new data will be collected and stored. This is where new political power will be generated and exercised in the future. On the surface the nature of the government may remain the same. For instance it may still be parliamentary democracy, but the social consequences of the government power may be very different if it is exercised through the technological infrastructure designed and maintained by private corporations.

Can you see any positive outcomes from the Covid-19 shock for migrants and refugees, as we adjust to what Naomi Klein calls “the new normal”, in her book Shock Doctrine?

For me, probably the biggest positive outcome is that, and not only for migration and refugee issues, but also for broader global developments, it created a condition in which we can start thinking of alternatives seriously. It is very clear that many things cannot be taken for granted, and many things can be changed in a very short space of time. The fact that people now travel less, use more online communication, and pay more attention to their local community, reminds us that we can reorganise our mobility, and our daily life, differently. Another positive sign is that people now are more aware of how essential all the delivery workers are. Many of them are migrants. There is an increasing appreciation of these workers as they become more visible. They used to be invisible.

In terms of the global compacts on migration and refugees, what kind of impact do you think this pandemic will have? Has it set the compacts back, or has it provided greater opportunity for solidarity in advancing their stated objectives?

The Global Compact on Migration will probably be affected by new geopolitical dynamics which are harder to predict at this stage. On one hand, the pandemic reminds everyone that cross-border mobility should be coordinated, and the burdens should be shared among countries. Countries shutting borders unilaterally affects migrants badly. It won't stop migration either because there will be human smuggling, which makes cross-border mobility even more difficult to regulate. But at the same time, we also witness that society and the economy are becoming re-nationalised to some extent. Just look at the relation between China, India and the US. Cross-border movements, including students, tourists, labour migration flows, are likely to decline. The public are also becoming more nationalistic in talking about different “national” models of controlling mobility and the disease. Will countries now have the incentive to sit down to talk about shared burdens, to give up some sovereign prerogative, and to have a more harmonised operational framework, to manage international migration? There will be lot of uncertainties. This is definitely an important issue to follow up with in the coming months and years.

Hot zones – the first global pandemic of the urban migrant district

The greater Covid-19 risks faced by non-citizen city dwellers are due more to their living conditions than any intrinsic propensity to infection. With traditional responses shown to be inadequate in addressing the varied needs of millions of urban refugees and migrants in times of crisis, new approaches should be developed with urgency.

By Doug Saunders¹

New pandemic, new dynamics

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global phenomenon uniquely driven and shaped by the migratory populations of cities. It has been concentrated disproportionately in the districts in which immigrants, refugees, and domestic rural-to-urban migrants live and has been spread to vulnerable regions by failed efforts to control their movements. The political and policy decisions attempting to control the pandemic have been complicated by migrant communities' collective economic and humanitarian decisions, and those communities have been disproportionately the pandemic's victims.²

Historically, global epidemics have generally had their most devastating effects on large, connected cities, their spread tied to patterns of human migration, and their lethality controlled only through processes of human movement and urban concentration. The new coronavirus, however, emerged at a point in the twenty-first century during which major cities in many countries are populated, to a far greater extent than in previous decades and centuries, with concentrations of domestic and international migrants who remain linked to their villages and regions of origin. These migrant and refugee populations, both regular and irregular, have become central to the economies of many host cities.

Three consequences

This has had three novel consequences, all observed during 2020 in the statistical data and reporting of multiple countries on several continents. First is a considerable concentration of the disease and its deaths

in the migrant-settled districts of cities: inner-city informal settlements and slums that are the primary recipients of domestic and regional migrants in lower-income cities, and inner-suburban apartment districts across Europe, North America and other developed regions. Both types of district became the predominant immigrant-reception neighbourhoods during this century and frequently bore the brunt of Covid infections and deaths during the pandemic's first wave.³

Second is what is likely modern history's largest-scale "reverse migration" trend—an urban-to-rural domestic return migration, driven predominantly by fear of the economic effects of curfew and quarantine—observed across less-developed and middle-income countries in East Asia, South Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Americas at considerable scales, with epidemiological effects on more vulnerable rural regions.

The third consequence has been the desperate situation of non-citizen international migrant labourers, who form the majority population of a number of major cities and a considerable plurality in others; their vulnerability to lockdowns, economic closures, and other disease-control measures has led to tensions, uncontrollable return migrations, and attempts at "reverse smuggling" while leaving populations both stateless and homeless.

Outdated policies

These three mass phenomena of urban migrant communities have confounded traditional policy efforts to contain the spread of the pandemic and maintain safety in cities. They have also provoked large-scale humanitarian crises, as both the disease itself and the

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2 Since the onset of the global pandemic in March 2020 until the time of writing this Review, the Mixed Migration Centre has conducted approximately 12,000 interviews with refugees and migrants on the impact of Covid-19 on their lives and their migration journeys. Most of those interviews took place with refugees and migrants residing in cities. Pages 112-119 in this Review present an overview of selected data in eight major cities. All publications featuring data from MMC's Covid-19 4Mi surveys are available here: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/re-source-type/covid-19/>

3 This paper draws on data and observations from January through September of 2020, a period that includes the coronavirus pandemic's "first wave" of infection peaks in many countries. As this Review went to press, a second peak of infections was emerging in many of these countries. It remains to be seen whether subsequent peaks will follow the geographic patterns of the first.

efforts to control it have disrupted the livelihoods and sometimes devastated the lives of urban migrant and migrant-descended populations, both illuminating and amplifying ethno-cultural and economic inequalities present within their urban districts.

The pandemic has drawn attention to the fact that migrants and recently migrant-descended populations remain vulnerable, concentrated, and potentially mobile long after they have officially landed and settled. This points to an urgent need for international agreement and coordination to protect migrant populations, not just when they are in transit or in flight, but also after they are established in cities and are still at greatest risk of both disease and the repressive effects of policy responses.

A brief history of epidemics and cities

The propagation and amplification of major epidemics has, throughout much of recorded history, been attributed to the migration in and out of major cities—by armies, religious pilgrims, people fleeing war, citybound migrants from overcrowded rural areas, trade routes, and immigrants. The plagues of classical antiquity were said to have an especially acute effect on the great cities—an effect amplified by migration into the city from overcrowded rural places.

Urban immunity

Big cities, however, also became the first centres of mass immunity, transforming previously deadly epidemics into endemic, predominantly childhood diseases among urban residents. By the end of the Middle Ages, trade connections linking the big cities had begun to create a unified disease pool linking the populated parts of Europe and Asia, with shared adult immunity to many diseases. This, however, made non-urban populations of indigenous and nomadic peoples especially vulnerable to viruses carried by urban Europeans engaged in trade and colonial expansion.⁴

It also made major cities deadly places for rural migrants who flocked to the cities as agriculture modernised. Until about 1900, large cities were described as “population swamps, incapable of maintaining themselves without constant replenishment from the healthier countryside.”⁵ Only the popularisation of inoculation, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries,

turned rural-to-urban migration into something other than a deadly prospect, and flipped the statistics so that rural areas became more vulnerable to epidemic disease than urban spaces.⁶

The well-off took flight

Epidemic outbreaks have long inspired some populations to attempt to flee the city, either to some rural location viewed as being safe, or to a migratory homeland with more physical and economic security. Until very recently, however, it was only the very prosperous who were able to migrate outward. For example, during the seventeenth century, the wealthy were advised to “flie far... flie speedily... returne slowly”—and as a consequence, “plague disproportionately affected people of middling or lower socioeconomic status, who lacked the resources to flee.”⁷ In current scholarly parlance, these populations are the “involuntary immobile,” their inability to migrate making them exceptionally vulnerable to war, conflict, natural disasters and epidemic disease. The same was observed in epidemics in the United States (US) in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when well-off residents rented houses in rural areas believed to be safer, often severely depopulating better-off districts of cities.⁸

The results of this urban flight could be devastating. During the 1918 influenza pandemic, a study by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health found that the mortality rate in big cities was about 1 in 100, while mortality in rural areas was as high as 1 in 10—a dichotomy credited to the outbound movement of urbanites, who tended to have higher levels of immunity due to previous low-level exposure, and carried the disease to places with neither immunity nor decent medical facilities.⁹

The rise of air travel as a primary mode of international migration greatly magnified the potential for spread—and the potential speed of infection—of epidemic diseases. Human migration and air travel were recognised as “a key driver in the emergence and dissemination of emerging infections” after the 2004 SARS virus epidemic, the H1N1 influenza of 2009, and the Zika virus crisis of 2016.¹⁰

4 Hays, J. (1998) *The Burdens of Disease: Epidemics and human response in Western history*. Rutgers University Press; McNeill, W. (1977) *Plagues and Peoples*. Random House.

5 McNeill, W. (1990). *Population and politics since 1750*. University Press of Virginia.

6 McNeill, W. (1977). op. cit.

7 Newman, K. (2012) *Shutt Up: Bubonic plague and quarantine in Early Modern England*. Journal of Social History Vol. 45 No.3.

8 Rosenberg, C. (1959) *The cholera epidemic of 1832 in New York City*. Bulletin of the History of Medicine, Vol. 33, No. 1.

9 Norwegian Institute of Public Health (2011) *1918 influenza pandemic (Spanish flu): Large differences in mortality between urban and isolated rural areas*.

10 Greenaway, C., & Gushulak, D. (2017) *Pandemics, migration and global health security* in Bourbeau, P., ed., *Handbook on Migration and Security*. Elgar.

The new urban world of Covid-19

Many of these patterns have been seen in the large-scale epidemics of recent decades. But the new coronavirus is the first global pandemic to have emerged and spread in a world in which the scope and movement of urban migrant communities has been transformed and greatly intensified. This is a product of three rapidly accelerating changes that were first observed near the beginning of the twenty-first century.

New demographics

The first is a substantial increase in the number of cities with sizeable rural-to-urban migrant populations, both domestic and international in origin, who remain connected to their villages and regions of origin symbolically, electronically, and through chain and cyclical migration links. While such populations have been a significant feature of cities throughout history, the 2000 to 2020 period witnessed a dramatic increase in the rates of internal and regional rural-to-urban migration in African and Asian countries, and a related rise in the migrant populations of larger cities on both continents.¹¹

That shift in scale had a measurable effect on the infection dynamics of Covid-19 compared to earlier viral pandemics. A 2020 analysis of population movements that compared the spread of the SARS pandemic of 2003 to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019-20 found that the ways diseases spread outward from cities have changed profoundly. As the researchers found, “China’s migration landscape is radically different from 17 years ago.”¹² In 2003, only in Beijing did rural-urban migrants exceed 20 percent of the city’s population; by 2020, internal migrants were distributed much more widely across China, forming sizeable populations in scores of second- and third-tier cities; by 2019, Wuhan (where Covid-19 was first detected in human populations) had a larger population share of migrants (20.25 percent) than Beijing did in 2003. This “changing geography of migration,” along with the longer distances taken by people for family reunification and the wider range of jobs the migrants hold, are “what make the spread of Covid-19 so different from that of SARS.”¹³

Cheaper travel

The second change is a great increase in the availability and affordability of comparatively rapid long-distance

travel, owing to the great expansion of air travel, road networks, bus and train connections in middle-income countries, the decline in absolute poverty, and the relaxation of authoritarian controls on cross-border and internal movement in many countries. The number of worldwide international air passengers per year, for example, grew exponentially during the first two decades of this century, from fewer than 2 billion per year in 2004 to 4.5 billion in 2019, with most of the passenger growth occurring in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁴

Digital connections

The third is the widespread availability of instantaneous electronic communication to people on low incomes and spread across wide and formerly remote geographies. For example, the proportion of Africans with mobile phone subscriptions (in “non-fragile” countries) increased from 0.67 per 100 in 2000 to 83 per 100 in 2016 (in “fragile” countries it rose to 68 per cent).¹⁵ This instantaneous communication between urban-resident migrants and their home villages, whether in their own country or abroad, has meant that during national emergencies such as epidemics, they are no longer tethered to their host city and its policies, but can obtain information about options for out-migration, flight migration, and circular migration. It also means that travel-restriction policies are ineffective, because many affected people learn about them, and act on that knowledge, before they can be implemented fully.

These three new developments have had observable effects on regional epidemics during the past decade. During the West African Ebola Virus Disease epidemic of 2014-15, for example, despite intensive efforts by governments to restrict travel and movement, internal movement between urban and rural locations (in both directions) not only failed to decline, but actually increased above its typical levels.¹⁶ The Covid-19 pandemic is the first truly global infectious-disease event to emerge in, and spread between and into, these new cities and technologies of this century.

Covid concentration in urban migrant districts

The movement of international immigrants and refugees is rarely a cause of viral disease spread. Even during very extensive and uncontrolled cross-border migration events they do not tend to bring disease. For example, during the European migration crisis of 2015-16, there were no observations of the millions of migrants and refugees having caused any measurable increase in

11 Teye, J. (2018) [Urbanisation and Migration in Africa](#). Expert Group Meeting, United Nations, 1-2 November; Kendall, J., et al (2012) [Payments and Money Transfer Behavior of Sub-Saharan Africans](#). SSRN; Kendall, J., et al (2013) [Remittances, Payments, and Money Transfers: Behaviors of South Asians and Indonesians](#). SSRN.

12 Shi, Q., et al (2020) [Changes in population movement make Covid-19 spread differently from SARS](#). Social science & medicine.

13 Ibid.

14 Mazareanu, E. (2020) [Global air traffic – scheduled passengers 2004-2021](#). Statista.

15 World Bank Group (2019) [Africa’s Pulse, No. 19, April 2019: An Analysis of Issues Shaping Africa’s Economic Future](#).

16 Campbell, L. (2017) [Learning from the Ebola response in cities: Population movement](#). ALNAP.

infectious disease rates in European countries.¹⁷ A study of the spread of Covid-19 in China found that inter-city business and tourism travel accounted for most of the inter-city and international infection, and emigration played a lesser role.¹⁸ Although “shock-mobility”¹⁹ mid-pandemic returns to places of origin do have a documented viral-transmission effect,²⁰ the regular movement and settlement of refugees and immigrants does not.

Unequal impact

On the other hand, settled migrant communities in cities have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic, both epidemiologically and financially. And the changing configuration and scope of migration communities in large cities appears to have had a greater than usual effect on segregating and subjugating immigrant, internal-migrant, and refugee communities to the worst of the pandemic’s effects.

After its initial spread in January and February of 2020 among comparatively elite populations through international travel, Covid-19 became an epidemic that concentrated within specific neighbourhoods and towns. In many larger cities in developed countries, it disproportionately tended to be prevalent in districts with the highest concentrations of migrant populations. An examination of some examples of the most-affected districts in Western cities illustrates the factors and influences that these new settlement districts have in common:

- In **New York City**, high Covid-19 infection rates during the late spring and early summer peak were concentrated heavily in inner-suburban apartment districts of the Bronx, Queens, and Brooklyn with high populations of foreign-born residents, while more “white” and non-immigrant districts such as most of Manhattan were largely spared serious infection.²¹
- In **Houston**, the highest rates of Covid-19 infection during the peak were measured in the neighbourhood of Gulfton, a low-rise apartment district with a very high population of refugees²² and immigrants, both regular and irregular (61 percent of its population is foreign-born, more than twice the rate of Houston as a whole).²³
- **Toronto** saw one of the most disproportionate distributions of coronavirus infections, with the disease concentrated heavily in apartment neighbourhoods of northern Etobicoke and northeastern North York—the districts with among the highest populations of visible-minority immigrants and refugees. The rates of Covid-19 and related deaths in these immigration-reception districts were found to be at least three times higher than those in less diverse neighbourhoods.²⁴
- In Sweden, the disease concentrated to an overwhelming degree in mass-housing districts in the peripheries of cities where large populations of refugees, migrants and their descendants live. In **Stockholm**, the highest rates of coronavirus death and infection were recorded in northern apartment suburbs such as Rinkeby and Husby, both major refugee-settlement destinations with foreign-born populations of 60 to 80 percent. Likewise, in Gothenburg, the northeastern apartment districts with majority refugee and immigrant populations experienced Covid rates over 50 percent higher than the city’s average.²⁵
- **Barcelona** saw the disease concentrated in the immigrant-dominated apartment neighbourhoods of the northern periphery, while more prosperous and “white” districts saw little infection.²⁶
- In **Paris**, there was widespread concern about the extremely high mortality rates in eastern apartment suburbs such as Seine-Saint-Denis, which is the French department with one of the highest proportions of immigrant residents, and the highest number of migrant-worker hostels in Paris.²⁷

17 Castelli, F., & Sulis, G. (2017) [Migration and infectious diseases](#). *Clinical Microbiology and Infection*; Krcmery, V. (2016) [Infectious diseases in refugees and migrants during the European Migrant Crisis 2015](#). *International Journal of Infectious Diseases*.

18 Shi, Q. & Liu, T. (2020) [Should internal migrants be held accountable for spreading Covid-19?](#) *Environmental Planning A: Economy and Space*

19 Sørensen, N. (2020) [Shock mobility: Long-term impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and lock-down](#). Danish Institute for International Studies.

20 Valsecchi, M., & Durante, R. (2020). [Internal migration and the spread of Covid-19](#). NES Working Paper No. 276.

21 Honan, K. (2020) [The New York neighbourhoods with the most Coronavirus cases](#). *Wall Street Journal*.

22 Binkovitz, L. (2017) [In Southwest Houston, apartment complexes are a haven for refugees](#). Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

23 Goodman, J. (2020) [The virus found a crowded Houston neighbourhood, sparing one nearby](#). *New York Times*.

24 Public Health Ontario (2020) [Covid-19 in Ontario – a focus on diversity](#); Toronto Public Health (2020) [City of Toronto Covid-19 summary](#).

25 Valeriani, G., Vukovic, I. S., & Mollica, R. (2020) [Unconventional answers to unprecedented challenges: The Swedish experience during the Covid-19 outbreak](#). *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Public Health*.

26 Soler, M. & Álvarez, P. (2020) [El coronavirus a Barcelona, barri a barri](#). *Betevé*.

27 Brun, S., & Simon, P. (2020) [L’invisibilité des minorités dans les chiffres du Coronavirus : le détour par la Seine-Saint-Denis](#). Institut Convergences Migrations.

The suburbanisation of immigration

With few exceptions, these are not urban geographies that would have been migration-settlement districts during most of the twentieth century. As a number of analyses have found, this century has seen a shift of immigrant districts in North America and Western Europe from the old “ethnic neighbourhoods” in the urban core (which are no longer accessible to newcomers due to rising housing costs caused by housing-supply crises in most Western countries) to apartment districts in the inner suburbs and outer periphery.²⁸ This “suburbanisation of immigration,”²⁹ often involving neighbourhoods built during the post-war decades as bedroom communities for workers with automobile transportation, leaves large migrant populations in many cities in more isolated and physically disconnected neighbourhoods than in previous decades. At the same time, these newcomer populations are disproportionately likely to hold jobs and small-business activities deemed “essential” under public-health rules, forcing them into close contact with others in the workplace, in mass-housing buildings, and on public-transportation links, leaving them more vulnerable to infection.

A 2015 study of the causal links between migration and disease incidence found that these effects can “turn some localities into ‘sinks’ whose initial high disease prevalence attracts further sick individuals because they cannot compete with healthy individuals for scarce space in healthier localities.”³⁰ In other words, more vulnerable populations become “stuck” in their neighbourhoods while better-off populations of developed cities are more likely to flee, thus increasing segregation of cities into high-prevalence and low-prevalence neighbourhoods.

Migrant districts more vulnerable in developing regions

In the major cities of many less developed countries, the greatest concentrations of cases were often identified in informal urban districts (including shantytowns and slums, but also dormitory and apartment districts) populated largely with internal or regional migrants. While the peripheral migrant districts of Western cities are typically populated with immigrants and refugees who possess, or can expect, permanent residency and a potential path to citizenship, the migrant-filled informal settlements of Asia, Africa, and the Americas typically contain irregular populations with very precarious sources of income and an ambiguous relationship with authorities (even if they have been settled there for decades). This has left these migrant districts exceptionally vulnerable to the pandemic.

For example, a serological survey conducted in three large slum areas of Mumbai in July 2020 found that 57 percent of residents tested positive to coronavirus, by far the highest rate in the city. The survey encompassed rural-migrant slums in the Chembur, Matunga, and Dahisar districts, with a combined population of 1.5 million; only 16 percent of non-slum dwellers in those districts tested positive.³¹ Authorities suggested that toilets shared by hundreds of people were a major contributor, as was the necessity of residents to continue working in crowded public places to survive. Across India, the Indian Council of Medical Research found that Covid spread in urban migrant slums was almost twice (1.89 times) as high as in rural areas.³²

Similarly, studies found that the highest rates of Covid-19 infections in Brazilian cities were in the huge Rio de Janeiro favela districts of Cidade de Deus (28 percent infected) and Rocinha (25 percent infected). Both districts, containing at least 100,000 people each, were settled by migrants from northeastern Brazil in the late twentieth century.³³

Not all high-density slums and shantytowns experienced high rates of coronavirus infection, though: the large informal settlements in Dhaka and Lagos, for example, reported only modest levels of infection (though this could in part be a consequence of low levels of testing). It was more common for such migrant settlements to experience economic and political hardships that forced their residents to choose between migration or destitution. Some governments used the cover of pandemic control to mete out worse hardships on informal settlements: the government of Addis Ababa demolished an established slum near its airport and evicted the families living there, at the height of the pandemic’s first wave, in what the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission called “a great risk for vulnerable people.”³⁴

Myriad factors of disparity

In summary, migrant districts in many cities have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19 due to a combination of distinctive factors, including overall population density; dwellings in which it is difficult to maintain physical distance or fully quarantine; poor hygienic and sanitary conditions or shared facilities; higher incidence of “essential” jobs in fields such as health, transportation and food service; reliance on crowded mass transportation; and dependence on crowded indoor settings for religious and social gatherings. People with immigration backgrounds are not intrinsically prone to

28 Allard, S. (2017) [Places in Need: The changing geography of poverty](#). Russell Sage Foundation.

29 Katz, M. et al (2010) [Immigration and the new metropolitan geography](#). Journal of Urban Affairs.

30 Mesnard, A. & Seabright, P. (2016). [Migration and the equilibrium prevalence of infectious diseases](#). Journal of Demographic Economics, 82(1), pp. 1-26

31 Biswas, S. (2020) [India coronavirus: 'More than half of Mumbai slum-dwellers had Covid-19'](#). BBC News.

32 Perappadan, B. (2020) [Urban slum population most vulnerable to Covid-19 spread: ICMBR](#). The Hindu.

33 Reeves, P. (2020) [Covid-19 infection rate in Rio's favelas far exceeds official count, a new study says](#). NPR.

34 Bhalla, N., & Wuilberca, E. (2020) [City demolitions expose Ethiopian families to coronavirus](#). Reuters.

infection, but their urban living and settlement conditions have put them at greater risk.

Large-scale reverse migration

Two things make the age-old experience of flight migration from epidemics different in the twenty-first century. First is that in all but the wealthiest countries those migrating outward from the cities during this pandemic tend not to be a middle-class elite but low-income migrant workers with precarious incomes who often reside in informal housing. Second is that in most instances they are not motivated to migrate by fear of infection but by economic and physical security concerns related to health-control laws and regulations.

Public health scholars became aware during the first decade of this century that quarantine policies can have the effect of encouraging outward migration.³⁵ This measurably became the case in the spring and summer of 2020 on a large scale in China, India, and Latin America, and to some degree in countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Europe and North America.³⁶ In the words of a World Bank analysis, urban epidemic-control measures, including lockdowns, quarantines and curfews, have “disproportionately affected internal migrant workers... [W]ithout adequate access to housing, basic water and sanitation, health facilities, or social safety nets to help them survive such restrictions,” these urban populations have either been stranded and vulnerable or have resorted to “a chaotic and painful process of mass return.”³⁷

Few precedents

Such reverse migrations—from urban back to rural areas—have been rare exceptions during the last several centuries of urban transition. Notable instances include responses to major regional or world wars, significant economic depressions, the collapse of communism in Central European countries and the HIV/AIDS crisis in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s. The reverse migration provoked by the Covid-19 pandemic and its policy responses is almost certainly one of the largest in history, though total numbers are unobtainable and will likely remain so.

Urban exoduses in India...

The most visible return migration was in India (China likely had more people move to villages during the coronavirus crisis, but the outbreak there coincided with the annual

Spring Festival migration, during which hundreds of millions regularly return to their family villages).

The imposition of a very strict lockdown and travel ban by the Indian government in March triggered an internal migration described by public-health specialists as “the second largest mass migration in its history, after the Partition of India in 1947” during which more than 14 million people were displaced.³⁸ It is very difficult to gauge its size, in large part because most of these movements were illegal, forcing many people to walk long distances to their villages. However, the number of Indians classified as interstate or intra-state “migrant workers”—that is, rural residents living in cities—was 456 million, or more than a third of India’s population, in the 2011 census.³⁹ According to one World Bank estimate early in the pandemic, the lockdown “impacted the livelihoods” of a majority of India’s 40 million inter-state migrants.⁴⁰

Although their flight was largely for economic rather than epidemiological reasons, India’s internal migrants reportedly were sometimes rejected by their own villages, out of fear of infections carried from the city. As a consequence, some became members of a large population of stranded workers. By April, an estimated 660,000 migrant workers were housed in relief camps.⁴¹

...Peru...

In Peru, an estimated 200,000 people attempted to migrate from Lima to their home villages after the country imposed an extended lockdown, with little aid available, in late April. Their journeys were often difficult, because Peru officially required people making overland journeys to quarantine in each state they passed through, often in unhygienic and sometimes exploitative conditions. Some of the 900,000 Venezuelan refugees living in Peru also made return migrations.⁴²

...Africa...

Many African cities became scenes of large urban-to-rural movements which crowded roads and overwhelmed transportation hubs in many cities in the days before and the weeks after lockdown and curfew measures were announced. Uganda reported the largest urban-rural exodus it had experienced since the Bush War of 1980-86.⁴³ In Kenya a few days later, as authorities prepared a strict curfew, Nairobi experienced an outbound migration in which “thousands of the city’s working and underclass, fearing they would perish if they didn’t get out, took to the roads on foot and headed back to their villages, hundreds

35 Mensard, A. & Seabright, P. (2009) [Escaping epidemics through migration? Quarantine measures under incomplete information about infection risk](#). *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 93, Issues 7-8.

36 Cliffe, S., Zamore, L., & Noel, N. (2020) [Population movements, Covid-19 and conflict risk](#). NYU Center on International Cooperation.

37 World Bank (2020) [Covid-19 crisis through a migration lens: Migration and development brief 32](#)

38 Mukhra, R., Krishan, K., & Kanchan, T. (2020) [Covid-19 Sets off Mass Migration in India](#). *Archives of Medical Research*.

39 Business Standard (2020) [Story in Numbers: Job hunt, marriage major driver of internal migration](#).

40 World Bank (2020) [Covid-19 crisis through a migration lens: Migration and development brief 32](#).

41 Patel, C. (2020) [Covid-19: The hidden majority in India's migration crisis](#). Chatham House.

42 Dupraz-Dobias, P. (2020) [Covid-19 shifts Peru's internal migration into reverse](#). *New Humanitarian*.

43 AFP (2020) [Coronavirus fears spark urban-rural exodus across Africa](#). *Citizen*.

of kilometres away”.⁴⁴ Similar situations were reported in Rabat, Johannesburg and Kampala.⁴⁵ In Zimbabwe, health authorities expressed worries that the mass movement of people out of Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare and Masvingo was spreading coronavirus infection to far-flung villages.⁴⁶ This African urban-rural shift has had a measurably damaging effect on remittance payments to villages (for which payments from urban relatives are often the largest source of village income). The Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that remittance payments across sub-Saharan Africa declined by 23 percent as a result of Covid restrictions and reverse migrations.⁴⁷

...and the global North

Reverse migration was not the sole preserve of less developed and middle-income countries. In Italy, for example, the government’s decision to impose a national lockdown and ban on intercity travel on March 8—an announcement that had been anticipated by many in advance, and leaked to the media—led to a major rush to train stations in northern Italian cities, where people fled to family villages in southern and central Italy that were seen as less restricted.⁴⁸ The pre-lockdown rush, in the words of an Italian virologist, “caused many people to try to escape, causing the opposite effect of what the decree is trying to achieve.”⁴⁹ In France a week later, the expected imposition of similar internal travel restrictions led to a “second Paris exodus” by road and train to villages and more remote cities that lacked quarantines. One crude study of mobile-phone data suggested that as many as a million residents of Ile-de-France (Paris and its periphery), out of a total population of 12.2 million, fled the metropolis.⁵⁰ There were similar reports of people fleeing the largest cities in the US to suburbs and villages, although suggestions that this marked a permanent population shift were contradicted by analyses of real-estate data that showed movements in 2020 did not differ from those in previous years.⁵¹ However, such reports do suggest that those making urban-to-rural moves from Western cities were mainly more financially secure residents, following the pattern of epidemics in previous decades and centuries and differing from the patterns in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Domestic propagation driver

Although the role of regular international immigration and refugee movements in spreading the coronavirus appears to have been negligible, there is unambiguous data showing that domestic flight or return journeys of urban migrant populations to their hometowns, at least during the initial imposition of disease-control measures such as lockdowns and curfews, played a role in spreading the virus to more remote areas, after its initial international spread within metropolitan borders. An analysis of internal migration in Italy found that 60 percent of all Covid-19 deaths in non-outbreak regions, and 18 percent of all Covid-19 deaths across Italy, could be attributed directly to reverse migration—meaning that, if internal migration had somehow been prevented completely, Italy would have suffered 7,348 fewer total deaths and 5,895 fewer Covid-19 deaths in March through May 2020.⁵²

However, there is an emerging consensus that the imposition of internal-migration controls most often achieves the opposite of the desired effect, and even under ideal conditions does little to reduce the spread of disease. A team of medical and public-health specialists studied the effects of Chinese measures on the early spread of Covid-19, and found that the travel ban implemented in Wuhan on January 23 “only delayed epidemic progression by 3 to 5 days within China,” and was less effective than lockdowns, self-isolation, hand washing and contact tracing at mitigating the pandemic.⁵³ A larger econometric study of the daily incidence of Covid-19 and population mobility across 135 countries found “no effects” on the disease of any statistical significance for “international travel controls, public transport closures and restrictions on movements across cities and regions.”⁵⁴ So even if well-implemented, restrictions on the movements of city-dwellers to home regions are unlikely to succeed as infection-control measures, it may be better to address the predominantly economic anxieties that motivate internal migrants to seek flight during a pandemic.

44 Onyango-Obbo, C. (2020) [Kenya: Urban-rural migration opens up countryside to Covid-19 refugees](#). AllAfrica.

45 Waita, E. (2020) [Fearing coronavirus, African city dwellers flee to the countryside](#). Reuters.

46 Chingarande, D. (2020) [Thousands flee to rural areas](#). Newsday.

47 Food and Agriculture Organization (2020) [Migrant workers and remittances in the context of Covid-19 in sub-Saharan Africa](#).

48 Johnson, M. & Ghiglione, D. (2020) [Coronavirus in Italy: ‘When we heard about the lockdown we rushed to the station.’](#) Financial Times.

49 Giuffrida, A. & Tondo, L. [Leaked coronavirus plan to quarantine 16m sparks chaos in Italy](#). The Guardian.

50 Licata Caruso, & D. (2020) [Plus d’un million de Franciliens ont quitté la région parisienne avant le confinement : comment Orange le sait](#). Le Parisien.

51 Andrews, J. (2020). [No, the pandemic is not emptying out America’s cities](#). Curbed.

52 Valsecchi, M., & Durante, R., (2020) [Internal migration and the spread of Covid-19](#). Vox EU/CEPR.

53 Chinazzi, M., et. al (2020) [The effect of travel restrictions on the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus \(Covid-19\) outbreak](#). Science.

54 Askitas, N., Tatsiramos, K., & Verheyden, B. (2020) [Lockdown strategies, mobility patterns and Covid-19](#). IZA Institute of Labor Economics.

The plight of migrants stranded in foreign cities

The shock spectrum

The social anthropologist Biao Xiang,⁵⁵ in his work with the migration observatory COMPAS at Oxford University, has characterised the responses of migrant communities to the Covid-19 pandemic as a spectrum of five forms of “shock mobility.”⁵⁶ The traditional response to epidemics is reaction mobility, a direct flight response to real or perceived threats. When migrants decide to move or return because their livelihoods have been destroyed by the disease and its policies, their response is survival mobility. An alternative, substitution mobility, involves having other people or groups move on your behalf. Another familiar response in 2020 is limbo mobility—a rootless slow movement among those who have been denied a place of return or safety, seen in many countries. And a perverse but important form of shock mobility is reaction immobility, in which nominally migrant populations stay put and avoid travel as a survival strategy.⁵⁷

Involuntarily immobile

For the millions of foreign migrant workers who live in faraway cities without citizenship—including in cities such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Doha and Singapore, in each of which more than a million residents are foreign noncitizen workers—survival in 2020 meant an often desperate choice between these forms of shock mobility. When pandemic control measures cut off their sources of income—and sometimes their access to food, housing and other necessities of life—many attempted reaction mobility, fleeing home as quickly as possible. After most countries closed their borders to migration and travel during March, many of these populations became what is termed the “involuntarily immobile.” An estimated 2.75 million migrants were left stranded worldwide.⁵⁸ Some attempted survival-mobility returns through clandestine channels, with some North Africans in Europe creating a small new industry in “reverse smuggling”—paying for return journeys back across the Mediterranean.⁵⁹ Such expensive and risky options were not available to many, though. Another population, almost certainly larger, found themselves in limbo mobility, with some families living desperately in parking lots and public squares of

Gulf States after losing their housing and jobs.⁶⁰ Others resorted to reaction immobility, sheltering with minimum resources, often in crowded labour camps or dormitories, unable to move or earn.⁶¹ Many more cycled between these options.

Multiple factors converge in Mexico

Many countries were overwhelmed by multiple foreign-migrant populations in varied but desperate situations. Mexico, for example, has experienced a dangerous confluence of all these factors among its sizeable noncitizen populations. First, the shutdown of borders by Mexico and its neighbouring countries, combined with the suspension of asylum processes in the US, led to large populations of prospective irregular migrants and asylum seekers, mainly from Central America, stranded in cities along the northern border of Mexico. Second, the US engaged in a large-scale deportation of settled irregular migrants and asylum seekers from Central America and Mexico during 2020, ostensibly for disease-control purposes but possibly using the pandemic as cover to amplify existing policies. By June, more than 40,000 people had been expelled to Mexico and were at large in its cities, unable to return south.⁶² Third, it was reported that a large proportion of these mixed-migration populations had given up their asylum attempts or international-migration efforts in order to flee the crowded confines of shelter and were “moving elsewhere in Mexico,” generally to “pursue informal livelihood activities” in cities. This both risked spreading infection to previously low-infection-rate urban areas and expanding the undocumented Central American population in Mexican cities who generally lack access to health care and other vital services.⁶³

Rescue efforts

Some middle-income countries eventually mounted rescue efforts to repatriate some of these populations. In May, India sent two naval ships and 64 jetliner flights to 13 countries to bring home some of its hundreds of thousands of stranded workers (most were charged the equivalent of USD \$40 for the journey).⁶⁴ Other countries that engaged in repatriation programs for stranded international migrant workers included Indonesia⁶⁵, Turkey⁶⁶ and the Philippines,⁶⁷ and the UN’s International Organization for Migration provided support to stranded return migrants in several transit centres.⁶⁸ However,

55 Biao Xiang is interviewed on page 206 of this Review.

56 Xiang, B. (2020) [Shock mobility: Convulsions in human migration are having large impacts \(Part II\)](#). COMPAS.

57 See for example Mixed Migration Centre (2020) [The impact of Covid-19 on the mobility of refugees and migrants in Libya](#).

58 IOM (2020) [Immediate action required to address needs, vulnerabilities of 2.75m stranded migrants](#).

59 IOM (2020) [Migration in West and North Africa and across the Mediterranean: Trends, risks, development and governance](#).

60 Hashmi, S. (2020) [Coronavirus leaves Gulf migrant workers stranded](#). BBC.

61 McQue, K. (2020) [‘I am starving’: the migrant workers abandoned by Dubai employers](#). The Guardian.

62 Reidy, E. (2020) [Briefing: Coronavirus and the halting of asylum at the US-Mexico border](#). New Humanitarian.

63 ACAPS (2020) [People Movement in Mexico: How the Covid-19 crisis is interfacing with migration and displacement](#).

64 Gettleman, J., & Yasir, S. (2020) [India starts bringing home hundreds of thousands stranded amid Coronavirus](#). New York Times.

65 Pinandita, A. (2020) [Covid-19: Indonesians stranded abroad return home amid ‘mudik’ ban](#). Jakarta Post.

66 Daily Sabah (2020) [Over 40,000 Turkish citizens repatriated since start of Covid-19 crisis, MFA says](#).

67 Asis, M.. (2020) [Repatriating Filipino migrant workers in the time of the pandemic](#). IOM Migration Research Series No. 63.

68 IOM (2020) [Covid-19 analytical snapshot #26: Stranded migrants](#).

there was little to indicate that more than a fraction of these millions of expatriate workers had either returned home or returned to employment by autumn of 2020. Most host countries have done little more than relying on international migration organisations, religious groups, charities and rudimentary aid programs to keep these populations alive and off the streets.

Remittance flows dwindle

Their plight has combined with the other two phenomena cited in this essay to create a dangerous economic situation for the rural populations of the global South. The chief source of income in many rural areas today is remittances from relatives who are either employed as migrant labourers in foreign cities or who have settled more or less permanently in immigration districts of developed countries. The crises afflicting both those urban populations have led to a dramatic collapse in remittance income: the World Bank estimates a decline of 20 percent in 2020, representing a loss of \$109 billion to vulnerable regions.⁶⁹ Many of these same rural regions are also experiencing the addition of new populations due to reverse migration, adding dependent residents who had previously contributed remittances.

Conclusion: time for change

The three populations discussed in this essay, many of whom once arrived in mixed migration movements—residents of coronavirus-affected immigration districts in cities, residents seeking to migrate away from cities back to hometowns, and non-citizen residents unable to emigrate or earn a livelihood—all generally fall outside the scope of what is considered “migration governance” by national administrations and many international organisations. What the Covid-19 pandemic has made painfully clear is that amid a global crisis, traditional policies designed to control movement, settle migrants, and supply labour are inadequate to address the humanitarian, economic and security needs of tens of millions of refugees and immigrants and the cities that host them. There is an urgent need to develop a new approach to managing and providing for these populations during major global crises, because those populations have emerged as this pandemic’s most prominent victims.

69 World Bank (2020) [World Bank predicts sharpest decline of remittances in recent history](#).

Photo credit: Manoj Paateel / Shutterstock. Mumbai, India

Migrant workers in India wearing mask on their journey back home during a nationwide lockdown to fight the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus. The numbers involved in the mass “reverse migration” that has been emptying Indian cities of workers is unknown but the World Bank estimated that the lockdown impacted the livelihoods of a majority of India’s 40 million inter-state migrants. Although their flight was largely for economic rather than epidemiological reasons, India’s internal migrants reportedly were sometimes rejected by their own villages, out of fear of infections carried from the city. As a consequence, some became members of a large population of stranded workers. By April 2020, an estimated 660,000 migrant workers were housed in relief camps.



Photo credit: Right Coast Images / Shutterstock. Cúcuta/ Colombia

Young Venezuelan men working as street vendors in Cúcuta, a Colombian border city full of Venezuelan refugees and migrants fleeing their country's economic turmoil and unrest. For many, their "arrival city" is the start of a new journey that can often lead out of poverty and a predominantly urban future where their children will often benefit from dramatically different life outcomes than their own.



Section 4

Policy and politics

City policy makers on the forefront - addressing today's and tomorrow's mixed migration challenges.

This section offers essays, reports and interviews to highlight the key issues facing those charged with steering cities towards the future in an 'age of migration'. Interviews with the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, two city mayors and the director of the Mayors Migration Council touch on critical political and policy level aspects, while the essays look at the tensions between national and municipal governance, future planning challenges and how cities are increasingly shaping urban governance with respect to migrants and refugees. Though not related to urban migration as such, as usual the policy and politics section of the MMR also charts the extensive and continued practice of 'normalising the extreme' in terms of policy reactions and practices directed at refugees and migrants globally.

Sanctuary cities – solidarity through defiance

Rejecting the exclusionary policies of some national and regional governments, sanctuary and solidarity cities around the world strive to cater to the needs of all their residents, regardless of immigration status.

By Harald Bauder¹

Introduction

City administrations often solve problems created by other levels of government; many might argue they are forced to. By doing so they may contest and resist wider policy directives or strategic, political, or ideological positions held by the national or state government. A key feature of the “Westphalian” system of national sovereignty that has held sway in the world since the mid-17th century is that national governments are empowered to grant or deny access to their territory, and to extend or withhold rights and services to those deemed to be non-citizens.² In a direct challenge to the exclusivity of those powers, so-called “sanctuary” or “solidarity” cities seek to include and protect residents who lack formal status or are otherwise rendered vulnerable by national migration and refugee policies.

This dynamic especially applies to issues relating to mixed migration, where people reside or arrive in towns and cities irregularly, without documentation, or without official recognition as refugees. In North America, there are more than 200 sanctuary cities or jurisdictions.³ In Europe, where such welcoming conurbations are a more recent phenomenon, gaining momentum over the past five years, they tend (except in the UK), to be called solidarity cities. Both terms denote cities where municipal ordinances and policies strive to protect undocumented migrants from deportation or prosecution, often in defiance of federal or national immigration law. Many such cities also extend the right to live and work to new arrivals, regardless of their immigration status, and provide them with free basic services. Champions of solidarity cities describe them as:

A city no one is deported [from], in which everyone can move freely and without fear. A city where no one is asked for papers or status, a city where no one is illegal... In such a city, everyone shall have the right to live and work. Everyone shall have access to education and health care. Everyone shall be able to participate actively in the cultural and political city life—no matter what “legal” and financial status they have, no matter what race, gender, sexuality, religion...⁴

Pragmatic rebellion

Sanctuary and solidarity cities can be seen as rebellious policy spaces that defy national migration and refugee laws and their enforcement, often on moral or ethical grounds.⁵ At the same time, such cities seek practical solutions to problems that arise at the city level because national migration and refugee policies create irregular status and other vulnerabilities.⁶ This contested space between national and local levels of government is a product of cities and nation states following different policy approach when it comes to deciding which people in mixed migration flows should be included in or excluded from national or local communities.

Cities that adopt sanctuary and solidarity approaches exist in many parts of the world. Those located in North America and Europe, such as Barcelona or New York, have received much of the public, political, and academic attention; but there are also cities that, while receiving far less attention, actually pursue similar policies and practices in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. These cities are embedded in a wide variety of different regional, national, geopolitical, economic, and cultural contexts. Despite their greatly varying situations, sanctuary and

1 Harald Bauder is a professor and the director of the Graduate Program in Immigration and Settlement Studies at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada.

2 Bauder, H. (2018) [Westphalia, Migration, and Feudal Privilege](#). Migration Letters Vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 333–46.

3 One anti-immigration lobby group put the number of US jurisdictions, including states and municipalities, that had adopted sanctuary policies in 2018 at 564: Federation for American Immigration Reform (2018) [Sanctuary jurisdictions nearly double since President Trump promised to enforce our immigration laws](#).

4 Solidarity City (2020) [About](#)

5 Harvey, D. (2012) [Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution](#). New York: Verso Books.

6 Barber, B. R. (2013) [If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional nations, rising cities](#). New Haven: Yale University Press.

solidarity cities share a vision of belonging and the need for local inclusion.

When local and national governments are drawn from rival political camps, their differing visions of belonging and politics of inclusion and exclusion may evolve into open conflict, as epitomised in the hostile exchanges between New York's (Democratic) Mayor Bill de Blasio and (Republican) US President Donald Trump.⁷ Sometimes the local-national relationship is more constructive, allowing the vision and politics of sanctuary and solidarity to make important contributions to the design of effective migration and refugee policies at other levels of governance, including national and international levels. For example, as the main destinations of mixed migration movements, cities can play important roles in setting global norms, and thus help implement initiatives such as the global compacts for migration and refugees and related bodies such as the Mayors Migration Council.⁸

The global Covid-19 health crisis has also highlighted other valuable aspects of the policies and practices of urban sanctuary and solidarity. Many migrants and refugees—especially those with a precarious residence status—lack proper access to health care, live in over-crowded conditions, and work in unsafe conditions that may have contributed to perpetuating the spread of the virus. Sanctuary and solidarity cities seek to address the circumstances that produce these vulnerabilities and, in this way, serve the larger public interest, especially during a global pandemic. For example, such cities have long argued that “non-status” (i.e. undocumented) migrants and refugees should receive the same access to local health services—including testing for infectious disease—as national citizens. The Covid-19 pandemic thus provides an opportunity to situate urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices in a new light.

Origins

The idea of urban centres providing sanctuary is not new. Throughout history, many cities have offered opportunities and safety to newcomers. The sanctuary city idea appears in various forms in sacred scriptures and the teaching of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Sikhism.⁹ In medieval Europe, the saying “city air makes you free” reflected the practice in some cities of offering freedom from feudal bondage to new inhabitants after a year of residence. Modern urban sanctuary and solidarity movements can be seen as a continuation of these historical traditions. Today, urban sanctuary is mostly a secular concept, although faith-based institutions continue to be amongst its key actors and proponents.

These days, the label “sanctuary city” has attained particular prominence in the United States (US), where hundreds of municipalities have passed sanctuary regulations.¹⁰ It is a country almost entirely built on immigration—including the forced migration of slaves from Africa, and the forced displacement of indigenous populations—and the need for and existence of sanctuary cities highlight the contentious politics around issues of belonging. San Francisco was a US pioneer of urban sanctuary:¹¹ in 1985, the city passed the largely symbolic “City of Refuge Resolution”, and then, in 1989, the more practical “City of Refuge Ordinance” seeking protection for Central American refugees and asylum seekers from federal immigration authorities. Over time, the focus of US sanctuary cities widened from protecting only newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers towards offering security to individuals and families who live in the city more or less permanently but who lack legal status.

Legitimacy and rights through a different lens

From the viewpoint of sanctuary cities, what makes a person a member of the urban community is that they live and work in the city, that their children go to school there, and that they are a part of the social and economic fabric of the city. A lack of legitimate immigration status does not make someone a less worthy inhabitant in the eyes of sanctuary cities. Many such inhabitants lack legal status because they overstayed the duration of their visas or work permits, crossed a border irregularly, or because their refugee or asylum claims were rejected; other residents may possess only temporary or precarious status, or experience discrimination or other forms of exclusion.

Today's sanctuary cities in the US and Canada seek to protect the rights of such migrants and refugees who live within their boundaries by providing them with equal access to municipal services. In doing so, those supporting and implementing sanctuary principles privilege values and rights they identify in relation to these groups above the laws or immigration policies of the nation state. They refuse to implement or cooperate with the detention, deportation or exclusion from city services of those that fall foul of national immigration stipulations. As such they create a philosophical, ethical and political dilemma for democratic societies and challenge the pre-eminence of the central state over regional and local democratic levels of government.

7 Wootson, C. & Dewsey, J. (2019) [Trump and de Blasio: As New York City mayor enters the presidential race, Trump gives him the Bronx cheer](#). Washington Post.

8 Bauder & Landau, L. (2018) [Why Cities Hold the Key to Safe, Orderly Migration](#). World Economic Forum.

9 Jennifer J. Bagelman, J. (2016) *Sanctuary City: A suspended state*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, p.20

10 Bauder, H. (2017) [Sanctuary Cities: Policies and Practices in International Perspective](#). International Migration, Vol. 55, Issue 2: pp. 174–87.

11 Mancina, P. (2012) [The Birth of a Sanctuary-City: A history of governmental sanctuary in San Francisco](#). In Lippert, R. & Rehaag, S. (eds) (2012) *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship and Social Movements*. London: Routledge. pp. 205–18

Push-back

Federal entities in the US have challenged municipal sanctuary policies on various occasions. In 2007, the House of Representatives passed legislation that would have denied federal emergency funds to sanctuary cities, although the bill did not get through the Senate onto the statute books. In early 2017, President Trump signed two executive orders on immigration and border security that would, among other stipulations, “strip federal grant money from the sanctuary states and cities that harbor illegal immigrants.”¹² These orders have been successfully contested in the courts by several sanctuary cities and have elicited defiant responses from mayors across the country—including de Blasio, who pledged that New York would defend all the city’s inhabitants, “regardless of their immigration status.”¹³ In this increasingly polemical climate, some state-level authorities have banned all sanctuary cities, while others, such as those in California, Vermont, and Massachusetts have actively encouraged the movement, declaring themselves “sanctuary states”.

Taking root in Europe

While European Union (EU) immigration policies strive to restrict undocumented or irregular access to Europe by refugees and migrants, the reality is that there are millions of irregular migrants as well as precarious regular migrants and refugees in Europe, most of whom live in cities. Authorities in many of these cities act on the conviction that the newcomers, regardless of legal status, deserve protection and support, a view that is often at odds with national policies.

Recent years have seen the sanctuary movement gain considerable traction in the United Kingdom (UK), where more than 100 locations have embraced its philosophy since Sheffield became the first “city of sanctuary” in 2007, announcing it took “pride in the welcome it offers to people in need of safety.”¹⁴ They include the major conurbations of Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol and Glasgow, as well as towns, villages and rural locations all across the country.¹⁵ (In the Republic of Ireland, Belfast, Dublin, and Cork are among a dozen locations to embrace the movement.)¹⁶ According to the movement’s UK umbrella organisation, becoming a city of sanctuary typically entails engaging with local organisations and the local refugee community, adopting a strategy for including

people seeking refuge, and the support of the municipal council.¹⁷ Unlike in the US, where sanctuary cities focus on local policing and non-cooperation with federal immigration enforcement authorities to offer tangible protections to non-status inhabitants, in the UK cities of sanctuary concentrate on creating a welcoming environment for asylum seekers and refugees, and on envisioning the city as a space of inclusion, rather than defying national laws..

In mainland Europe, the Catalan city of Barcelona exemplifies the role cities can play in refugee and migrant protection. In September 2015, it launched the “Barcelona, Refuge City” plan “to gear the city up to receiving and assisting refugees and guaranteeing their rights”.¹⁸ The plan promotes the rights of all city inhabitants, including undocumented migrants and rejected asylum seekers. Barcelona’s mayor, Ada Colau, has been a vocal international advocate for giving progressive cities a stronger voice in finding practical solutions to accommodate and support hundreds of thousands of irregular and regular migrants and refugees living in cities.

Other major cities throughout Europe, such as Amsterdam, Athens, Berlin, Milan, Stockholm, and Zurich, have joined Barcelona in the pan-European Solidarity Cities network to exchange information and knowledge, build capacity, and advocate for the local inclusion of vulnerable migrants and refugees.¹⁹ Such progressive policies may run counter to those of central governments, especially when conservative parties are in power at the national level.

Latin America's regional approach

In 2004, 20 countries in Latin America adopted a series of measures to identify durable and innovative solutions for the region’s refugees. The “Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen International Protection of Refugees in Latin America” created a framework to establish *Ciudades Solidarias*—solidarity cities—in order to accommodate refugees throughout the region.²⁰ Under this framework, major cities such as Buenos Aires, Quito, and Montevideo collaborate with the UN Refugee Agency to protect vulnerable migrant and refugee populations.²¹ Research on the municipality of Quilicura in Chile illustrates that local solidarity initiatives seek to

12 White House press secretary Sean Spicer quoted in: Kopan, T. & Shoichet, C. (2017) [Key points in Trump's immigration executive orders](#). CNN.

13 Robbins, L. (2017) ‘[Sanctuary City: Mayors Vow to Defy Trump's Immigration Order](#)’, New York Times.

14 City of Sanctuary UK (2020) [Groups](#); City of Sanctuary Sheffield (2020) [Building a Culture of Welcome and Hospitality for Refugees and Asylum-Seekers](#).

15 City of Sanctuary UK (2020) [Groups](#).

16 [Places of Sanctuary Ireland](#)

17 City of Sanctuary UK, op. cit. See also: Darling, J. & Squire, V. (2013) *Everyday Enactments of Sanctuary: The UK City of Sanctuary Movement*. In Lippert, R. & Rehaag, S. (eds) op. cit. pp. 191–204

18 Barcelona Ciutat Refugi - [The plan](#)

19 [Solidarity Cities](#)

20 [Mexico Declaration and Plan of Action to Strengthen International Protection of Refugees in Latin America](#). See also: Varoli, F. (2010) [Cities of Solidarity: local integration in Latin America](#). Forced Migration Review.

21 Durango A. & Aguilar, S. (2010) [“Ciudades Solidarias” trabajan para integración de refugiados en las Américas](#). UNHCR.

support people in both mixed migratory irregular flows and regular situations.²²

It's a scheme that goes beyond just welcoming its beneficiaries to focus on many aspects of their full integration:

The [participating] municipality accepts responsibility for identifying the needs of refugees and asylum seekers, evaluating the conditions in which they find themselves in their territory and establishing plans of action to address their needs. The municipal authorities appoint staff specifically to support their local integration through social programmes such as family welfare payments, emergency housing plans, food policy plans, support for small businesses and integration into the education system.²³

De facto sanctuary in the global South

While some researchers have applied the language of urban sanctuary to cities such as the Kenyan capital, Nairobi, and Makassar, in eastern Indonesia, the circumstances of many cities in the global South differs fundamentally from those in the global North.²⁴ In countries in which states are weaker, national migration policies or individuals' refugee status may have little relevance when it comes to respecting rights or accessing municipal services.²⁵ Moreover, although some African cities serve more as transit hubs on routes to Europe, the majority serve as final destinations for continental south-south movement. For many, this means living continuously under the radar in irregularity with not channel for citizenship or formal recognition by the host government – for some an irregular status can even be used to their advantage.²⁶

In effect, therefore, many cities in the global South, such as Cairo, Tripoli, Nairobi, and Bangkok, offer de facto sanctuary by turning a blind eye to irregular residents, or by lacking the capacity to implement national immigration laws. Sanctuary at this level may not be the deliberate manifestation of policies embraced by civic authorities or municipal leaders, but, from the perspective of the irregular migrant or asylum seeker, even if they are denied many services (which in any case may not be

free of charge or adequate for more regular residents) they benefit from being able to reside or settle in cities in countries with nominally unwelcoming immigration rules. In fact, millions of refugees and migrants are also hosted openly and willingly in thousands of cities and urban centres in the South that have shown far greater openness and “solidarity” with refugees and migrants without giving themselves labels or joining sanctuary-like movements. From three different regions examples are striking where millions of refugees from Venezuela are hosted by South American cities; Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey have shouldered the vast majority of responsibility in welcoming Syrian refugees in the Middle East; and in Africa cities like Kampala and other towns in Uganda have opened access willingly to refugees from South Sudan, Somalia and elsewhere. Whether motivated by practical necessity or ethics of solidarity, numerous cities in the South are making efforts to integrate refugees and migrants and allow their presence to influence urban planning and city management.²⁷

Common principles

The experiences in North America, Europe, and Latin America have shown that an important commonality among urban sanctuary and solidarity is that top-down and bottom-up approaches converge at the city level.²⁸ Grassroots organisers and activists in municipalities as diverse as Chicago, Berlin, and Quilicura collaborate with municipal authorities towards a common goal of local migrant and refugee accommodation. These local alliances can be a powerful political force.

The Anglo-American approach—which can be observed in Canada, the UK, and the US—has four basic dimensions: first, city councils typically make official commitments to support and enact sanctuary policies; second, local efforts seek to rescript narratives demonising migrants and refugees towards more inclusive and humane approaches; third, urban communities frame “belonging” in terms of mere residence rather than legal status; and, fourth, municipalities and local civic society actors mobilise urban institutions and social services to cater to all inhabitants, even if this goes against of national policies that categorise people as citizens, immigrants, refugees, or people without status.²⁹

22 Bauder, H. & Gonzalez, D. (2018) [Municipal Responses to 'Illegality': Urban Sanctuary across National Contexts](#) Social Inclusion Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 124–34.

23 Varli, F. op. cit.

24 Kassa, D. (2019) *Refugee Spaces and Urban Citizenship in Nairobi: Africa's Sanctuary City*. Lanham: Lexington Books; Missbach, A., Adiputera, Y. & Prabandari, A. (2018) *Is Makassar a 'Sanctuary City'? Migration Governance in Indonesia After the 'Local Turn'*. *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 199–216.

25 Bauder, H. (2019) *Urban Sanctuary and Solidarity in a Global Context: How Does Africa Contribute to the Debate?* MIASA Working Paper on Migration, Mobility, and Forced Displacement. Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa.

26 Landau, L. (2019) *Temporality, Informality, and Translocality in Africa's Urban Archipelagos*. MIASA Working Paper on Migration, Mobility, and Forced Displacement. Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa; Kassa, D. op. cit.

27 International Rescue Committee. (2018) [Urban Refuge. How Cities Are Building Inclusive Communities](#).

28 Bauder, H. & Gonzalez, D. op. cit.

29 Bauder, H. (2017) [Sanctuary Cities: Policies and Practices in International Perspective](#). *International Migration* 55, no. 2: pp. 174–87.

Reducing vulnerability in US cities

Some US cities, such as New York and San Francisco, issue municipal ID cards that do not distinguish between people based on their status. In this way, all inhabitants can identify themselves to local authorities to receive services and police protection. Many US and Canadian cities have passed—or are quietly implementing—so-called Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) policies whereby police officers and service providers are not supposed to ask residents about their status and, when such information becomes available, not to share it with national authorities. DADT policies aim to provide non-status migrants and refugees access to municipal services without fear of detention or deportation. Essentially, these policies create a bureaucratic firewall that mirrors the Global Compact on Migration's call to

“ensure that cooperation between service providers and immigration authorities does not exacerbate vulnerabilities of irregular migrants by compromising their safe access to basic services or by unlawfully infringing upon the human rights to privacy, liberty and security of person at places of basic service delivery.”³⁰

Many cities, however, struggle to properly implement such policies in practice. In Toronto, municipal implementation efforts lack coordination and are insufficiently resourced to properly train frontline staff, while staff who do not share the values behind DADT policies may be reluctant to implement them.³¹ Other cities, such as some in Texas, are facing hostile state laws that prohibit sanctuary city policies.³² These situations further illustrate the contentious nature of urban sanctuary policies: although democratically elected municipal governments may support them, other levels of government often do not.

Europe follows suit

Inspired by New York City's status-blind municipal ID card, in 2018, Zurich's municipal council adopted a motion to introduce identity cards for all residents, including an estimated 14,000 undocumented migrants.³³ According to one advocacy group behind the initiative, these so-called *sans-papiers* “live in the shadow of our city” and

*...are among the most vulnerable in our society because they cannot exercise their fundamental rights. If they become victims of violence or exploitation, *sans-papiers* cannot file a complaint, they can only seek medical treatment at the risk of being deported, they cannot take out liability insurance, they cannot take out a cell phone contract, they cannot open a bank account, they cannot rent their own home... They move in constant fear on the street.³⁴*

In a similar move, the Berlin Senate—the city's executive body—has approved a health insurance card that covers uninsured non-status migrants and refugees. The effective implementation of such initiatives has faced considerable challenges, such as creating incentives for all residents, not only *sans-papiers*/irregular migrants to use a common city ID card, and establishing the bureaucracy required to administer and fund universal health insurance.³⁵ Nevertheless, these initiatives demonstrate a common proclivity to include migrants and refugees in the local community.

Rights through residence

The guiding principle that underpins this attitude is domicile citizenship, according to which urban communities accept all those who live there as members. Palermo's mayor Leoluca Orlando articulated this principle succinctly when he said: “If you are in Palermo, you are a Palermitan”.³⁶ The domicile principle differs fundamentally from the birth principle according to which national citizenship is passed from one generation to the next (*jus sanguinis*) or is acquired automatically by being born in a country (*jus soli*).

Open door policies

There is more to a being solidarity city, however, than simply embracing all current residents: an open-door policy is another key criterion. Founded in 2018, the German *Seebrücke*, or Sea Bridge initiative, calls on German cities to voluntarily accept migrants and refugees directly from Mediterranean port cities, rescue boats denied entry to European ports, and border camps at Europe's periphery.³⁷

30 United Nations (2020) [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).

31 Hudson, G. et al. (2017) [\(No\) Access T.O.: A Pilot Study on Sanctuary City Policy in Toronto, Canada](#). RCIS Working Paper Series. Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement.

32 See for example, Fernandez, M. (2018) [Texas Banned 'Sanctuary Cities,' Some Police Departments Didn't Get the Memo](#). New York Times.

33 SwissInfo (2018) [Zurich wants ID cards for all – even illegal immigrants](#). Under the approved motion, the council had two years to draft a bill that would introduce the cards. While “*sans papiers*” is French for “without papers”, the term is also commonly used in German-speaking countries.

34 Züri City Card (undated) [Züri City Card - Stadtbürgerschaft für alle](#). This organisation notes that the ID card proposed for Zurich is modelled on those issued in various sanctuary cities in the US.

35 Bauder H. & Weisser, T. (2019) [Solidarity Cities in Germany and Switzerland: A Brief Overview of Initiatives](#). RCIS Research Brief No. Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement.

36 Bauder, H. (2019) [“If You Are in Palermo, You Are a Palermitan”: An interview with Mayor Leoluca Orlando](#). RCIS Research Brief No. 2019/1. Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement.

37 Seebrücke (2018) [We create Safe Harbours](#).

Dozens of German city councils and mayors signed up to this initiative in a post migration “crisis” context where migration and refugee issues were consistently at the top of the political agenda. These municipal declarations have sent a clear message: solidarity cities care not only for migrants and refugees who are already residents, they are also eager to bring people in need elsewhere into their communities. These cities advocate for local migration and refugee policies to mitigate what they may frame as the inhumane and often deadly consequences of national and European policies. Another example is the recent grassroots push in several European countries to rally municipalities to accept unaccompanied children trapped in asylum centres on Greek islands. In the case of the Netherlands, in opposition to their coalition government’s refusal, by mid-2020 one third of Dutch municipalities – a total of 119 local authorities representing 9 million people – have declared themselves in favour of bringing 500 children to the Netherlands.³⁸

There may also be a political dimension behind the Seebrücke initiative’s appeal: while it is driven by activists and grassroots organisations opposed to national and European policies that deny entry to many people in mixed migration flows, mayors and city councils realise that corresponding municipal declarations remain largely symbolic as long as the national government does not grant cities permission to accept the requested migrants and refugees. For local political leaders, therefore, signing on to the initiative may curry favour with progressive voters without entailing any real risks or obligations.

While the politics surrounding refugees and migrants in cities can be cynical, much of the willingness and openness to increased refugee and migrant numbers at the local level is genuine and springs from existing proximity to migrants and refugees in the urban space. Studies and polls often show the political divide between rural and urban areas where urban populations are noticeably less fearsome or xenophobic towards migrants and refugees.³⁹ Contact theory holds that sustained positive contact (i.e. friendships rather than the casual, fleeting contact of passing others in the street) with members of other ethnic, religious, racial, or national groups produce more positive attitudes toward members of that group. Although contact theory is not the only theory of what influences local contextual decision-making and attitudes it has ‘support in numerous contexts’ and such proximity hypotheses appear to be backed up by voting patterns. For example, in the UK, low-immigration areas voted for Brexit in 2016 where immigration policy was given high prominence in voting choices.⁴⁰ The issue

of city managers being influenced and pressured by pro-migration and refugee-supporting local residents (who may also be migrants and refugees as well as other minority groups) cannot be underestimated.

Finally, while the reasons for local authorities to adopt a more welcoming approach to refugees and migrants in their cities can be primarily pragmatic – as they are ultimately the ones dealing with their presence – or ethical, it is likely there is also a political component to it. It is often assumed that local politicians are closer to their electorate and thus have a better sense of what it is their electorate wants, as opposed to politicians at the national level, often relying on polls which have proved to be highly unreliable. Like their national counterparts, mayors also think about their electorate and the likelihood of winning the next elections. This interplay between local migration policies and politics could therefore be an important factor too in what defines which cities declare themselves as sanctuary cities. Simply put, some mayors may decide to implement more progressive migration policies, sometimes antagonising the national level, because they are confident this will help gain consensus with their voters. The above-mentioned Mayor of Palermo is a good example, having been re-elected in 2017 and remaining a popular mayor, despite a clear pro-migration agenda, antagonising the national level.⁴¹

National and international networks

Sanctuary and solidarity cities also build networks among each other. Barcelona, for example, as well as supporting its own vulnerable migrant and refugee residents through its Refuge City plan, has created a national Refuge City Network to support and advocate for other urban initiatives that welcome refugees.⁴² These urban networks reach beyond national borders: Barcelona also played a key role in establishing the Solidarity Cities initiative within Eurocities, a European network started in 2016 by Giorgos Kaminis, the mayor of Athens at that time. Participating cities not only seek to fund and improve local programmes for migrants and refugees but also advocate for the relocation of refugees within and beyond the network, in line with the core European values of “solidarity, humanity and dignity”.⁴³ In Latin America, Cuidades Solidarias connects cities that support the local accommodation of migrants and refugees. Globally, researchers have identified more than two dozen such international city networks.⁴⁴

The limits of urban autonomy

It would be wrong to assume that sanctuary and solidarity cities can offer complete protection for vulnerable and

38 Rankin, J. (2020) [Dutch government under growing pressure to take in child refugees](#). The Guardian.

39 See; DelReal, J.A. & Clement, S. (2017) [Poll of rural Americans shows deep cultural divide with urban centers](#). The Washington Post. And, The Migration Observatory. (2011) [UK Public Opinion toward Migration: Determinants of Attitudes](#)

40 The Conversation. (2016) [Hard evidence: how areas with low immigration voted mainly for Brexit](#).

41 Van de Zee, R. (2018) [He fought the mafia and won. Now this mayor is taking on Europe over migrants](#). The Guardian.

42 Agustín, Ó. & Jørgensen, M. (2019) *Solidarity and the “Refugee Crisis” in Europe*. New York: Springer.

43 Cities of Migration (2017) [Solidarity Cities](#).

44 Oomen, B., Baumgärtel, M. & Durmus, E. (2018) [Transnational City Networks and Migration Policy](#). Cities of Refuge Research.

(especially) non-status migrants and refugees. Around the world, migration and refugee policies tend to be determined at the national level, and most cities lack the necessary autonomy from their national governments to embrace all residents, regardless of their legal status, or to enact their own migration and refugee policies.

In the US, for example, federal immigration authorities are empowered to raid homes and workplaces to locate, detain, and eventually deport non-status residents. These powers have led sceptics to argue that sanctuary cities in the US offer a false sense of security.⁴⁵ In Germany, federal law imposes strict reporting requirements on all foreign residents and the national government continues to block efforts by municipalities participating in Seebrücke to receive migrants and refugees directly from Mediterranean sea ports. In many countries, sub-national governments (states, provinces, etc.) have also adopted policies and enacted legislation intended to curtail urban sanctuary and solidarity initiatives.

Cities of hostility

Of course, not all cities foster migrant and refugee inclusion; some appear to do the exact opposite. This can be for a number of reasons and differ from place to place. Group conflict theory used in explaining migration attitudes suggests that “migrants or minority groups can appear to threaten the interests, identities, or status of the majority (as a group), and that those who feel this sense of threat most acutely will be most likely to oppose migration.”⁴⁶ Some cities may have low immigrant levels and could therefore also be more susceptible to anti-migrant perceptions and/or rhetoric. Politics can play an important role if, for example, a more populist anti-migrant approach that appears to favour local residents’ jobs and access to services can be instrumentalised by a local politician or mayor. Johannesburg’s mayor, Herman Mashaba, has rallied against undocumented foreign migrants in light of economic uncertainties. Likewise, migrants and refugees in Nairobi often experience harassment and extortion from the Kenyan police and municipal bureaucrats.⁴⁷ More specifically following the 2011–2014 terror attacks in Nairobi and Kenya, the social and political backlash against Somali urban refugees was intense, leading to many Somalis leaving Kenya to live in Uganda (mainly Kampala).⁴⁸ In 2007, the Quebec town of Hérouxville, where no immigrants lived, signified that Muslim newcomers were unwelcome by introducing a “code of conduct” that, amongst other things, promoted

mixed-sex swimming and insisted that women showed their faces in public. The small Pennsylvanian city of Hazelton attempted to keep out non-status migrants by enacting stricter rules around housing and employment. US municipalities that enact exclusionary policies tend to have lower-than-average education levels among their population and high rates of owner-occupied housing; they also are more likely to be located outside of larger urban centres, where a vision of local belonging may be less connected to the domicile principle than to the politics of race and nation.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Cities, where many migrants and refugees live and work, are key loci of national immigration law enforcement.⁵⁰ Different cities react in different ways: some municipal administrations and civic society institutions support the inclusion of all inhabitants—irrespective of national status—in the local community, by defiantly working to provide sanctuary or solidarity, even if, as some critics have argued, these policies end at municipal boundaries. Other cities tend to collaborate with federal immigration authorities to a greater degree than they are obligated to do and follow populist anti-migrant sentiments to exclude migrants and refugees.

It would therefore be overly simplistic to blindly favour urban policies on migration over national, regional, or global approaches. Still, in the light of national and regional (including EU) migration policies that create vulnerable non-status populations and that—in the resulting absence of regular pathways—force millions of people to risk death in their efforts to seek safety and better lives, sanctuary and solidarity cities present an alternative vision of welcome and inclusion. It is a vision that rejects categorisation by citizenship or legal status, a system of classification that is a defining feature of national migration policies, and one that often leads to unequal access to social, economic, mobility, and human rights. Tackling these inequalities lies at the heart of what drives the architects of sanctuary and solidarity cities. And precisely because cities are the main providers for migrants and refugees, there remains a strong argument that they be given a greater voice in the design of effective migration and refugee policies at the national, regional, and global levels.

45 See, for example: Tramonte, L. (2011) [Debunking the Myth of ‘Sanctuary Cities’: Community Policing Policies Protect American Communities](#). American Immigration Council.

46 The Conversation. (2016) op cit.

47 Kassa, D. (2019) *Refugee Spaces and Urban Citizenship in Nairobi: Africa’s Sanctuary City*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

48 Lazzolini, G. & Hersi, M. (2019) [Shelter from the storm: Somali migrant networks in Uganda between international business and regional geopolitics](#). Journal of East African Studies. And, Lazzolini, G. (2014) [A safe haven for Somalis in Uganda?](#) Rift Valley Institute Briefing Paper.

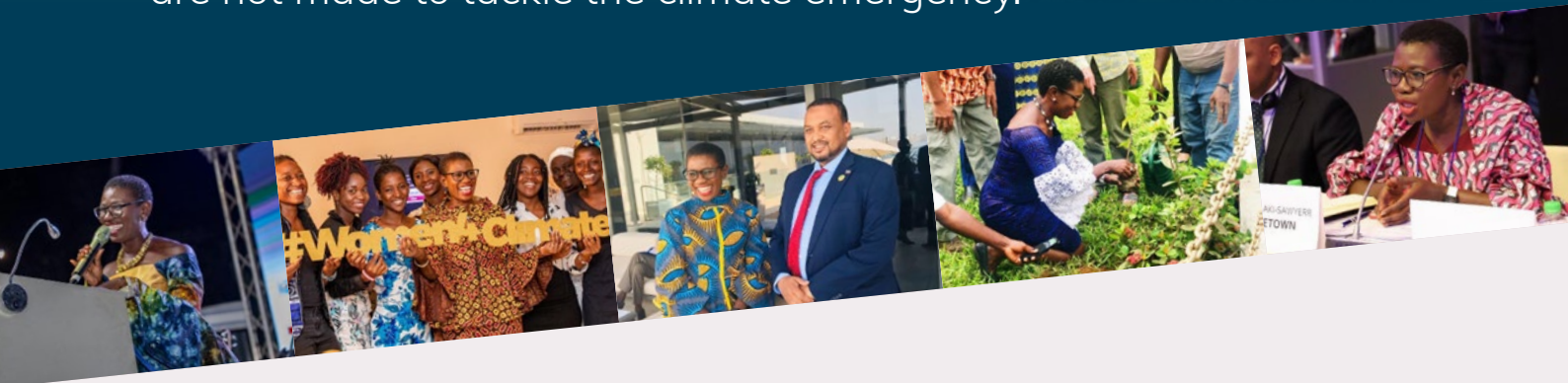
49 Kyle E. Walker K. & Leitner, H. (2011) [The Variegated Landscape of Local Immigration Policies in the United States](#). Urban Geography Vol. 32, No. 2, pp. 156–78.

50 Varsonyi, M. (2010) *Taking Local Control: Immigration Policy Activism in U.S. Cities and States*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press; De Genova, N. (2015) [Border Struggles in the Migrant Metropolis](#). Nordic Journal of Migration Research Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 3–10.

Interview

Invest in people, not walls

Meaningful development of cities such as Freetown cannot take place without human capital, insists **Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr**, pointing out that the examples of New York and London illustrate that migrants have played a key role in delivering urban development for centuries. But all that goes out the window if concerted efforts are not made to tackle the climate emergency.



Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr has served as the mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone since May 2018. A finance professional with a record of leading institutional change, Aki-Sawyerr campaigned against the trade in blood diamonds during Sierra Leone's civil war and co-founded a charity that supports disadvantaged children. In 2016 she was made an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE) for her work during Sierra Leone's Ebola crisis.

You've said that a significant amount of resources are being spent on building walls and fortifying borders around the world. Indeed, Frontex's budget this year is almost half a billion euros, and you've said that this money would be better spent on building people. Building which people, and in what way?

The people that I'm talking about are the people against whom and in respect of whom the walls are being built: the people who others feel need to be kept out of their cities, their countries, their geographic locations. And what do I mean by building the people? It comes back to the second objective of the Global Compact for Migration, which speaks to the need for us to address the structural drivers of migration. People, generally speaking, are migrating because they're looking for a better life, because they're looking for opportunities, because they want to be sure that they can provide food, clothing, and education for their children. They're

moving from one place to the other, because of climate change and the impact of climate change on their livelihoods, on their opportunities.

In building the people, you are addressing those structural drivers of migration. You're addressing the reasons why these people are moving because, again, the concept of building a wall, versus building people, is about investment. What are you investing in? And how do you invest in people? You invest in people by providing the opportunities that they need to fulfill their own potential. People crossing the Mediterranean, people crossing the border into the US, or even moving internally from the rural areas to urban areas, do so because they're looking for opportunities, because investment is not being made in them where they are, or they're facing a danger which is not being addressed—whether it's conflict or climate—where they are. That's what I mean: shift the investment, from walls to people.

Given that Freetown would probably benefit from human capital remaining in Africa, what's your view on the widespread aspirations throughout the continent to be mobile? On the culture of migration, particularly in West Africa, including Sierra Leone?

It's interesting. At the heart of what you've just asked is the question of choice. The impact of the brain drain is a serious one for a city like mine, a country like mine, where we need human capital in order for development to happen. Everybody needs human capital in order for development to happen, but I want to stop for a minute and move back generations, centuries, and look at the growth of cities all over the world. Cities like New York and London that are famous for being built by migrants—a collection of people coming with different skills and abilities to the table—have benefitted from the different ideologies and ideas and academics and professionals and scientists coming together, and the impact of that, in terms of growth, is that growth is fueled. So migration has fueled the development of cities for centuries.

“ The term “migrant” is used very selectively. You're a migrant when you're not wanted or when you're going to be given a low-paid job. ”

We're now in an era where we've got the Bretton Woods institutions and UN bodies, and the growth of continents, of cities, of economies, is influenced by world trade agreements, by existing hegemonies, patent rules, labour laws, and visa restrictions, which are very difficult to change. So, what you now have is different. It's not so much an individual pursuit in which people are drawn to particular locations because there's a buzz, there's a vibe, whether it was Babylon or it was California, with the Gold Rush. It's not just that individual movement any longer. It's a movement which is now much more impacted by global institutions and global arrangements, which can result in making those natural developments a lot more difficult.

Stop for a minute and think about why we have poverty, such extreme poverty, 60 years after the Bretton Woods institutions were created. And let's be realistic and talk about the structural adjustment policies of the '80s and the impact that they had. And talk about world trade. Who makes the guns, who gets the profits on the guns used in conflicts throughout Africa? There's a whole other dimension to this. So where am I going with this? It's where I started, I said it's about choice. So when you find yourself in a country where poverty is almost institutionalised because of a myriad of factors, where it's so hard to break out of poverty because of local and international dynamics... When that happens, and let's come back now to the individual, the individual's

own desire is for a better life. These are uncomfortable conversations, but we need to face them if we're going to talk about the migration that this new global system allows and not be hypocritical. A country might say, “No, I'm not opening my border to you, you've come here on a dinghy, you've risked your life.” But at the next moment, if that country needs more healthcare workers visas are given to those very people that are needed by their own countries. So you take them when you need them, and you block them when you don't.

You're an economist, so when you see the wage differentials for both professionals and non-skilled workers between somewhere like Freetown and London or Paris, isn't migration going to be an inevitable aspiration for a long time to come?

Of course, it's a big driver and that's what's driven the brain drain, that plus the selective issuance of visas. But again, there's another element to this, which is important. The term “migrant” is used very selectively, and that's something else that we need to unpack. You're a migrant when you're not wanted or when you're going to be given a low-paid job. I did my masters at the London School of Economics and then worked for a global professional services firm. Was I a migrant or was I just an individual? If I had done that in reverse, and had come from New Zealand to Freetown, would I be called a migrant or would I be called an expat?

“ I did my masters at LSE and then worked for a global professional services firm. Was I a migrant or was I just an individual? If I had done that in reverse, and had come from New Zealand to Freetown, would I be called a migrant or would I be called an expat? ”

From an African perspective, do you think there's some degree of historical rough justice when you see the migrants from the continent irregularly entering Europe? How do you feel about the level of political panic that's caused by a relatively small number of irregular migrants from Africa, mostly fleeing poverty and wars, that some would argue the unequal world economic order has significantly contributed to?

Yes, exactly my point. But I don't think there's any rough justice because do you know what percentage of people actually survive that crossing? Do you know how many young people die in the deserts in North Africa? How many are languishing in jails now? And I meet these young people. So yes, I know that there are some people who say rough justice, but I don't think it's justice. I think the fact that people still feel the need to do this is painful. I've had young people who have tried

to migrate, been jailed, seen their colleagues die in front of them in the desert, seen girls raped, come back to Freetown and try again. That is horrific. Horrific. Not to mention the mafia, don't forget the organised crime that's behind illegal migration systems. Let's not leave them out. Another beneficiary. No, no, the justice is not on our side.

“ I've had young people who have tried to migrate, been jailed, seen their colleagues die in front of them in the desert, seen girls raped, come back to Freetown and try again. That is horrific. Horrific. ”

Considering climate change, what do you think will happen in term of migration in the next decade or more? Is Freetown or other areas of Sierra Leone especially vulnerable to climate change?

Oh, yes, it is going to affect things hugely. I'm not being dramatic, but it depends massively on what we do in the next five years. In the next year even. If we don't as a global community stop people like the climate deniers and actually begin to put real policy in place to reverse, or at least slow down climate change our conversation isn't just going to be about migration, it's going to be much broader and existential. I was on a call with Eric Garcetti, the mayor of Los Angeles, yesterday. He said he woke up to a red sun because of the fires there.

“ When climate change impacts are felt in rural areas, people are driven to leave for the city, and the city cannot cope without further investments. And when you can't cope, then it drives people from your city across the ocean, so it's a chain that we need to break. ”

I became mayor because of this. I became mayor because of the environment and sanitation. And this desire to want to fight back and prevent a climate disaster in our city is one of my primary reasons, it was my primary reason for being mayor. Cities in Africa are facing a lot of the impact of climate change. It's catching up very fast with the rest of the world, but we've been on the receiving end already for a number of years now with extreme climate events. And what's different is it comes back to these structural drivers of migration, where you have poverty, where you have no infrastructure, where you have no resilience capacity,

you don't even have a fully functional and effective fire force. So in poorer countries your ability to be resilient in the face of the more extreme weather patterns is much lower. The kind of the weather disasters that we've had in parts of the US versus what you had, say, in Haiti. Haiti has still not fully recovered. When climate change impacts are felt in rural areas, people are driven to leave for the city and the city cannot cope without further investments, and when you can't cope, then it drives people from your city across the ocean, so it's a chain that we need to break.

Do you think the penetration of digital connectivity and communication is exacerbating migration in all its forms, or does location matter less precisely because of digital access and proliferation?

I think that that's a question that is loaded with potential. I think location could matter much less than it used to. We've seen the growth of the telemarketing, call centre businesses and such like in places like India and parts of Eastern Europe, where someone now has a job which is linked to another country and without having to leave their country, and we come back to: why is it that people move? People move because they're looking for opportunities. There is enormous potential for there to be a spreading of opportunities and job creation, but I say it's "potential" because there are still barriers to entry, there are still restrictions and patents and agreements, and obviously, we're seeing a growing sentiment of nationalism in the West, the rhetoric of "make America great again", do everything American, don't let other people take your jobs. Digital penetration in Sierra Leone, it's so low, the cost of the internet is so high, access to computers is so limited, so again, I feel there's potential, but we need to get through the barriers on both sides of the divide for that potential to flourish.

You've said that the relative absence of city leaders in the discussions ahead of the global compacts was unfortunate and wrong. That was in 2018. Do you feel anything has changed in terms of the voice of mayors and city managers since then?

One thing that's happened, obviously with Covid, with the Black Lives Matter movement, is that, not really by choice or design, we've seen mayors around the world stepping up by necessity, and in some instances simply because their national governments have abrogated all responsibilities and said, "you go. You go find jobs in the city." I'm sure you're familiar with Benjamin Barber's work, *If Mayors Ruled the World*.¹ So the interesting thing here is by virtue of our proximity to those whom we serve and their access to us and their sense of responsibility.

For example, yesterday I was the first person on the

1 Barber, B. (2013) *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

scene when a bridge crashed, but the bridge is not the City Council's responsibility; according to our mandates, the bridge is a responsibility of the national government through the Sierra Leone Roads Authority. But residents in the city somehow expect that mayors to be in charge of everything that goes wrong. And so you have to be there and play that role of advocacy if that's what's required of your central government, because you have a responsibility to keep the city working, even if you don't have specific mandates for road maintenance or bridge repairs. Your overall job is to make sure that the city works.

What's changed is Covid has catapulted many mayors in different parts of the world to the front of the response because their residents have seen them responding and they needed to respond. Black Lives Matter has also highlighted this. And that moves on to migration, because migration impacts your city, it impacts your city residents in reality and through perception. So it's very important that those who are going to be held accountable have the opportunity to influence the policies that are made, and that didn't happen effectively with the Global Compact [for Migration].

Has the Covid-19 pandemic set back the objectives of the Global Compact for Migration?

I don't think it's set it back; I think it's shone a spotlight on it. All over the world, we saw the importance of not leaving your migrant communities out. Because they are your frontline workers and you see them working in the hospitals, you see them driving public transport, you see them providing those essential services of food deliveries...Those were the migrants by and large, all over the world, that were seen. The importance of not leaving migrant communities out was also demonstrated when migrants were forgotten in efforts to get case numbers to zero, when not enough attention was paid to Covid-19 testing in migrant communities.

A lot of the rural migrants in my city live in the informal settlements. The president of the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor, also known as the Slum Dwellers Association, often refers to those living in the informal settlements as the silent army. He says to me, "Mayor, the day we decide we're not coming to work, all of Freetown will close, because no one will be driving your cars, no one will be looking after your children, no one will be cooking your food." Because that's all done by the slum dwellers and the slum dwellers are, in many cases up to 30 percent, 40 percent, internal migrants depending on which slum it is, the more established ones, it's a smaller number, the newer ones, it's a higher number, sometimes the 60s and 70s. They are almost all rural to urban internal migrants. And it's no different to what we saw with Covid in cities around the world. Covid has told us we need to pay attention to our migrants. In some countries we need to know that some

of our taxi drivers are actually doctors and in the time of Covid, it may be useful to have them be doctors and not drive taxis!

“ Covid has told us we need to pay attention to our migrants. In some countries we need to know that some of our taxi drivers are actually doctors, and in the time of Covid, it may be useful to have them be doctors and not drive taxis!”

You are on the leadership board for the Mayors' Migration Council, and you're quite active and vocal in that forum. After being mayor of Freetown, do you have your eyes set on becoming more involved internationally on migration issues, or is that too narrow for you?

No, no, no, my passion is Freetown! My interest in migration is very deep not least because of my personal and family history. I'm a Krio so I'm a descendant of freed slaves who came back to Sierra Leone, to Africa after being in the US via Nova Scotia. I look at it from so many different angles. I will continue to speak to international migration issues, but I am passionate about addressing the structural drivers of migration, and I need to do that from here in Freetown.

A warmer welcome – city planners preparing for future flows

With mixed migration trends set to continue making an important contribution to the growth of urban populations, cities cannot afford to ignore the needs of migrants and refugees in their planning. Indeed, it is imperative that inclusivity be the hallmark of how destination cities prepare for the future.

By Jessica Sadye Wolff¹

In 2020, globally, there are an estimated 272 million international migrants and 79.5 million forcibly displaced persons.² Trends in rural-to-urban migration spurred by climate change and increasingly unsustainable rural livelihoods, combined with moves prompted by broader economic aspirations, are driving people to cities at an unprecedented rate. In 2018, 55 percent of the global population lived in urban areas, a figure that is predicted to rise to 68 percent by 2050.³ Forced migration also causes refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to flee to cities, with 61 percent of refugees and 80 percent of IDPs now living in urban areas.⁴ Urban populations are increasing worldwide, putting pressure on existing city services and compounding concerns about inclusivity for vulnerable or displaced urban populations. This essay explores how cities are planning for current and future arrivals of migrants and refugees in their municipal jurisdiction.

Context and trends

Why people migrate

People who are migrating move to cities seeking security, livelihood opportunities, social connections, access to services and, in some cases, a longer-term home. Depending on the level of resources that individuals already have, some will be able to rely on existing social networks to establish themselves in a new city; others will arrive with limited connections and no financial safety net. When considering pathways to integration and long-term stability for both migrants and refugees, quick access to employment is paramount.⁵

While immigration policy is designed at national and international levels, decisions made at the city level by local governments often have the most tangible impact on the day-to-day experience of a new city resident and present opportunities for integration and longer-term stability. Considerations such as a centralised immigrant services office, schools that offer multi-language learning, and direct representation of immigrant communities in local government are just some of the policies or programs that can be implemented at city level to help improve immigrants' daily lives. In the context of mixed migration, the issue of how to include irregular migrants in city programming and development goals is also a priority and a particular challenge.

The next major destinations

In twenty years, the estimated number of international migrants has increased by over 120 million people, from 150 million people in 2000 to over 272 million as of 2020.⁶ Historically, the majority of migrants have lived in Asia, Europe and North America and we can expect to see sustained high rates of international migration across these regions, following trends in the early 2000s.⁷ For both economic migrants and forcibly displaced populations, the majority of international migration happens regionally, despite pervasive media coverage and fearmongering rhetoric, such as during the 2015 “migration crisis”, suggesting the contrary. In 2019, 88.9 percent of migrants in sub-Saharan Africa and 83.1 percent of migrants in South-Eastern Asia originated from another country in the same region.⁸ When considering forced displacement, 73 percent of

1 Jessica Sadye Wolff is a Program Manager at Stanford University's Immigration Policy Lab.

2 International Organization for Migration (2020) [World Migration Report 2020](#); UNHCR (2020) [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019](#).

3 UN-DESA (2019) [World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision](#).

4 UNHCR (2020) [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019](#).

5 Fokkema, T. & de Haas, H. (2015) [Pre- and Post-Migration Determinants of Socio-Cultural Integration of African Immigrants in Italy and Spain](#). International Migration. Marbach, Hainmueller & Hangartner (2018) [The long-term impact of employment bans on the economic integration of refugees](#). Science Advances.

6 McAuliffe, M. & Khadria, B. (eds) (2020) [World Migration Report 2020](#). International Organization for Migration

7 Ibid.

8 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2019) [International Migration 2019](#).

the world's refugees lived in countries neighboring their country of origin in 2019.⁹ Irregular migration, while hard to quantify, remains a common phenomenon of both intra- and inter-regional movements.¹⁰

Looking forward, the key questions are:

- Where will migration rates increase?
- Where are the next major destinations for urban migration?
- How can cities prepare?

Though the impacts of Covid-19 may temporarily dampen and even reverse migration and urbanisation rates in 2020 due both to depressed interest in and inability to migrate, as well as restrictive immigration policies, migration trends are still tracking toward long-term urban population growth.

Likely scenarios

Data on population growth rates, pressures of climate change, and ongoing conflict can help anticipate, to a degree, future migration patterns. Recent research confirms that increases in GDP per capita in poor countries lead to an increase in emigration, suggesting that the overall migrant stock, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa as well as Central and South Asia, is poised to increase in the next few decades.¹¹ The World Bank estimates that climate change will internally displace more than 143 million people in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia by 2050, potentially creating “hotspots” in nearby cities also vulnerable to sea level rise.¹² The effects of climate change in South Asian countries will simultaneously threaten rural livelihoods, negatively impact living conditions, and destabilise coastal cities, likely driving both rural and urban residents to rapidly expanding cities.¹³ The displacement of Venezuelans to cities across Colombia and Brazil will likely become a protracted situation, especially as other countries have enacted policies to prevent cross-border travel of Venezuelans.¹⁴

Uneven growth

In the next few decades, urban population growth will also be concentrated in a few countries. UN projections indicate that 90 percent of urban population growth between 2018 and 2050 will happen in Asia and Africa; specifically, China, India and Nigeria will see their urban populations grow by 416 million, 255 million and 189 million people respectively.¹⁵ These countries each

already have at least one megacity with a population of more than 10 million people, where city services for existing residents are already overextended.

The most vulnerable cities adjacent to rural communities at high risk of sea level rise, particularly in South Asia, as well as cities hosting refugees from Venezuela and Syria, are likely candidates for an increased arrival of refugees and migrants in the near future. These cities—and their refugee, migrant and long-time residents—would benefit from understanding the practicalities, value, and imperative of building a welcoming and inclusive arrival city.

Thinking inclusively

How do we plan and build welcoming and inclusive arrival cities for regular and irregular migrants, including forcibly displaced populations? An inclusive city ensures that all “plans, policies and programs explicitly include the needs and perspectives of displaced and marginalised residents.”¹⁶ And a welcoming city seeks to “build connections between immigrants and longer-term residents; set goals, monitor impact, and adjust strategies as needed; design for equitable access; and implement in partnership.”¹⁷

Taller hurdles

Generally, planning for and building welcoming arrival cities occurs through design and implementation of urban policies that are inclusive of and accessible to all city residents, including those marginalised due to migration status or displacement. Migrant, refugee, and IDP communities experience unique vulnerabilities as compared to citizen residents, especially since varying legal statuses in their country or city of arrival may not afford them equivalent protection under the law or equal access to local and national services. Combined with instances of prejudice and xenophobia by both government officials and local residents, the barriers to accessing city services are higher for migrants and displaced individuals, often in ways that are invisible or unknown to citizens and officials.

9 UNHCR (2020) [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019](#). The figure takes into account some 3.6 million Venezuelans displaced abroad, regardless of their legal status.

10 McAuliffe M. & Khadria, B. op. cit.

11 Clemens, M. (2020) [The Emigration Life Cycle: How Development Shapes Emigration from Poor Countries](#). Center for Global Development.

12 Rigaud, K. et al (2018) [Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration](#). World Bank.

13 Podesta, J. (2019) [The climate crisis, migration, and refugees](#). The Brookings Institution.

14 Bahar, D. & Dooley, M. (2019) [Venezuela refugee crisis to become the largest and most underfunded in modern history](#). The Brookings Institution.

15 McAuliffe & Khadria, op. cit.

16 Saliber, S. & Wolff, J. (2018) [Urban Refuge: How Cities are Building Inclusive Communities](#). International Rescue Committee.

17 Welcoming America (2016) [The Welcoming Standard & Certified Welcoming](#).

At the same time, migrants and displaced populations in any given city are not monolithic groups. Individual and community needs vary depending on legal status, language, education, access to services, access to existing systems of wealth, social networks, and the duration of time spent in a given city, among other considerations.

Better by design

As the level of urbanisation continues to increase globally and rates of protracted displacement rise, cities will be presented with a critical choice to support all urban residents regardless of citizenship, and to design welcoming arrival cities that present pathways to integration. By focusing on planning and policy development that includes migrants and refugees at the city level, we can identify tangible, actionable steps that have been proven to improve not only immigrants' integration and outcomes, but local economic development and social cohesion, as well.

While we can anticipate some future destinations of urban migration and forced displacement based on trends, unexpected shocks such as sudden-onset climate events or new outbreaks of conflict may alter migratory patterns, creating new "arrival cities" without significant histories of urban migration. Especially for these cities, local leadership, inclusive urban planning, and dedicated funding will determine if they actually become welcoming cities that enable arriving migrants and refugees to establish themselves and engage in the local community. Creating pathways for integration and long-term stability will affect individuals' ability to substantively engage in the local economy, politics and culture.

The costs of failure

Failure to do so could quickly lead to overstretched local services, precarious livelihoods and living situations for migrants and refugees, widespread underemployment, and rising animosity from long-term residents. These risks are especially great in cities that will experience rapid population growth and do not plan to welcome new city residents. Building inclusive urban destination cities will not only improve individuals' ability to establish a sustainable livelihood and engage locally, but it will also promote wider community cohesion and steps towards sustainable urban development.

Arguably, building inclusive cities does not require new strategies of urban planning or innovative technology/design/service solutions because strong examples of effective strategies already exist. However, in order to plan and build welcoming arrival cities successfully, cities must align the necessary funds, capacity and commitment around matters of arrival, housing, employment and citizenship. Prioritising inclusivity requires commitment and political will, and the finances to act upon good intentions.

Yet inclusive urban planning is just one component of a larger migration system, and building communities that are truly inclusive to refugees and migrants also requires comprehensive refugee and migration policies. Only by developing holistic systems at the national and regional level will true inclusion of all refugees and migrants be possible.

Three priorities for best practice

To achieve this genuine inclusion, cities must demonstrate **leadership** to shape local narratives and advocacy efforts; prioritise the development and implementation of **inclusive city plans**; and commit and generate **funding** for expanded city services. Though rapid urbanisation can intensify needs and present challenges to scaling, cities as varied and far-flung as Bogotá, Salt Lake City, Bangui and Athens offer encouraging examples of inclusive city planning in these three primary areas. These cases constitute a living manual of actionable best practices, as well as resources, to build a welcoming city.

1. Leadership: control the narrative

One of the most powerful and cost-effective strategies a city can deploy is to lead with a proactive narrative of inclusivity and engagement. Local leaders can define the narrative and guide collective action to elevate conversations around cities' role in supporting urban migrants and displaced populations. Mayors, specifically, set the tone for community building in their city. Among many examples of inclusive leadership is Giuseppina Nicolini, the mayor of Lampedusa, who won a UNESCO prize for her local leadership and management of refugees arriving to her small Italian island, while calling upon larger European Union institutions to be more accountable.¹⁸ Other leaders, particularly Marvin Rees of Bristol (UK), and Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles, for example, frequently use their platform to speak up on behalf of their city's diverse residents.¹⁹

18 UNESCO (2020) [Giuseppina Nicolini](#). An interview with Nicolini appears on page 184 of this Review.

19 Marvin Rees is interviewed in this Review on page 258.

Resisting restrictions, countering hostility

Outspoken city leaders can assert a positive message, even amidst restrictive national immigration policy. In the United States (US), Executive Order 13888 on Enhancing State and Local Involvement in Refugee Resettlement was issued in September 2019, establishing an unprecedented requirement that local and state governments approve in writing any refugee resettlement in their jurisdictions.²⁰ Immediately, there was an outpouring of statements from mayors and state governors affirming the importance of refugees who had been resettled in their communities.²¹ Such public declarations not only indicate to recently resettled refugees that a city has set an intention for inclusion, but they also demonstrate to long-time residents that welcoming new residents and supporting their integration is a local priority.

Research suggests that a sudden arrival of refugees can increase citizens' hostility towards refugees and immigrants and their support for restrictive immigration policies.²² Local governments and elected officials can counteract pervasive and toxic messages of xenophobia and help build welcoming arrival cities by demonstrating leadership in advocacy efforts to enumerate a city's values, and shape local narratives around migration. In Barcelona, the municipal government launched their "Barcelona Ciutat Refugi" plan in September 2015 to "gear the city up to receiving and assisting refugees, providing the necessary services and guaranteeing their rights."²³ The city has widely advertised the importance of local resident engagement and commitment towards building a welcoming city, asking its residents to proactively engage at both city and personal levels.

At the international level, cities are pursuing collective action and advocacy through the Mayors Migration Council, a platform for elevating city perspectives in international migration policy discussions. The aim is to formalise cities' access to such conversations, while building their capacity to advocate for representation and funding in national, regional and international policy processes.²⁴

The role of international aid agencies

There is a wide range of actors who hold critical roles in building a welcoming city. As well as city governments, these include immigrant, refugee or IDP community groups; local NGOs; private companies; and international aid organisations. While the latter have historically tended to focus their activities in rural areas, they are now increasingly present in cities due to the urban nature of displacement. Typically, humanitarian response is divided into sectors (such as shelter, food security, health, livelihoods, water and sanitation, etc.) in an effort to build inter-agency partnerships and enhance effectiveness in emergency settings, where local government may have a limited or nonexistent presence. However, in urban settings, such sector-specific activity risks duplicating the services provided by city administrations.

In response, "area-based assessment" (ABA), a multi-sectoral, inclusive and participatory development approach, has recently gained recognition within the humanitarian community.²⁵ Focusing on delivering and improving services for all residents in a defined geographic area advances the message of inclusivity and can reduce animosity between migrant or displaced populations and long-time local residents.

In 2018, AGORA, a joint project by IMPACT initiatives and ACTED, conducted an ABA in Bangui, the capital of Central African Republic, where more than 800,000 people had been internally displaced due to sectarian conflict ignited five years earlier.²⁶ As of 2020, approximately 20 percent of the country's population is displaced, due to both armed conflict and natural disasters.²⁷ Amid decreasing violence, residents began to return to the capital, which required renewed attention to providing basic services and reintegration support. AGORA conducted an ABA in two neighborhoods whose residents were displaced to better understand the capacities of local service providers and

20 US Department of State (2020) [State and Local Consents Under Executive Order 13888](#).

21 See, for example, Catholic Charities of Northern Kansas (2019) [Kansas Officials Show Support for Local Refugee Resettlement](#). Several refugee resettlement groups sued the Trump administration over the executive order, contending it "threaten[ed] to systematically dismantle the organizations that have spent decades developing networks, expertise, and resources to carry out the American ideal of welcoming refugees". See: Hesson, T. (2019) [Lawsuit challenges Trump order requiring local sign-off on refugees](#). Reuters. In January 2020, a federal judge in the state of Maryland blocked the executive order, saying it violated the Refugee Act of 1980. See: Allyn, B. (2020) [Judge Blocks Trump's Executive Order Allowing Local Officials To Reject Refugees](#). NPR.

22 Hangartner, D. et. al. (2019) [Does Exposure to the Refugee Crisis Make Natives More Hostile?](#) American Political Science Review.

23 See the city's website, [Barcelona, City of Refuge](#); Barcelona Ciutat Refugi (2020) [The Plan](#).

24 To learn more about the Mayor's Migration Council, visit their [website](#)

25 Schell, J., Hilmi, M. & Hirano, S. (2020) [Area-based approaches: an alternative in contexts of urban displacement](#). Forced Migration Review.

26 IMPACT (2020) [Using Area-Based Approaches to Support Returns and Recovery in Bangui, Central Africa Republic](#).

27 Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (2020) [Central African Republic](#).

household-level needs.²⁸ After an initial data collection effort, AGORA collaborated with local authorities and other partners to craft recovery plans with short, medium- and long-term goals responding to the assessment.²⁹

In cities with significant displaced populations, there are often many international aid organisations working to provide services. By design and mandate, their presence is intended to be temporary as they operate in times of conflict or other emergency, though these missions can last for decades. Given their tenure in cities and access to funding streams often beyond the direct reach of local governments, it is the responsibility of these organisations to proactively partner with cities to integrate their efforts with local city plans and service provision to prevent duplication and redundancy. These organisations must ensure that their efforts advance existing city development goals and do not create parallel pseudo-city governments that could exacerbate social tensions.

For example, since the beginning of 2015, many established and newly arrived NGOs began working in Athens to support arriving migrants and asylum seekers, often with overlapping mandates and areas of operation. To coordinate efforts, the city authorities established the Athens Coordination Center for Migrant and Refugee issues (ACCMR). The goal was “efficient coordination between the municipal authorities and stakeholders operating within the city in order to shape the necessary conditions for the smooth integration of migrants and refugees currently living in Athens.”³⁰ After learning about the ACCMR at an international city-exchange event, municipal authorities in the Ugandan capital adapted the model and created the Kampala Coordination Forum for Displacement, Migration and Urban Refugees.³¹

2. Urban planning: think inclusivity from the get-go

The central tenets of urban planning—community engagement, data, and strategic design—are even more relevant when building an inclusive city for migrants and displaced populations.

Community engagement

In cities where tensions can arise between citizen and non-citizen residents, the lack of electoral accountability can lead to underfunding and underprioritising critical services for migrants and displaced people. Without the right to vote in nearly all countries, migrants and refugees are disenfranchised in local politics, making intentional community engagement even more critical. As a rare example, immigrants living in Buenos Aires are entitled to vote in municipal elections, though the bureaucratic requirements of registering to vote remain a significant barrier leading to low rates of electoral participation by non-citizens.³²

The lack of electoral representation for migrants and refugees reveals two implications for cities: 1) in order to design services that are truly inclusive, local governments must feel accountable to all city residents, not just those who vote in elections, and 2) other forms of direct engagement with migrant communities, including irregular migrants, is critical for grounding city services and directing them to be more relevant and reducing barriers for all city residents.

Customary approaches to community engagement, such as open-invitation community meetings or online surveys, may not be particularly inclusive due to erroneous assumptions about migrants’ awareness of certain city offices and their responsibilities, or limited multilingual accessibility. Dedicated outreach and relationship-building between city officials and migrant communities, in formal and informal settings, as well as allocating resources to language accessibility across city government offices, is paramount for effective and diverse community engagement. For example, the government of the US city of Boston has not only neighborhood-specific community representatives, but also staff as designated contacts for immigrant communities in the city.³³ In situations where direct engagement with city governments is challenging or could be risky for individuals, such as migrants without legal documentation, engaging with community organisations that can represent collective needs can be effective.

New American Economy, a New York-based immigration policy research and advocacy organisation, created the Cities Index which evaluates local policies for immigrant inclusion across five areas (government leadership, economic empowerment, inclusivity, community and legal support) in the 100 largest cities in the US. The index compares differences in socioeconomic outcomes of immigrants and US-born citizens in each city,

28 IMPACT (2020) [After Years of Violence Bangui is on the Path to Recovery – Guided by Data](#).

29 Ibid.

30 Athens Coordination Center for Migrant & Refugee issues (2020) [Coordination in Support of Integration](#).

31 Saliber, S. & Wolff, J., op. cit.

32 Caramani, D. & Grotz, F. (eds) (2018) *Voting Rights in the Era of Globalization*. Abingdon (UK): Routledge

33 See the Boston’s Neighborhood Services [website](#) for more details.

identifying those with the most inclusive policies and strongest pathways to integration, thereby revealing best practices that can be applied elsewhere. Of the 10 cities with the highest index score, eight offer comprehensive policies for community engagement, such as setting up a local office for immigrant services, ensuring immigrant representation in government positions, and liaising with immigrant communities directly.³⁴

Good plans need sound data

Obtaining accurate data on migrants and displaced populations at the local level is challenging. Most data on migrants and refugees from national censuses or international migrant stock calculations are quantified at the national level. There are often disincentives—such as concerns over legal status or fear of deportation for irregular migrants—to participate in formal population surveys. However, working toward an accurate estimation of the migrant or displaced population is essential for planning and budgeting.

Without systematised, local-level data, cities must dedicate resources and staff toward data collection efforts to ensure services are designed and located appropriately. REACH is a humanitarian research organisation that works with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to gather city- and neighborhood-level data and conduct area-based assessments in the absence of existing data to guide local planning. In 2018, REACH completed participatory mapping exercises and focus group interviews to identify neighborhoods in Brazilian cities with a high concentration of displaced Venezuelans.³⁵ In 2019, the research was expanded to a representative sample of Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants in order to conduct a thorough socioeconomic and vulnerability assessment to inform opportunities for local integration and humanitarian support.³⁶

Data can also be used to strengthen city narratives around inclusion. New American Economy quantifies the economic impact of immigrants in US cities and advises cities to use these data as an evidence-based approach to ground conversations about immigrant integration at the city-level. For example, in 2017, the 152,558 immigrants living in the Salt Lake City Metro Area had a combined spending power of \$3.1 billion in 2017 and contributed over \$900 million in taxes.³⁷ While immigrants also bring intangible and unquantifiable benefits beyond economic value to a city, this is one way to tangibly account for their impact and to present an evidence-based argument to counter negative opinions and advocate for inclusive policies at the local and national level.

Mainstreaming migration response

Embedding inclusive policies into city plans ensures that building a welcoming city becomes an overall urban development goal and a critical aspect of urban resilience. Examples include:

- The Kampala Capital City Authority released the Strategic Response to Displacement, Migration and Resettlement in April 2018. This was the Ugandan capital's first ever plan to acknowledge that its refugee population (most recently estimated at over 98,000 in 2017), as well as its migrant population, have both unique needs that require support from city government as well as needs that overlap with those of the host population. For example, there is a dire need for more affordable housing and improved sanitation systems in neighborhoods where refugees and poor Ugandans alike live in under-resourced informal settlements.³⁸
- The City of Athens ratified the Strategic Action Plan for the integration of migrants and refugees as well as the Preparedness and Response Mechanism for the management of potential refugee crises in February 2019. Both were designed by the Athens Coordination Center for Migrants and Refugee issues, which brings together 92 different organisations across the city.³⁹ The Strategic Action Plan outlines goals to strengthen the city's service provision based on mapping efforts to identify existing service coverage and gaps. The Preparedness and Response Mechanism establishes preparatory actions and systems, including a risk matrix of potential situations as well as protocols to identify which city offices will be engaged in a response, so the municipality can respond successfully to future refugee crises.

From paper to practice: four case studies

In order to be successful, city plans must go beyond frameworks and policies towards implementation of programs that provide expanded services for migrants and forcibly displaced people. The examples below highlight practices across four distinct sectors of city policy.

- **Arrival:** In Bogotá, the High Council for the Rights of Victims, Peace and Reconciliation was established in 2011 to provide services for IDPs arriving in the Colombian capital fleeing armed conflict. Upon arrival at any one of nine dedicated arrival centres across the city, individuals are offered support and evaluated by psychosocial and legal teams who then determine

34 New American Economy (2020) [About the Cities Index](#). The eight cities with comprehensive policies for community engagement are: San Francisco, Chicago, Portland, New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, Jersey City, and Denver.

35 For an example, see: REACH (2018) [Situation Overview IV: Venezuelan asylum seekers and migrants living outside of shelters, Boa Vista city](#).

36 For an example, see: UNHCR & REACH (2019) [Situation Overview: Profiles of Venezuelan Persons of Concern in Pacaraima, Roraima State, July 2019](#).

37 New American Economy (2020) [Immigrants and the economy in Salt Lake City Metro Area](#).

38 Archer, D. (2018) [Kampala sets example for how cities can help refugees](#), International Institute for Environment and Development.

39 Athens Partnership (2019) [Athens City council ratifies ACCMR proposals for effective refugee response](#).

which immediate services may be required (such as food assistance and transportation).⁴⁰ The city's High Council also coordinates with other city government units to ensure that appropriate accommodations are made to ensure accessibility for IDPs including support finding employment to establish financial security.

- **Housing:** In Germany, in order to prevent widespread homelessness among thousands of asylum seekers arriving in 2014, the federal government approved section 246 of the National Building Code, a new federal land-use policy to build temporary refugee housing in non-residential areas.⁴¹ Under this new provision, Hamburg built over 15,000 new places in temporary housing sites across the city, while also increasing construction for additional permanent social housing facilities.⁴² These facilities were initially built under the temporary provisions of section 246 and intended for asylum seeker accommodation, but will ultimately become a part of the city's social housing stock, available for citizens as well.
- **Employment:** In Canada, the Integration Office for Newcomers in Montreal established 'Employ Nexus,' a program which offers consultation services to local businesses struggling with employee recruitment and encourages hiring of immigrants. Furthermore, immigrants with specific employment barriers are offered six-month internships to gain local work experience in their professional field.⁴³
- **Citizenship:** In Los Angeles, the city government established New Americans Centers in city libraries where Department of Justice-accredited librarians provide advice on immigrant rights and citizenship. In 2018, the facilities had already served 46,000 immigrant residents and the mayor announced the programs' expansion across the city.⁴⁴

Vacancy pitfalls

It is critical that plans and investments are made in alignment with actual destinations; otherwise, governments risk investing in underutilised or even entirely vacant urban areas. National governments are currently building and trying to attract internal migrants in China, or international migrants in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, to new cities to prevent overcrowding of existing cities and to diversify economic hubs.⁴⁵ However,

without existing social, cultural and economic draws, the newly planned cities run the risk of remaining vacant for a long time. This phenomenon is especially apparent in the prevalence of China's "ghost cities"; while the exact number is unknown due to restricted data, estimates suggest potentially hundreds of thousands of new apartments in planned, but unpopulated cities across the country.⁴⁶

Challenges for cities of transit

The examples above focus on destination cities where community development and inclusionary efforts entail long-term investment in and engagement with new local residents. However, determining how to allocate limited city resources in a transit city that may see high numbers of transitory migrants, especially irregular migrants, is even more challenging. In these cities, the probability of irregular migration may be higher, resulting in a population that is highly vulnerable and at great risk of exploitation along their journey. For example, approximately 920,000 migrants and refugees traveled through Belgrade between 2015 and 2016.⁴⁷ Other transit cities, such as Agadez in Niger and Cúcuta in Colombia, experience mixed migration flows. Significant numbers of migrants pass through, yet many also stay in such cities, due to varying circumstances including limited financial resources for further travel or, more recently, borders closed (often only ostensibly) because of Covid-19.⁴⁸

Even transitory migrants depend on and can strain city services for temporary accommodation (if available), health care, food, and sanitation. Such significant population movements challenge existing city systems. Due to the (intended) temporary nature of these migrants, however, transit cities will likely prioritise investment in more short-term arrival procedures and safe temporary housing options, rather than in longer-term goals of employment and citizenship. Transit cities should collaborate with local and international development organisations in order to best serve transitory populations. UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, and NGOs often set up centralised locations for information and service provision in transit cities, including Agadez and Cúcuta. Local organisations also provide essential support for refugees and migrants. For example, seeing a gap in existing city services, a volunteer collective called the Baobab Experience in Rome established basic medical, legal and social services for people who lacked access to

40 Alta Consejería para los Derechos de las Víctimas, la Paz y la Reconciliación (2019) [Asistencia & Atención](#).

41 Sprandel, A. (2018) [Housing and integrating refugees in Hamburg](#). The Veolia Institute Review.

42 Wolff, J. (2020) [Urban planning for refugee housing: responding to urgent needs](#). Forced Migration Review.

43 100 Resilient Cities (2018) [Global Migration: Resilient cities at the forefront](#).

44 Mayor Eric Garcetti/City of Los Angeles (2018) [Mayor Garcetti launches new initiative to expand support for immigrant Angelinos](#).

45 Shepard, W. (2019) [Should we build cities from scratch?](#) The Guardian.

46 Chi, G. et al (2015) ["Ghost cities" analysis based on positioning data in China](#). Williams, S. et al (2019) [Ghost cities of China: Identifying urban vacancy through social media data](#). Cities.

47 GMF Editorial Staff (2018) [Refugees, international experts, and locals come together in Serbia](#). German Marshall Fund of the United States.

48 Baddour, D. & Huang, P. (2020) [Coronavirus brings new worries for Venezuelans in Colombian shanty town](#). New Humanitarian. REACH (2020) [Briefing Note: Impact of COVID-19 on mixed migration in the Agadez region, Niger](#).

official immigration centres, serving more than 35,000 people in 2016.⁴⁹

Locations initially regarded as transit cities, however, could morph into arrival cities when transitory populations for a variety of reasons tend to stay more permanently. When this happens, local governments will need to react and emphasise employment and citizenship efforts for these groups. Effective responses for transit cities will vary depending on available resources, the local political situation, the intended duration, actual duration and number of refugees and migrants passing through who end up staying, but prioritising protection of all migrants should be an imperative in all cities.

3. Funding: an ever-scarcer commodity

In order to act on stated intentions of inclusion, cities require funding to expand existing services to accommodate new urban residents, and to design and execute new inclusive services. However, city budgets for immigrant, refugee and IDP services, if at all present, are small, and, in many cities, getting smaller. City budgeting is a complicated political process, reflecting the nuances of voting residents' and local leadership preferences. For a global report on inclusive city planning, the International Rescue Committee interviewed 23 local governments in cities with significant populations of migrants or displaced persons; only five had dedicated budgets for refugee or immigrant services.⁵⁰ When asked what would be the single most important additional input to serve their refugee or IDP residents, half of the cities in the IRC report said they needed greater access to financial resources. Funding for inclusive city services needs to be an explicit priority of local leadership and the reality of increasing city budgets for these services is dependent on local political will and budget constraints.

Win-win decisions

Cities almost constantly operate with limited resources and underfunded budget lines and face challenging decisions about program prioritisation. It is critical to demonstrate how prioritising access for particularly vulnerable groups in the city actually improves accessibility and inclusion for all residents. The needs of newly arrived migrants or displaced persons often overlap with other vulnerable groups living in a city. As newly arrived migrants and refugees often require inexpensive initial accommodation, many will move into neighborhoods, usually far from the city centre, already underserved

in terms of quality housing and city services. Targeting specific services and aid programs towards one group of city residents can directly or indirectly elevate tensions among city residents by exacerbating inequalities and increasing local competition. For example, providing rental grants to Syrian refugees in Lebanon can increase rental prices in the housing market overall, negatively impacting poor Lebanese households.⁵¹ Emphasising neighborhood-based planning, which dedicates funding to build up services accessible to all residents in a given geographic area, can be a more effective approach.

Go to the top

A critical source of financing is an infusion of national funding specifically allocated to urban areas experiencing high rates of in-migration. In April 2019, President Iván Duque of Colombia announced an investment of more than \$229 million across multiple lines of credit from national banks for border departments and cities which have received more than 1.5 million displaced Venezuelans.⁵² The funding will be allocated toward the development of new jobs, humanitarian aid, health care and sanitation, and capacity building initiatives which would likely not be possible at scale without supplementary national funding.

Creative fundraising

Given limited local budgets, cities must look to alternative sources, such as public-private partnerships or collaborations with development and humanitarian agencies. Since such organisations are mandated to serve displaced populations they offer opportunities to identify program synergies to use multiple funding sources to expand services to advance city development plans. For example, since 2011, over 600,000 Syrian refugees fled to Jordan, with more than 270,000 living in the capital city, Amman.⁵³ The rapid population growth aggravated an already overburdened solid waste management system as waste levels increased by 25 percent.⁵⁴ In order to expand the city's landfill capacity, and to contribute to other important infrastructural developments, a €50 million loan was co-financed by donors including the UK Department for International Development, the European Union, and the US Agency for International Development.⁵⁵ By tapping into these streams of financing, the Greater Amman Municipality was able to address not only an urgent need triggered by the recent population influx, but also to enhance a critical municipal service more broadly.

In 2016, as a part of the Grand Bargain (an agreement among several of the largest donors and aid providers

49 Paynter, E. (2018) *The Liminal Lives of Europe's Transit Migrants*. Contexts.

50 Saliber, S. & Wolff, J. op. cit.

51 Guay, J. (2015) *Social cohesion between Syrian refugees and urban host communities in Lebanon and Jordan*. World Vision.

52 Diario Las Americas (2019) *Duque anuncia plan de inversión de \$229 millones para la frontera con Venezuela*.

53 UNHCR (2020) *Registered Persons of Concern Refugees and asylum seekers in Jordan*.

54 Zgheib, N. (2017) *EBRD strengthens Jordan's infrastructure in contribution to address refugee crisis*. European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

55 Ibid.

to guide and reform humanitarian response for the subsequent five years) signatories committed to providing 25 percent of program funding directly to local and national governments for implementation. However, in 2019, only 10 of 52 signatories met that target, suggesting that a significant amount of funding that could be used directly by cities to expand their existing services is not yet being channelled to local authorities.⁵⁶ Donors note that a primary challenge in allocating greater funding directly to local actors is a lack of capacity, reflecting the importance of pairing funding with training and capacity building in certain contexts.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Migration will be a defining feature of the next several decades. As outlined in the examples above, building welcoming cities for all people in mixed migration flows depends on commitment and political will. For cities that do demonstrate leadership and initiative in advancing plans for a welcoming urban environment, funding will likely remain the most significant barrier to expanding inclusive services.

Importantly, inclusive urban planning doesn't exist in a vacuum and should not be seen as a substitute or band-aid for comprehensive migration policy at national and regional levels. To fully support refugees and migrants of varying backgrounds, legal status, and long-term aspirations, comprehensive migration policies are required, including pathways to regularity and residency. Mayors, local governments, and other city planners must take the initiative to work towards a welcoming city, but such efforts are most effective when migrants and refugees can safely arrive and, if they so choose, stay.

⁵⁶ Metcalfe-Hough et al (2020) [Grand Bargain annual independent report 2020](#). Overseas Development Institute Humanitarian Policy Group.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Interview

Collective responsibilities

Enabling holistic governmental and societal approaches that benefit all members of society, including refugees and migrants, is a priority for **Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, for whom the fight against urban poverty and inequality is one that should engage everyone.



Maimunah Mohd Sharif has been the executive director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) since December 2017. She has previously served as mayor of the City Council of Penang Island, Malaysia, having risen through the ranks of local government from her entry position in 1985 as a town planner in the Municipal Council of Penang Island.

UN-Habitat has put cities at the centre of its agenda for a long time, but since when has the organisation seen migration as an urban important issue?

Migration has always been a major driver of urbanisation. It is UN-Habitat's mandate to assist governments manage the challenges of rapid urban growth, particularly if the intensity of growth is due to migration. This means supporting governmental authorities to develop inclusive governance structures, addressing issues around informal settlements, planning for sustainable growth and ensuring adequate access to housing and basic services.

UN-Habitat brings its expertise to global initiatives such as the UN Migration Network and the World Bank-led Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development. We work with cities and countries to confront the challenges of displacement and ensure

that urban migration is harnessed as a positive contribution to the life of the city.

What kind of activities and campaigns has UN-Habitat been involved in in relation to migration and cities?

In most countries and regions, migrants move to urban areas. Our contribution comes from our urban knowledge and expertise, and our ability to provide innovative and evidence-based urban solutions, both normative and operational.

Migration to cities happens both in humanitarian and development contexts. UN-Habitat's experience is particularly useful when rapid influxes to cities leads to an urban crisis, and when government authorities, specifically at local level, don't have the necessary resources or capacity to cope or provide basic services, housing and shelter to new arrivals.

Urban solutions can only be developed in a multi-sectoral approach and strong cooperation of different government levels is needed. UN-Habitat has a strong convening role with key urban decision makers at local and national levels. Even in humanitarian settings we aim to build the capacity of local actors and influence long-term change at policy, operational and implementation level. Through inclusive and area-based approaches, we ensure that vulnerable host communities also benefit from interventions to enhance social cohesion.

“Urban solutions can only be developed in a multi-sectoral approach and strong cooperation of different government levels is needed.”

Urban solutions can't be developed in silos. Due to its technical expertise in rapid urban growth, UN-Habitat can play an important coordination role in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as migrants often have similar needs to host communities in vulnerable situations.

Could you sum up what the New Urban Agenda is for our readers and how important is it to the issue of migration and cities?¹

The New Urban Agenda is an action-oriented document that aims to mobilise member states and other key stakeholders to drive sustainable urban development at the local level. It can be seen as a roadmap to accelerate the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals.

It highlights the need to support migrants, but also takes in consideration the situation of host communities. Under the New Urban Agenda UN member states committed to ensuring “full respect for the human rights of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants and [to] support their host cities in the spirit of international cooperation.”

It mentions the need to recognise both the challenges of large movements of people into towns and cities but also the significant social, economic and cultural contributions they bring to urban life.

Member states also committed to ensuring safe, orderly and regular migration through planned and well-managed migration policies and to support local authorities to find ways to help migrants make a positive contribution.

Often there appears to be a contradiction between national immigration policy and municipal treatment of those arriving in cities in mixed flows. Is this based on ideological differences or just practical necessity?

Migration policies are national-level responsibilities, but many services are provided by local authorities. In many migration and displacement contexts, local authorities are the first to respond to the needs of people that migrate to or transit through their cities. They have to manage to respond to and balance the needs of migrants and host communities. Local authorities often work closely with civil society and the private sector to meet the needs of those arriving.

Local authorities are rarely consulted in national migration policy development, and national responses to migration often do not take into account the situation in the arrival cities. The local context needs to be more prominent in policy processes and decisions. Recent global frameworks, from the New Urban Agenda to the Global Compact for Safe, Regular and Orderly Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees acknowledge this. City and local government networks such as United Cities and Local Governments and the Mayors Migration Council are now formally included in global dialogues on migration related topics.

“Migration has shown to have a positive impact on social and economic development in cities. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the fears of host populations.”

For many cities, the issue of migrants and refugees appears to be viewed as a problem, often a political problem. Is this only an issue of perception, or are there concrete problems facing cities receiving significant numbers of migrants and refugees?

In some contexts, rapid urban population growth can be challenging due to perceived or real competition for jobs and livelihood opportunities, housing or land and services or infrastructure. This competition can be “politicised” and used for advancing political agendas, leading to mistrust, marginalisation and discrimination.

Migration has shown to have a positive impact on social and economic development in cities. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the fears of host populations. It is key to ensure that any action taken in development or humanitarian contexts benefits both migrants and host communities in vulnerable situations

1 The New Urban Agenda was adopted by UN Member States at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development (Habitat III) on 20 October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly two months later.

Interview

Maimunah Mohd Sharif

and that representatives of all communities are included in decision-making processes.

Cities encounter migrants and refugees in many different ways in different parts of the world. Can you offer some examples that bring out these contrasts of extreme differences in the various locations UN-Habitat works?

In Iraq, many internally displaced people and specifically Yazidi returnees faced challenges regarding land tenure rights, which then also increased the possibility of conflict within communities. In Somalia, the absence of adequate, affordable, and accessible housing for returning migrants and internally displaced people was one [pressing] challenge. In Latin America, many cities struggled with the provision of services due to the rapid influx of Venezuelan migrants.

What do you and/or UN-Habitat feel about cities that have high levels of migrant labour without any facility or intention for migrants to integrate or have channels for family unification or residency? Is this just another model of interaction for cities and migrants?

Labour migration can have positive impacts both for the countries of destination as well as countries of origin as many migrants send home remittances to support their families.

“ While the right to migrate for the purposes of work does not imply the right of residency and family reunification, it is important that the human rights of labour migrants are respected. ”

While the right to migrate for the purposes of work does not imply the right of residency and family reunification, it is important that the human rights of labour migrants are respected. This includes labour rights, as well as the right to adequate housing, basic services (including health services) and the right of participation in local decision-making processes.

Our work has strong impact on local economic development and the well-being of people in urban areas in areas such as housing and the safety and inclusiveness of public spaces. We seek to ensure that no-one, including migrant populations, even those transiting or residing in cities temporarily, is left behind.

In what ways do you think the Covid-19 pandemic is affecting progress made to date in relation to migration and cities? Has it caused significant setbacks?

Covid-19 has highlighted inequalities regarding access to services, adequate housing, labour rights and information. And it will continue to have major socio-economic impacts including on employment.

“ Covid-19 has highlighted inequalities regarding access to services, adequate housing, labour rights and information. And it will continue to have major socio-economic impacts including on employment. ”

Migrants and in particular those in irregular migration situations or informally employed are specifically vulnerable. They often live in inadequate, overcrowded living environments without access to water or sanitation. And they can face specific challenges when accessing services due to their migration status or being stuck at previously open borders.

Many cities have supported migrant communities during the Covid-19 pandemic: they have expanded citizenships, included migrants in service provision, or have increased migrants' access to housing in order to avoid homelessness.

At the same time, the contribution of migrants to our cities has become clearer during the Covid-19 crisis: many migrants work in crucial sectors, including health, food or agriculture, sales or transport or other basic services. The widely recognised work of care givers, nurses and doctors—many of them migrants—will hopefully help to change public opinion on migrants.

Were you surprised by the scale of reverse migration out of some cities back to the countryside seen in 2020 due to the pandemic? Are you assuming this is merely temporary?

Nobody could have foreseen this pandemic or its impacts on every aspect of our lives. The reverse migration to rural areas highlights the challenges in poor urban areas where migrants and the urban poor have no access to water, sanitation nor space for physical distancing.

When people lost their jobs, they couldn't afford to live in urban areas anymore so going home was the only option. In many countries, the return migration to rural areas brought economic and social challenges and helped spread the virus.

Some countries have been successful in reducing the spread of the pandemic due to lockdowns, but in other contexts, we saw that trying to keep people from migrating is not possible.

“**Reverse migration to rural areas highlights the challenges in poor urban areas where migrants and the urban poor have no access to water, sanitation nor space for physical distancing.**”

Do you think mayors and municipal managers were given sufficient voice in the planning and drafting of the global compacts, especially the Global Compact for Migration? Do you see this changing in the future, in terms of their involvement in global decision making?

The process leading to both global compacts was long and local authorities were given a voice. It is difficult to judge if they had a “sufficient” voice. However, there has been great progress in involving local authorities as well as civil society and private sector in drawing up global frameworks.

During the drafting process of the Global Compact for Migration, mayors from all over the world came together at several Mayoral Forums on Mobility, Migration and Development, with the fifth Forum taking place at the same time as the summit for adopting the migration compact, in December 2018. It ended with the signing of the Mayors’ Declaration which outlines cities’ and other local and regional authorities’ commitments to contribute to the achievement of both global compacts.

Local authorities are now also part of the Mayors Mechanism of the Global Forum on Migration and Development and actively contribute to the UN Migration Network’s working groups. This gives them a strong role in monitoring and shaping the implementation of the compacts.

What role does UN-Habitat play in implementing the Global Compact for Migration?

We are engaged in the global implementation frameworks, including the UN Migration Network, but also active in different regional structures for advancing the compact’s objectives. Our normative products and guidance documents contribute to global knowledge platforms and mechanisms for the compact. UN-Habitat with the World Health Organization is co-leading the working group of the UN Migration Network on “Access to Services” and contributing to two other working groups.

Then there are our urban migration and displacement related projects under the different thematic areas that are developed in line with the compact’s objectives and implemented in partnership with other UN agencies and other development and humanitarian actors. In our current strategic plan, we put a strong emphasis on

urban migration-related topics and improving the lives of migrants and displaced persons.

To advance UN-Habitat’s operational and normative work on urban migration, we are currently developing a flagship programme on urban migration, which is titled “Inclusive cities: Enhancing the positive impact of urban migration”. It is designed to enable countries and cities to harness the potential of migration and ensure a human-rights and sustainable urban development approach.

Should cities be gearing up for a future of increased migration and new arrivals of refugees as an inevitable continuation of historic trends? And if so, to what extent do you think climate change will affect the process?

Migration and human mobility is not a new phenomenon; and people have been moving for centuries to find better living environments and improved livelihoods. This will continue as long as inequalities, natural and human made disaster persist, and as long as there are unmet labour and skills demands and employment opportunities in cities.

Climate change will certainly be among one of the main reasons for migration and displacement. Climate change impacts agricultural production and rural livelihoods. We have also seen an increase in natural disasters that lead to displacement with those from rural areas settling permanently in cities.

UN-Habitat is also working on integrated territorial development approaches and strengthening urban-rural linkages. By fostering capacities and creating opportunities in rural towns and small or intermediate cities, people have choices and can find non-farming/agricultural jobs also in rather rural areas.

At the same time we see that many people in vulnerable situations, including migrants and displaced people, who have moved to urban areas are at risk of climate change impacts when settling in areas that are prone to risks such as flooding or landslides. We need to ensure that cities are more resilient to shocks of any kind.

If you were the mayor of a large city, what would you prioritise as a critical aspect of meeting the challenges of migrant and refugee influxes, many of whom may be undocumented?

There is no “one size fits all” approach in urban areas and authorities need to respond to their challenges within the existing legal and policy environment based on their resources and capacity.

We have seen many local authorities coming up with innovative and tailor-made solutions for their

Interview

Maimunah Mohd Sharif

specific challenges including regarding undocumented migrants, working in strong cooperation with civil society, private sector and other relevant stakeholders such as academia and media – for changing the discourse on migrants.

But let me refer to my own experiences, as mayor of Penang, in Malaysia. Penang, when I was mayor and president of the Municipal Council, attracted many people, both from within Malaysia and international migrants. The global compacts were not yet in place, but the New Urban Agenda, with its “people at the centre”, action-oriented approach, gave concrete guidance for sustainable and inclusive urban growth.

Malaysia is a multi-cultural society and Penang’s economy thrived, so any additional workforce was very welcome. As a mayor, my job was to ensure the human rights of all the inhabitants of my city. I worked with international organisations to ensure we had accurate data on our population growth, so we could respond to the basic needs of our citizens and new arrivals and plan for adequate service provision. My key priorities were access to adequate housing and basic services, access to decent work, security of land tenure and fostering social inclusion. I proposed investments into public infrastructure as well as social services, to ensure that development would be benefitting all inhabitants of my city.

In Malaysia, we have a strong coordination between different government levels, a well-functioning civil society and good level of cooperation with our private sector actors, so I can strongly relate to the Guiding Principles in the Global Compact for Migration.

In my role as Executive Director of UN-Habitat, fostering whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches and developing integrated solutions for all members of society is the focus of my attention. We need to all work together to reduce poverty and inequality, in cities and in the rural-urban continuum, so that migration is a choice and not a necessity, and that people can live in dignity and peace.

Normalisation of the extreme 2020

By Chris Horwood¹

Many policies, actions, and attitudes related to mixed migration—especially irregular migration—that were considered unacceptable a few years ago are now becoming normalised. The following list is not exhaustive but offers snapshots from 2020 providing an indication of the growing prevalence and range of such measures, as well as the role of Covid-19 to sometimes justify and legitimise extreme action.²

Many of the examples below show that some countries devised immigration policies and actions under the cover of Covid. As early as April, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi warned that “core principles of refugee protection are being put to the test” by countries’ responses to the pandemic and stated that securing public health and protecting refugees were “not mutually exclusive”.³ UNHCR was observing “a disproportionate use of immigration detention” as well as restrictions on access to health and social services and a dramatic loss of livelihoods driving many refugees deeper into poverty.⁴ As the pandemic took hold, migration policy experts were soon warning that some governments were taking advantage of the crisis to push through legally dubious, hard-line migration policies that couldn’t “be justified by public health concerns and that could stay in place long after the Covid-19 outbreaks subside—in particular, ending or curtailing access to asylum.”⁵

1. Rounding up, segregating and isolating migrants and refugees

States’ responses to the coronavirus pandemic include numerous examples of migrants and refugees being rounded up, or segregated and isolated.⁶ In late March, in what some have described as a “cyclical regression in the treatment of people-on-the-move in western **Bosnia-Herzegovina**” the Bosnian authorities built a new camp to detain transferred migrants to reportedly halt the spread of the virus.⁷ In April, in **Panama**, migrants—including entire families, with children and pregnant women who were on their way from South America across the dangerous Darién jungle towards the United States (US)—were placed in an over-crowded and poorly provisioned jungle camp.⁸

In May, authorities in Malaysia rounded up and detained hundreds of undocumented migrants, including Rohingya refugees, as part of efforts “to contain coronavirus”.⁹ While Southeast Asian governments were reportedly using the pandemic as an excuse to turn away maritime migrants and Rohingya refugees and leave hundreds of others adrift, **Bangladesh** sent Rohingya refugees believed to have spent weeks stranded on cramped boats at sea to the remote uninhabited island of Bhasan Char.¹⁰

Starting in March, as part of their efforts to combat Covid-19, at least 21 municipalities in **Lebanon** introduced discriminatory restrictions, including curfews, on Syrian refugees that do not apply to Lebanese residents. The curfews are not being carried out under any law. Instead, municipalities arbitrarily implemented and enforced them.¹¹

1 Chris Horwood is an independent consultant and co-director of Ravenstone Consult.

2 Despite the urban theme of this year’s Mixed Migration Review, this essay does not specifically relate to cities. Nor does it include all of the extreme policy and practice measures already featured in [MMR 2019](#) (p. 177), even if some of those measures continued into 2020. As [recently documented](#) by the Mixed Migration Centre, but beyond the scope of this section, there are also various examples of governments implementing positive policies and facilitating positive responses to refugees and migrants during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3 UNHCR (2020) [Beware long-term damage to human rights and refugee rights from the coronavirus pandemic: UNHCR](#)

4 Ibid.

5 Reidy, E. (2020) [The COVID-19 excuse? How migration policies are hardening around the globe](#). New Humanitarian.

6 Tondo, L. (2020) [Bosnia crams thousands of migrants into tent camp to ‘halt Covid-19 spread’](#). The Guardian.

7 Ibid.

8 Rodríguez, J.J. (2020) [Migrants traveling to U.S., stranded in the Panamanian jungle, now face COVID-19](#). AFP.

9 Ahmed, K. (2020) [Malaysia cites Covid-19 for rounding up hundreds of migrants](#). The Guardian.

10 Ratcliffe, R. (2020) [Rohingya refugees sent to remote Bangladeshi island after weeks at sea](#). The Guardian.

11 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Lebanon: Refugees at Risk in COVID-19 response discrimination risks Harming Syrians, Lebanese alike](#).

2. Preventing or curtailing rescue at sea

During 2020 there were various cases of preventing, reducing, or curtailing the rescue of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants in peril at sea, primarily in the Mediterranean and in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean (off the coast of Malaysia, see below). In late May, in a joint statement, UNHCR and its sister agency, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), said they were deeply concerned by reports that states had been “ignoring or delaying responses to distress calls”, noting that the obligation under international law to assist people in distress “cannot be traded away with the offer of fuel and aid” to those on board.¹²

In April, **European Union (EU)** member states were accused of abandoning people at sea after failing to respond to information provided by NGOs that four boats, carrying 258 migrants between them, were in distress.¹³ In another case, the **Libyan** coast guard reportedly tried to prevent rescue efforts by the non-profit Sea-Eye’s Alan Kurdi vessel by firing shots and causing panic at the point of rescue.¹⁴

Malta allegedly used clandestine private fleets to intercept, detain, and return migrants and asylum seekers back to Libya.¹⁵ Maltese authorities were also accused of sabotaging a migrant boat and letting it float without rescue, although in this case they later reluctantly rescued the passengers.¹⁶ “We’ve never seen states committing crimes of non-assistance in such a blatant light,” stated a researcher for Forensic Oceanography, which investigates abuses in migrant rescues. “They’ve done it before but in a more covert way. But now there’s a total disrespect of any kind of humanitarian or legal framework.”¹⁷

In July, the **Italian** coast guard and cargo ships were filmed as they simply “ignored a stricken migrant boat” with approximately 60 passengers aboard.¹⁸

At the multi-state level, the **EU**, after suspending the rescue efforts of Operation Sophia in March 2019 for six months and then closing it down in February 2020, replaced it with Operation Irini. The new naval operation launched on 31 March 2020 focuses on enforcing the arms embargo to Libya. Human Rights Watch contends Irini is specifically designed not to save lives and that its marine assets are deployed with the explicit goal of avoiding areas of the Mediterranean where they might have to respond to boats carrying migrants in distress.¹⁹ There is no mention in Irini’s mandate of migrant rescue and although its naval assets are—like any other sea-going vessel—obliged under maritime law to rescue boats in distress, data on where those on board are disembarked will reportedly remain confidential, raising fears that refugees, migrants and asylum seekers may be returned to Libya.²⁰

3. Denying access to ports or safe harbour

Vessels carrying refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants were denied access to ports in various cases in the Mediterranean and Asia. In early April, in an unprecedented move, the Italian government declared its seaports “unsafe” due to the coronavirus pandemic and stated it would not authorise the landing of migrant rescue boats until the end of the emergency.²¹

As noted above, **Malta** also stated it would not allow vessels to dock and refused to allow the disembarkation of asylum seekers and migrants. During the following weeks and months various cases emerged where Maltese authorities had either deterred vessels, refused to rescue stranded migrants, refused docking, or even reportedly sabotaged one boat

12 UNHCR (2020) [UNHCR, IOM, urge European states to disembark rescued migrants and refugees on board the Captain Morgan vessels](#)

13 Guiffreda, A. (2020) [Calls in Italy to rescue people at sea after fears of more migrant deaths](#). Guardian

14 Sea-Eye (2020) [tweet](#)

15 Kingsley, P. & Willis, H. (2020) [Latest Tactic to Push Migrants From Europe? A Private, Clandestine Fleet](#). New York Times.

16 Kingsley, P. (2020) [Malta Accused of Sabotaging Migrant Boat](#). New York Times.

17 Associated Press. (2020) [Desert or sea: Virus traps migrants in mid-route danger zone](#). Mail Online.

18 Tondo, L. (2020) [Italian coastguard and cargo ship 'ignored stricken migrant boat'](#). Guardian.

19 Sunderland, J. (2020) [EU Turns Its Back on Migrants in Distress](#). Human Rights Watch.

20 CEPS (2020) [Operation Irini in Libya: Part of the solution, or part of the problem? It is notable that one of the new operation's secondary tasks will be to "support the detection and monitoring of human smuggling and trafficking networks through information gathering and patrolling carried out by aerial assets above the high seas." See Official Journal of the European Union \(2020\) COUNCIL DECISION \(CFSP\) 2020/472 of 31 March 2020 on a European Union military operation in the Mediterranean \(EUNAVFOR MED IRINI\)](#)

21 Tondo, L. (2020) [Italy declares own ports 'unsafe' to stop migrants arriving](#). Guardian.

off its coast.²² In one case, when a vessel was left floating close to Malta, five of the passengers died, seven were declared missing and eventually 51 passengers were picked up by a commercial boat and taken to Libya where they were handed over to Libyan authorities for detention.²³

In another case in June, approximately 400 asylum seekers and migrants were kept on board tourist boats while they waited for Malta to accept them. Malta only reluctantly conceded when migrants threatened to create a security incident on board.²⁴

NGO rescue boats such as Sea-Eye's Alan Kurdi were initially inactive as they were quarantined at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some vessels were subsequently repeatedly frustrated by Italy and Malta during the summer, with disembarkations being prevented or resisted. However, some disembarkations did occur, after much political and inter-governmental discussion and NGO appeals. UNHCR and IOM said a clearly agreed system on relocations was urgently needed to end "a perpetual cycle of negotiations and ad-hoc arrangements" that put the lives and health of people at further risk.²⁵

Bangladesh refused several vessels laden with many hundreds of Rohingya refugees permission to dock at its ports, sometimes months after Malaysia had pushed them back to the high seas.²⁶ Bangladesh's foreign minister said in April that since the Covid-19 pandemic had increased the number of Bangladeshis returning to the country, "we have no room to shelter any foreign people or refugees."²⁷ International pressure led Bangladesh to relent and rescue stranded passengers in at least some cases, but not without considerable loss of life due to thirst, hunger, illness and the brutality of smugglers.²⁸

In early September, nearly 300 Rohingya refugees were allowed ashore in Aceh, on the northern tip of **Indonesia's** Sumatra island, after more than 200 days at sea during which more than 30 people died—three after their arrival. The refugees told UNHCR that they repeatedly tried to land in several different countries in the region without success.²⁹

Also in September, 27 migrants and refugees remained stranded on a cargo ship over a month after rescue in the Central Mediterranean. Initially no EU country granted permission for the ship to disembark its passengers. Three of the migrants reportedly jumped overboard and had to be rescued by crew members. This was the third incident between January and September 2020 in which a merchant vessel had languished in the Mediterranean with rescued people aboard.³⁰

4. Scapegoating over Covid-19

By mid-May, and only weeks after the start of most states' lockdowns in response to Covid-19, UN Secretary-General António Guterres claimed the virus had unleashed a "tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scaremongering" across world. He appealed for an all-out effort to "end hate speech globally", warning that anti-foreigner sentiment had surged online and on the streets. He highlighted the spread of antisemitic conspiracy theories and Covid-19-related anti-Muslim attacks and noted that migrants and refugees had been vilified as a source of the virus.³¹

A stark example of this was seen in **Yemen** from April onwards, where a reported 14,500 predominantly Ethiopian migrants, blamed for spreading the virus, were rounded up from different locations and bussed to and then abandoned

22 Kingsley, P (2020) [Malta Accused of Sabotaging Migrant Boat](#). New York Times

23 Martin, I (2020) [Five migrants found dead in boat stranded in Maltese waters](#). Times of Malta

24 Camilleri, N (2020) [Captain Morgan incident: Migrants stole knives, threatened to set vessel on fire – PM](#). Malta Independent

25 UNHCR (2020) [UNHCR, IOM, urge European states to disembark rescued migrants and refugees on board the Captain Morgan vessels](#)

26 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Bangladesh: Rohingya Refugees Stranded at Sea](#); Hoelzl, V. (2020) [As Rohingya Boats Keep Sailing, Southeast Asia Turns a Blind Eye](#). Foreign Policy.

27 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Bangladesh: Rohingya refugees stranded at sea](#).

28 Ellis-Petersen, H. & Rahman, S. (2020) [Bangladesh rescues hundreds of Rohingya drifting at sea for nearly two months](#). The Guardian; Ratcliffe, R. (2020) [Bangladesh urged to open ports to allow in Rohingya refugee boats](#). The Guardian.

29 AFP (2020) [Terror at sea: Rohingya migrants tell of 200-day ordeal](#). Bangkok Post.

30 UNHCR (2020) [ICS, UNHCR and IOM call on States to end humanitarian crisis onboard ship in the Mediterranean](#)

31 Davidson, H. (2020) [Global report: virus has unleashed a 'tsunami of hate' across world, says UN chief](#). The Guardian.

in different provinces. An IOM spokesperson said “migrants are scapegoated as carriers of the virus and as a result, suffer exclusion and violence.”³² This situation later turned out to be lethal for some of the 7,000 taken to Saada, the rebel stronghold in the north who faced gunfire from both Houthi rebels and Saudi border guards as they were forced across the border into Saudi Arabia.³³

Elsewhere, amid rising xenophobia, **Malaysia** arrested hundreds of undocumented migrants, including Rohingya refugees, purportedly as an anti-Covid-19 measure. Members of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s government blamed Muslims for bringing the virus to **India**.³⁴ **Saudi Arabia** expelled African migrants en masse claiming they were bringing the virus into their country and circulating it. Thousands of the deportees were first detained in dire conditions that attracted international condemnation.³⁵ In **China**, landlords evicted Africans from their homes in the city of Guangzhou in what one media source called “a worldwide pandemic in scapegoating of migrants”.³⁶

5. Pushbacks and pullbacks

“Pushback” and “pullback” are terms used to describe the practice by authorities of preventing people from seeking protection by forcibly returning them to another country or forcing them to return to their own territory against their will. Both violate international and EU law.

During 2020, extreme examples of pullbacks continued off the coast of **Libya**, where the coast guard—sometimes with the alleged cooperation of Italian and Maltese authorities—repeatedly intercepted many hundreds of migrants heading to Europe. They returned them to the Libyan mainland, where they are routinely detained in abusive conditions.³⁷

As early as May, the UN human rights office said it was “deeply concerned about recent reports of failure to assist and coordinated pushbacks of migrant boats in the Central Mediterranean, which continues to be one of the deadliest migration routes in the world.”³⁸ Many more pushbacks and pullbacks were to follow and not only in the Mediterranean.

In repeated and frequent cases too numerous to list in more detail here, **Bangladeshi, Malaysian, Tunisian, French, Greek, Maltese, and Turkish** sea patrols were amongst various authorities that intercepted fleeing or pushed back arriving migrants and refugees in 2020.³⁹

In one case in June, video footage emerged of masked men intercepting a boat in the Aegean Sea and removing its outboard motor.⁴⁰ According to other reports, migrants landing on the Greek islands from Turkey were “frequently” forced onto sometimes leaky, inflatable life rafts, dropped at the boundary between Turkish and Greek waters and left to drift until being spotted and rescued by the Turkish coast guard.⁴¹

Pushbacks also occurred at land borders. In **Mexico**, police kitted out with shields and batons pushed back hundreds of US-bound migrants, mainly from Central America trying to enter Mexico from Guatemala.⁴² **Croatia** was criticised during the year for pushbacks along its borders with Bosnia. Some claimed pushbacks had become systemic in Croatia and often involved beatings, robbery and sometimes spray-painting people’s heads.⁴³

32 IOM (2020) [Tens of Thousands of Migrants Stranded in Yemen Fear for Their Lives](#).

33 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Yemen: Houthis Kill, Expel Ethiopian Migrants](#).

34 DW (2020) [Indian Muslims face renewed stigma amid COVID-19 crisis](#).

35 Brown, W. (2020) [International condemnation rains down on Saudi Arabia after Telegraph investigation into hellish detention centres](#). Daily Telegraph

36 Maniatis, G. (2020) [A worldwide pandemic in scapegoating of migrants](#). FMG News.

37 Statewatch (2020) [Pull-backs by the Libyan Coast Guard: complaint filed with UN Human Rights Committee](#).

38 AFP (2020) [UN decries dangerous Med migrant pushbacks](#).

39 For Tunisia: ANSA (2020) [Migrant departures thwarted in Tunisia, suspects arrested](#); for Turkey: Daily Sabah (2020) [Turkey intercepts 276 EU-bound migrants off Izmir coast](#); for Malta: UN News (2020) [UN rights office concerned over migrant boat pushbacks in the Mediterranean](#); for Greece: Balock, B. (2020) [UNHCR calls on Greece to investigate pushbacks at sea and land borders with Turkey](#); for Malaysia: BBC News (2020) [Starving Rohingya refugees rescued off Bangladesh after two months at sea](#); for France, Wallis, E. (2020) [UK and France step up action to stop people smuggling in the Channel, Infomigrants](#).

40 Smith, H. (2020) [Masked gangs terrify migrants as they force boats in Aegean back to Turkey](#). Times (London).

41 Kingsley, P. & Shoumali, K. (2020) [Taking hard line. Greece turns back migrants by abandoning them at sea](#). New York Times.

42 BBC News (2020) [Mexican police push back hundreds of US-bound migrants](#).

43 Tondo, L. (2020) [Crosses on our heads to ‘cure’ Covid-19: refugees report abuse by Croatian police](#). The Guardian; ECRE (2020) [Croatia: Further evidence of systemic push-backs at the border with Bosnia](#).

6. Deportations and refoulements

Deportations of migrants and asylum seekers have also continued in 2020, adding to the numerous cases documented in 2019's Mixed Migration Review. Cases in Central America, Europe and in the Gulf are again particularly prominent as ongoing de facto practices for some states, while many have redoubled—and newly justified as necessary for public health—security responses during the pandemic.

The government of **Mexico**, under considerable economic and diplomatic pressure from Washington to stop migrants reaching the **United States'** southern border, reportedly deported hundreds back to Honduras.⁴⁴ According to reports, for the first time since the US asylum system was created in 1980, new rules mean that Mexicans and Central Americans who cross the border illegally no longer even get the chance to apply for asylum. Instead, they are speedily returned to Mexico within hours. In April alone, approximately 10,000 Mexicans and Central Americans were “expelled” to Mexico. US Customs and Border Protection stated the decision was not about immigration but about public health amid fears of Covid-19.⁴⁵ Later reports (in August) suggested over 40,000 were expelled from the US. Reportedly, some people have been sent directly back to their country of origin via plane, while “the majority were sent back to Mexico by plane to Mexico City, or by bus and left just south of the US border, often in remote areas, without any access to shelter or any other form of support.”⁴⁶

In Europe, **Spain** won support from the European Court of Human Rights to uphold its long-standing practice of rapid migrant deportations (so called “hot returns”) from its North African enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta without allowing asylum applications.⁴⁷ For some the decision was a case of effectively legalising refoulement and permitting immediate deportation irrespective of the details of individual cases. It's a practice also used in the Canary Islands where Spanish authorities expel maritime arrivals (irregularly) through deportation flights to Mauritania carried out with the support of Frontex, the EU's border and coast guard agency.⁴⁸

In March, a report surfaced accusing the **Greek** government of “detaining migrants incommunicado at a secret extrajudicial location before expelling them to Turkey without due process”. Several interviewed migrants claimed they had been “captured, stripped of their belongings, beaten and expelled from Greece without being given a chance to claim asylum or speak to a lawyer”.⁴⁹

Possibly the most harrowing cases of detention preceding deportation were in **Saudi Arabia**, where “hundreds if not thousands” of Ethiopian migrants, including women and children, were locked in “heinous conditions reminiscent of Libya's slave camps” as part of an alleged “drive to stop the spread of Covid-19”.⁵⁰ Migrant workers were also reportedly deported or “repatriated”, from the **United Arab Emirates**, often having been sacked from their jobs and reportedly without receiving their last pay packets.⁵¹

Despite announcing that such deportations would end, **Algeria** has continued to expel migrants and asylum seekers, normally abandoning them in the deserts of Niger. At the end of March, according to IOM figures, more than 800 people arrived in Niger in a single expulsion.⁵² Thousands ended up stranded there, “unable to return home or anywhere else.”

44 BBC News (2020) [Hundreds of US-bound migrants stopped from entering Mexico](#).

45 Associated Press (2020) [Desert or sea: Virus traps migrants in mid-route danger zone](#). Daily Mail.

46 ACAPS (2020) [People Movement In Mexico](#).

47 Jamieson, A. (2020) [Spain wins European court appeal over rapid migrant deportations from Ceuta and Melilla](#). Euronews.

48 Garver-Affeldt, J. (2020) [Hot returns” and the cold shoulder: New developments in deterrence along the Western Mediterranean Route](#). Mixed Migration Centre.

49 Stevis-Gridneff, M. et al. (2020) [‘We Are Like Animals’: Inside Greece's Secret Site for Migrants](#). New York Times.

50 Brown, W. (2020) [Investigation: African migrants 'left to die' in Saudi Arabia's hellish Covid detention centres](#). Daily Telegraph.

51 Turak, N. (2020) [The Gulf's migrant workers are being exploited amid the coronavirus crisis, rights groups say](#). CNBC.

52 Associated Press. (2020) op cit.

In **Libya**, officials in the migrant detention centre in Kufra expelled nearly 900 men and women in mid-April. They were taken by vehicles across hundreds of miles of desert and left in a remote town in Chad and at a border post in Sudan.⁵³ Apparently dozens of Egyptians were also deported from Libya and were “abandoned in the desolate border zone because they lacked identity papers” and Egypt would not let them enter.⁵⁴

7. Suspending asylum or access to claiming asylum

Subsections in this report cover overlapping themes. Of course, pushbacks and pullbacks, closed borders, detention and deportation, and preventing asylum seekers from docking all conspire to hinder asylum claims and curtail access to application procedures. The pandemic emergency offered further opportunities for governments to justify their actions, even if they had no basis in international law. However, in some cases the suspension of asylum claims or preventing access to claiming was explicit.

In March, **Greece** suspended asylum applications for 30 days for anyone who had entered irregularly, which prompted the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants to urge the country to “immediately reverse its decision.”⁵⁵ This followed an earlier (January) announcement, before Covid-19 fears, that Greece was planning to install a floating barrier in the Aegean Sea to help stop migrant boats reaching its islands from Turkey.⁵⁶ Also in March, **Hungary** suspended the admission of migrants to its so-called “transit zones”.⁵⁷

Reports emerged in August that the government of **Malta** intended to charter a ferry to house migrants offshore, suggesting that its practice of detention at sea would continue.⁵⁸

As mentioned, authorities in **Spain** have increasingly been undertaking “hot returns” of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers arriving in Ceuta or Melilla, effectively returning them to Moroccan territory immediately without allowing them the opportunity to claim asylum.⁵⁹

In the **United States**, the Trump administration imposed new policies in March that aimed to block ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ immigration, with the stated objective of limiting the spread of Covid-19. The new policies stipulate that asylum seekers, or anyone arriving into the US without authorisation, including unaccompanied minors, can be expelled immediately without legal process. By August, 40,000 migrants had reportedly been expelled, “including people who have been in US detention centres for some months, and others who have only been on US soil for a matter of hours.”⁶⁰ By late May the US administration indefinitely extended border restrictions, citing concerns about the continued spread of Covid-19 and allowing authorities at the border to restrict the entry of asylum-seekers and other migrants while also denying asylum to people traveling from “disease-stricken” countries.⁶¹

In September, in the space of 48 hours, five boats carrying a total of 183 migrants arrived on or near the coast of **Cyprus** from Syria and Lebanon. While some were allowed to disembark, others were sent back to Lebanon in a boat chartered by Cypriot authorities, without being allowed to claim asylum. Cyprus and Lebanon, have an agreement to prevent large numbers of small boats from reaching Cypriot waters.⁶²

53 Associated Press. (2020) op cit.

54 Ibid.

55 UN News (2020) [UN expert raises alarm over migrant, asylum seeker 'pushbacks' at Turkey-Greece border.](#)

56 BBC News (2020) [Greek plan to stop migrant boats with floating barriers.](#)

57 ANSA. (2020) [Coronavirus: Hungary suspends admission of asylum seekers.](#)

58 The Shift (2020) [Prime Minister to spend €1m a month to detain migrants on ship.](#)

59 Garver-Affeldt, J. (2020) [“Hot returns” and the cold shoulder: New developments in deterrence along the Western Mediterranean Route.](#) Mixed Migration Centre.

60 ACAPS (2020) op cit.

61 Owen, Q. (2020) [Trump administration indefinitely extends US border restrictions, citing coronavirus.](#) ABC News.

62 Wallis, E. (2020) [5 migrant boats arrive in Cyprus in 3 days.](#) Info Migrants.

8. Inhuman treatment of migrants and refugees and (state) toleration and/or instigation of violations

Negligence and deliberate violations of rights or simply rough treatment continued to characterise the experience of millions of migrants and refugees in 2020, particularly but not only of those on the move. Some publicised cases appear particularly egregious and deserve inclusion here, although many of the cases referenced in previous sections above also involve hardship and, not uncommonly, death.

The discovery of 64 asphyxiated Ethiopians in a shipping container in **Mozambique** in March is not untypical of the treatment migrants and asylum seekers face when engaging unscrupulous smugglers to assist their movement. In other cases state and non-state authorities were directly responsible for fatalities and abuse.⁶³ For example, border guards in **Iran** were reported to have beaten and tortured Afghan migrants. Survivors reported that at least 23 of 57 people thrown into the Harirud River drowned.⁶⁴

In April in **Yemen**, using Covid-19 as a pretext, Houthi forces forcibly expelled thousands of Ethiopian migrants from the north of the country, killing dozens and forcing them to border with **Saudi Arabia**, where border guards opened fire, killing dozens more, while hundreds of survivors escaped to a mountainous border area. Those rounded up by Saudi forces were kept in “unsanitary and abusive facilities without the ability to legally challenge their detention or eventual deportation to Ethiopia.”⁶⁵

Libya continued to be extremely dangerous for migrants and refugees. Reports suggest that 2020 saw an “increase in this industry of torture for ransom” by militia groups, in new “off-the-grid detention centres” that have mushroomed in the wake of the closure of many official detention facilities in previous months. In July, IOM reported that more than 3,000 people intercepted at sea by the Libyan coast guard had either disappeared into unofficial facilities or were unaccounted for. Reportedly, others are rounded up on land and taken to warehouses or repurposed factories where they can suffer worse abuses than those that have been documented in government detention centres.⁶⁶

Severe rights violations were also seen in different cases in the Indian Ocean where hundreds of Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi nationals engaged smugglers to sail them to Malaysia. Survivors frequently report that smugglers beat, cut, starved, sexually abused and sometimes killed their passengers during their journey. Typically, boats are eventually intercepted or allowed to disembark after months at sea during voyages where smugglers repeatedly used brutality to extort additional money from their paying passengers’ relatives and contacts.⁶⁷

9. Scandalous policy and politics

Not only are extreme events or actions becoming increasingly normalised through practice and repetition, but the politics and policies around mixed migration issues have, in places, also become scandalously extreme. The term scandalous is used here deliberately to denote how far some of these new de facto and de jure practices stray from the stated value systems of certain societies, but also how they directly contravene national and international law.⁶⁸ A case in point, the “Mediterranean is the theatre where tensions between Europe’s ideas of human rights do battle with continental politicians’ anxiety about African migration.”⁶⁹

This occurs in a context of diminished respect for migrants’ rights and reduced adherence to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Breaches of agreed rules on non-refoulement; pushbacks to unsafe countries of men, women and children,

63 Al Jazeera (2020) [More than 60 people found dead in cargo container in Mozambique.](#)

64 Al Jazeera (2020) [Afghanistan probes report Iran guards forced migrants into river.](#)

65 Human Rights Watch (2020) [Yemen: Houthis Kill, Expel Ethiopian Migrants.](#)

66 Abdulrahim, R. (2020) [Migrants in Libya Suffer Torture, Abuse in Off-the-Grid Detention, Aid Groups Say.](#) Wall Street Journal.

67 Natarajan, S. & Hossain, M. (2020) [Rohingya refugee crisis: ‘The bodies were thrown out of the boat’.](#) BBC World Service

68 Media commentators have also seen fit to use the word. See, for example, Malik, K. (2019) [The EU’s dirty work is being carried out by the UN’s scandalous policy on migrants.](#) Guardian.

69 Example of a joint statement on Libya from major human rights groups: Migreurop (2020) [EU: Time to review and remedy cooperation policies facilitating abuse of refugees and migrants in Libya.](#) In reference to the absence of search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean one [UNHCR representative](#) said in May, “If there is no help at sea and countries drag their feet to rescue and allow people to disembark, we’re going to end up with a fairly serious humanitarian situation.”

including unaccompanied children; separating families; reassigning unsafe countries as “safe” to permit deportation; detaining asylum seekers and migrants in at best unacceptable conditions and at worst in abusive brutal detention; funding or diplomatically coercing governments to prevent the movement of asylum seekers; denying access to asylum process; preventing rescue at sea and disembarkation; and discriminating against nationalities using the pretext of pandemic, are all policies that may be considered scandalous but have become increasingly common in 2020.

Human rights organisations and United Nations representatives repeatedly call out and challenge scandalous policy and practice where they see it, while investigative journalists continue to write condemnatory articles.⁷⁰ But typically, governments are able to act with impunity, often ignoring legal censure or side-stepping processes designed to prevent actions that violate rights.⁷¹ For example, in May, **Hungary** ignored a European Court of Justice ruling that its detention of asylum-seekers at two transit zones near its border with Serbia was unlawful.⁷² In September, referring to pushbacks of Rohingya refugees on ships, UNHCR’s director for Asia and the Pacific said “the collective unwillingness of states to act for more than six months” had proved fatal. He noted that the Bali Process, which was created by countries in the region to prevent such tragedies, had failed to deliver coordinated action to rescue and disembark the refugees.⁷³

There are currently “four submissions before international courts and two in the Italian system, accusing **Italy**, the **EU** or both of funding and directing the Libyan coast guard.”⁷⁴ One complaint accuses the EU of “breaking its own laws by funnelling €90 million earmarked for poverty reduction to the Libyan coastguard”—an entity notorious for its heavy handed tactics and for returning migrants and refugees to unacceptable and unsafe detention.⁷⁵

Elsewhere, the **EU** is reportedly “cynically” using its Emergency Trust Fund for Africa to pay for a construction project in Eritrea—as part of efforts designed to address the root causes of migration—whose workers included forced conscripts from national service, which is itself the major root cause of emigration from Eritrea.⁷⁶ Also in 2020, **Turkey** “politicised” or “weaponised” refugees by reportedly transporting people to its border, antagonising Greece and putting pressure on the EU.⁷⁷

New agreements dismantling important elements of the **United States’** asylum system signed in late 2019 with **Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras** started to have an impact in 2020. The agreements effectively re-classify these Northern Triangle countries as “safe” and require migrants on their way to the US to apply for protections in those countries first—a bitter blow for those who fled them in the first place.⁷⁸ If they fail to do so, US immigration authorities will send them back to those countries, where crime, violence, and lack of economic opportunity has driven hundreds of thousands to flee over the past year.

Finally, mirroring the more blatant anti-migrant and anti-refugee policies of the Trump administration in the US, the EU looks set to come clean on its intentions to restrict and prevent mobility through its much-delayed New Pact on Asylum and Migration. In September, EU Commission Vice President and Commissioner for Promoting the European Way of Life Margaritis Schinas said the pact would feature a “very strong external dimension with agreements with countries of origin and transit to keep people, for a better life, in their countries.”⁷⁹

70 Howden, D. et al. (2020) [Revealed: the great European refugee scandal](#). The Guardian.

71 Ibid.

72 DW (2020) [Hungary illegally held asylum-seekers, ECJ rules](#).

73 Ratwatte, I. (2020) [UNHCR welcomes the life-saving disembarkation of 300 Rohingya refugees in Indonesia](#). UNHCR.

74 Howden, D. et al. (2020) op cit.

75 Ibid.

76 Stevis-Gridneff, M. (2020) [How forced labor in Eritrea is linked to E.U.-funded projects](#). New York Times.

77 Kakissis, J. (2020) [Migrants again try to leave Turkey for Europe, but this time the gate is closed](#); Forin, R. and Frouws, B. (2020) [Op-Ed: The wrong side of history? A missed opportunity to lead on a human-rights-led response to mixed migration between Turkey and Greece](#). Mixed Migration Centre.

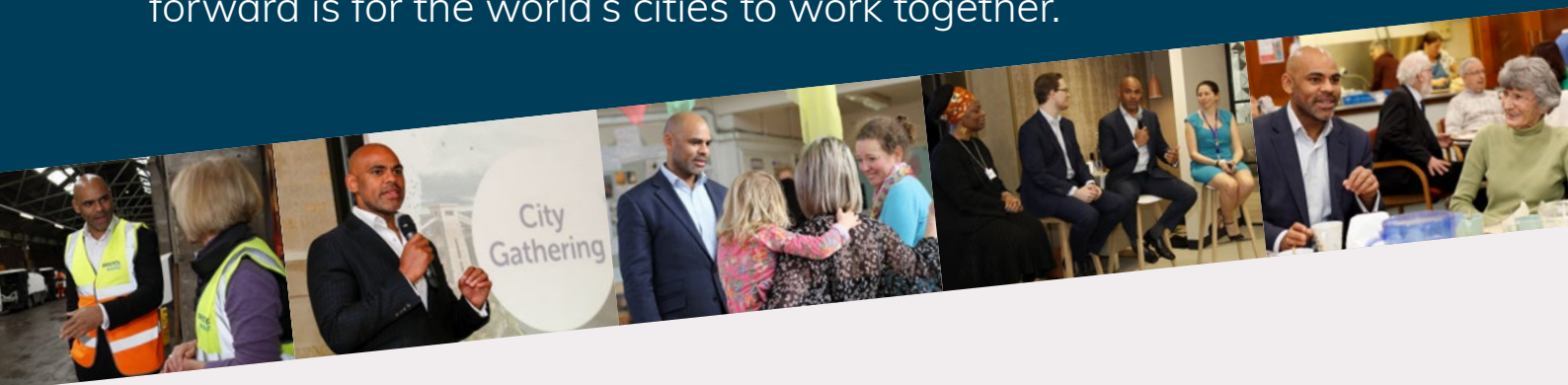
78 Narea, N. (2020) [Trump's agreements in Central America are dismantling the asylum system as we know it](#). Vox.

79 Nielsen, N. (2020) [New EU migration pact 'to keep people in their country'](#). EU Observer.

Interview

Equity now!

Without global economic justice, “integration” risks being little more than an empty buzzword, says **Marvin Rees**, who sees inequality not only as a migration push factor but also an invisible and pernicious catalyst for division and disempowerment, especially among highly diverse urban populations. The only way forward is for the world’s cities to work together.



Labour Party politician Marvin Rees has been mayor of the British port city of Bristol since 2016, when he became the UK’s first directly elected black mayor. He sits, alongside nine counterparts from across the globe, on the leadership board of the Mayors Migration Council. Previously, Rees, who holds a master’s degree in political theory and government, worked as a journalist and in civil society organisations striving to improve opportunities for disadvantaged young people.

You once said that while cultural exchange is important, integration is about money, economic opportunity and social mobility. Is economics the key to good integration in cities?

When we talk about integration, integration into inequality is not meaningful integration at all in the way that we would hope for it. So if I say that we’re in this together and we’re all part of the same community, and yet your children are disproportionately likely to end up mentally unwell, physically unwell, unemployed, poor, more destitute than mine, simply because of who I am, or that yours are better, more likely to end up with good quality lives because of who you are, then that doesn’t mean anything, that’s not real togetherness and integration. So, we have to do something about economic injustice, and Martin Luther King said this himself. He said we’ll get around to the love but let’s do the economic justice first.

If, as many have observed, migrants and refugees overwhelmingly settle in cities in destination countries, might they through democratic processes take the larger cities in a different direction from the rest of the country and operate in contradiction to what the rest of the country chooses?

In many ways, cities are already separate from the rest of their countries. You only have to look at voting differences around the issue of Brexit in the UK, or the attitudes to difference and to diversity within the cities versus non-city areas. Secondly, it’s not just down to the questions of migration; differences will be due to economic imbalance and opportunity as well. London is different, not just because London is more diverse, but London is phenomenally wealthy compared to the rest of the country. And so that is going to be a big driver of that difference as well.

In many ways I'd go back to a fundamental belief I have that migration is the result of the way we run the world. There can be a personal choice to migration, but it can also be as a result of the way the world is run, the imbalances, the push factors as well as the pull factors. And the forces that push people, powerless people, around the world are the very same forces that have made the UK one of the most socially immobile countries in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), it's the same power, it's the same global order.

“ Migration is the result of the way we run the world. Inequalities in the global economy will push people around the planet. ”

What happens is that people focus on the first visual manifestation of those forces driving the global order, and those are often migrants and people being pushed around, and people fail to understand that their lives are being shaped by the very same forces that shape the lives of the migrants. It's a really impoverished politics when you have these relatively poor and powerless people blaming other relatively poor and powerless people for why their lives are the way they are.

“ It's an impoverished politics when relatively poor and powerless people blame other relatively poor and powerless people for why their lives are the way they are. ”

You once said that cities need a “sense of urban civic identity, which is broad enough to contain diversity and strong enough to withstand the siren calls of scapegoating and division.” Why do you refer to these forces as siren calls, and who is making them?

It's cheap, and it's immature politics. By immature I don't mean it lacks intent and strategy. What we primarily get at the national level is an inability to deal with the world the way it is today. What happens at national-level politics is that when they try to work out identity, they generally try to fix on a stagnant set of values and principles that they impose on what it means to be British or not, and that's outdated, it never fit the world because we've always been multinational. [This sort of politics] is just not equipped to cope with the world the way it is today. There's a democratic issue at the moment in our country with politicians desperate for legitimacy and belonging. They are desperate to form associations with people. But what they do is they

form negative associations. It's built on borders: “Let's keep people out and we'll know who we are.” That's a negative association. Keeping people away, defining who doesn't belong, doesn't tell us who we are, it just keeps people out.

Cities are more tuned in to people like me, who don't just want negative associations. I want positive associations. So let's work out who we are by what we're actually trying to get done, by the dynamism, by our ambition, by our shared values, rather than just by who doesn't share our values, by who we say doesn't belong. And that's where I think national governments are really being left behind, and they're ending up giving us a politics that divides us.

“ Keeping people away, defining who doesn't belong, doesn't tell us who we are, it just keeps people out. ”

According to a 2011 census, 16 per cent of Bristol residents are from minority groups and the proportion of the city's residents born outside the UK increased from eight to 15 per cent between 2011 and 2019. Presumably, you support this kind of growth, but does it have a limit, or should cities allow diversity and immigration to change them without restraint?

I don't support or oppose that kind of growth. It just is what it is. Inequalities in the global economy will push people around the planet. My point is that as a city, we have got to work with the world the way it is, and if that's what's going on, we've got to build a culture that works with difference and diversity and recognise that is not a threat, it's just the world.

How important is Bristol's status as a city of sanctuary?

It's a really important status for us in Bristol and we have had that status since 2010, long before I became mayor, but I was also involved in the process at that time. When we describe our city as a UK sanctuary city, we are initially talking about refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants, but we also promote the concept as a city value in a wider sense. We are a city that wants to be a sanctuary for anyone seeking sanctuary: women fleeing domestic violence and abuse, children looking for places of safety, because you cannot box in your values to one particular group of people, it just doesn't work. The city of sanctuary status inspires us to focus on our ambition of building Bristol as a city of welcome, safety and hope for all, including people seeking sanctuary from war, violence, persecution and impact of climate change.

Given all the discussion about creating legal pathways for migrants, what if cities in the global north and south start cooperating directly with the aim of shaping policy?

We urgently need global governance of migration to move into its next iteration. This means cities and global networks of cities working as equal partners in shaping national and international policy. Right now, national and international policy is set by national governments working together talking about cities, but cities are not at the table shaping that policy. So we end up with a policy framework that at best is not being shaped by us and at worst it's hostile to our interests. I'd love to see much more city-to-city cooperation. We want to see global South-global North cooperation at the city level.

“ We urgently need global governance of migration to move into its next iteration. This means cities and global networks of cities working as equal partners in shaping national and international policy.”

You have described the absence of city leaders in the discussions ahead of the global compacts discussions—almost exclusively negotiated by national leaders—as a scandal. That was in 2018. Do you feel anything has changed?

As another mayor said once, most migrants leave cities, travel through cities, turn up in cities, and then return to cities. Why would you not include cities in the conversation? When you have a government minister who represents a rural constituency, with no first-hand knowledge of a city, making these decisions about an issue that is predominately a city issue, it doesn't work, does it? Maybe it was a scandal, and even now I say it's pretty unfortunate, and problematic, and would leave those compacts somewhat irrelevant and inappropriate to cities that most people live in.

What impact has Covid-19, and governments' reaction to it, had on the issues around migration and asylum? Has the pandemic set all this back, including the global compacts? And how do you see these kind of issues post-Covid?

I see a real danger, and that's tied in with racism. There's a great quote from the US Civil War, and it says, “When they set their slaves free, they didn't set them free, they just made them slaves with all the white working slaves”. So my concern is that Covid-19 will set back all the work on equalities in general, and race inequality in particular. And not only set it back but put

it on a lower trajectory for the future as well. Migration will be part of that, and inseparable from it, so the overarching context could be incredibly negative.

“ Most migrants leave cities, travel through cities, turn up in cities, and then return to cities. Why would you not include cities in the conversation.”

As we go into economic depression, we know what kind of politics tries to take advantage of that. It's simplistic, it's opportunistic. It creates the fear of difference, and I think that that will be a real concern for a couple of reasons. One is for the overt manifestation of that with far-right groups hostile to migration. There will be a thought in the back of the minds of national governments that they be fearful of crossing that line, and fearful of a population that's less able to cope with difference because of the economic hardship. Second, people become less willing to share diminishing resources, so it's a very challenging time for us on the question of migration and refugees. A third area is just around finance. Local government has been decimated by this, national government came out of the blocks quite strongly telling local government, “do whatever you need to do to tackle all the challenge of Covid,” but financially we end up less supported and in debt.

You are on the Leadership Board of the Mayors Migration Council and you hosted the Global Parliament of Mayors summit in Bristol in 2018. After being mayor here do you have your eyes set on becoming more involved internationally on these issues?

I've always been interested internationally. Between what goes on locally and what goes on internationally, it's a continuum. I'm very keen to stay internationally involved and do as much as I can to support the international change we need for a more just, more sustainable world.

I've recently written about Bristol, framing its whole approach to post-Covid economic recovery in terms of the Sustainable Development Goals. They plug us into a global conversation, they give us a common language with which to talk to cities in North America, South America, and across Africa, and these international bodies such as the UN who are supporting the SDGs. Cities actually have to deliver. For city leaders it becomes very, very practical, very quickly. Again, I'm not saying cities are the answer to everything, but we have to be much more practical than national governments.

Cities empowered

How cities shape the agenda and governance of global migration

By Sophie van Haasen¹

Introduction: the urbanisation of migration

Today there is an unprecedented recognition of the pivotal role local governments play in managing mobility, including that of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—often in mixed migratory flows—who settle in or transit cities throughout the world. This is not surprising: an estimated 55 percent of the world’s population lives in cities, which will grow to 68 percent in 2050.² Eighty percent of the world’s internally displaced persons (IDPs)³ and two thirds of the world’s refugees end up living and working in cities.⁴ With climate change expected to displace another 200 million people by 2050,⁵ it is safe to expect this trend to accelerate in the near future. Cities are—and will increasingly become—places of first arrival, transit and often longer-term stay, and while national governments decide who enters a country and on what basis, cities have the de-facto power to determine how they include migrants in their urban planning, even when their legal and political mandate to shape migration policy is limited.⁶ This urbanisation of migration or human mobility in all forms places ever more strain on cities and communities, in particular when existing city institutions are fragile. But while challenges are evident, the local level is also where innovative, inclusive and collaborative solutions to migration happen. Examples of such city practice are ample,⁷ and the current Covid-19 pandemic has only further highlighted the capacity of cities to swiftly and comprehensively reach migrants.⁸

In an ever more connected world, cities have become increasingly organised to engage in international deliberations and policymaking spaces. At the same

time, the international community is creating openings for cities to meaningfully engage. This review outlines important new developments in terms of the role of cities in the global governance of human mobility today.⁹

“Cities need a voice at the table. Most migrants leave cities, go to cities and return to cities. Cities are on the frontline of making migration work for everybody. Therefore, cities have invaluable insight when it comes to understanding both the benefits and challenges of mass movements of people.”

Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol¹⁰

The “age of city diplomacy”

This is the “age of city diplomacy”, an era where cities enter the international arena to discuss the contemporary and global challenges of our time.¹¹ City diplomacy is not new, but it has surged over the past two decades, characterised, for example, by a rise in the number of cities boasting staff and dedicated offices that deal with international affairs.¹² Cities are increasingly joining forces in coalitions and networks to strategically engage in global discussions.¹³

In an ever more interconnected and urbanised world, cities become diplomatic actors in their own right and see strategic value in nurturing their own international relations. This is particularly so on issues where national governments fail to take swift action. The boldest and most innovative solutions to pressing issues such as climate

1 Sophie van Haasen is Coordinator of the Mayors Mechanism. She wrote this review/report in a private capacity as an independent consultant.

2 UN DESA (2018) [World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision](#).

3 European Commission (2018) [The Urban Amplifier: Adapting to Urban Specificities](#).

4 Park, H. (2016) [The Power of Cities](#). UNHCR.

5 UN University (2015) [5 Facts on Climate Change](#).

6 Gebhardt, D. (2014) [Building Inclusive Cities: Challenges in the multilevel governance of immigrant integration in Europe](#). Migration Policy Institute.

7 Saliba, S. & Wolf, J. (2018) [Urban Refugee: How Cities Are Building Inclusive Communities](#). International Rescue Committee. This report provides information about 23 city governments worldwide and how they support displaced populations. It gives a good grasp of the breadth of mandates and activities cities are undertaking.

8 Mayors Migration Council (2018) Campaign video: [MMC Mayors for Inclusive COVID-19 Response & Recovery](#).

9 This article discusses the role of local government not only in municipalities and cities, but also in provinces and regions. To keep the article accessible and easy to read, the author will refer to cities only, but the word may be interpreted more broadly to include local and regional governments.

10 Morris, S. (2018) [Bristol Mayor Marvin Rees to ask UN to give cities greater role in migration talks](#). The Guardian.

11 Hachigian, N. (2019) [Cities will determine the future of diplomacy](#). Foreign Policy.

12 Fisbone, A. (2015) [Municipal Foreign Affairs. A study of the offices of International Affairs in Europe and the USA](#). Robert Bosch Foundation Alumni Association.

13 Acuto, M. & Morissette, M. (2017) [City Diplomacy: Towards mores strategic networking? Learning with WHO Healthy Cities](#). Global Policy.

change and migration tend to be spearheaded by cities.¹⁴ A rise in nationalist and populist governments has also strained multilateral processes and organisations, which are consequently increasingly turning to cities as new and legitimate actors for change.¹⁵ Recently, cities—and global networks of cities—have called for greater access to and recognition from UN governance structures.¹⁶ This trend highlights an undeniable “urbanization of international affairs”.¹⁷ This is also true in the area of migration governance: due to a rise in migration to cities, frustration with the inaction of national governments to effectively and safely manage migration, and the

increasingly proactive attitude to advocate for swift and effective solutions, cities have increasingly engaged on this topic at the regional and international level, and have set up coordination structures and networks for strategic direction and peer learning.¹⁸

The table below gives an overview of the city initiatives and networks that work on migration, that are international in scope, and that mention influencing state-led processes within their mission statements. The overview includes brief information about the governance structures and objectives of these networks.

Table 1: International city initiatives engaged in migration governance¹⁹

Name (year established)	Governance structure	Objectives and role in migration governance
Networks specialised on migration and inclusion		
Mayors Migration Council (MMC) (2018)	Leadership board of 10 mayors	Empowers and enables cities with access, capacity, knowledge, and connections to engage in migration diplomacy and policymaking at the international, regional, and national level.
Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) Mayors Mechanism (2018)	Platform launched by the GFMD, and co-steered by the MMC, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and the International Organization for Migration. Engagement with cities happens through its steering committee members.	Creates opportunities for cities to influence the GFMD discussions and provides them with opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and exchange. It establishes a platform to interact with states and provides an opportunity to bolster innovative solutions. It formalises the connection between the GFMD and cities participating in the Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development. ²⁰
Intercultural Cities Networks (2016)	Hosted by the Council of Europe, over 140 city members	The intercultural cities programme supports cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realise the diversity advantage. It has developed tools to foster transnational municipal standard-setting, such as the Intercultural City Index. ²¹
Generic networks that have migration in their portfolio		
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) (2004)	Secretariat governed by the World Council and Executive Bureau. Has several regional sections. Membership of over 240,000 local and regional governments and over 175 local and regional government associations.	UCLG, as a global network of cities and local, regional, and metropolitan governments and their associations, is committed to representing, defending, and amplifying the voices of local and regional governments to leave no-one and no place behind. It coordinates the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments that brings together the major international networks of local governments to undertake joint advocacy work relating to global policy processes, in particular on the 2030 Agenda. UCLG has also increasingly engaged on migration, for example through the M2C2M project and having established a community of practice on migration. ²²

14 Hachigian, N. (2019) op. cit.

15 Lacroix, T. (2019) [Réseaux des villes hospitalières : un panorama global](#), Migrinter.

16 See for example: Global Parliament of Mayors (2020) [Open letter to UN Secretary-General H.E. Mr. António Guterres](#).

17 Acuto, M. & Morissette, M. (2017) op. cit.

18 Lacroix, T. (2019) op. cit.

19 The mapping conducted by Thomas Lacroix in the above-referenced article provided the starting point for this table.

20 The Mayoral Forum on Human Mobility, Migration and Development was launched at the second-High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development. It was supported by a coalition of international organisations, including the Joint Migration and Development Initiative, the UN Institute for Training and Research, and the World Bank’s Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development. Its purpose was to connect city representatives worldwide to discuss migration and to connect to international processes. In 2018 it became fully incorporated as a mechanism under the GFMD.

21 Intercultural Cities Network (2020) [What is the Intercultural City Index?](#)

22 UCLG (2020) [Migration](#).

Metropolis (1984)	The board of directors is formed by at least 15 members representing metropolises from different continents.	To connect political leaders, policy makers and practitioners worldwide in order to advocate metropolitan interests and improve the performance of metropolises in addressing local and global challenges. The international Metropolis Conference in 2017 focused on migration and global justice, and Metropolis drafted the 2018 Position Paper on the GCM and GCR. ²³ Metropolis is the metropolitan section of UCLG.
Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM) (2015)	The 43 GPM mayors form the general meeting and elect the members of the executive committee, which will formally be the board of directors.	Facilitates debates between mayors, national governments and international organisations; drives systematic action to achieve political change on a global scale. Migration has been a central topic in their Bristol Declaration (2018) ²⁴ and their Durban Declaration (2019). ²⁵

When studying these networks closer, it becomes clear that there is some overlap in terms of objectives and/or membership. In addition, collective city diplomacy efforts are often the result of informal or ad-hoc city coalitions that have been created because of a specific window of opportunity. Such coalitions have not been included in the above overview.

Multilateral processes on human mobility: increased engagement and recognition of cities

As cities increasingly engage to influence migration processes at the international level, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and other agencies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UN-Habitat, as well as members states such as Switzerland, and philanthropic institutions such as the Open Society Foundations and the Rockefeller Foundation, understand that cities play a pivotal role in migration management. In addition, over the past five years, migration has gained considerable traction at the multilateral level, creating concrete entry points for cities to engage and organise around.

What follows is a list of some of the most important international agreements and processes on migration since 2015, noting the extent to which they include cities. It also zooms in on city action since the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants was signed in 2016 and highlights city key messages in such processes.

Selected international agreements on migration

2015: The 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

In Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, the 2030 Agenda recognises the central role of cities in building safe, inclusive, and resilient societies. It also defines migration as a key factor of development, making it a cross-cutting topic.²⁶ At the **Second Mayoral Forum in Quito**, cities outlined how they were working to implement the SDGs in the **Quito Local Agenda on Migration and Development**.²⁷ Increasingly, cities either join national delegations at the **UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development**, the annual gathering where governments meet to (voluntarily) review their progress made towards achieving the SDGs, or present their own local voluntary reviews.²⁸

2016: The New Urban Agenda (NUA).

The NUA, the outcome document of the **Habitat III conference in Quito**, states: “urbanization can be a powerful tool for sustainable development and if well planned, migration into cities can bring significant social, economic and cultural contributions to urban life”.²⁹ The NUA marks a move away from the previously held narrative of migration being a problem to be addressed to an acknowledgement that it generates opportunities for migrants and residents alike.³⁰

2016: UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants.

Following the large number of Syrian refugees arriving in Europe with other refugees and irregular migrants in mixed migration movements in 2015 and 2016, the UN General Assembly hosted this high-level meeting in September 2016 to discuss how to improve international responses to and coordination of migrants and refugees travelling in “large movements”. It resulted in the **New**

23 Metropolis (2017) [Contribution to the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).

24 Global Parliament of Mayors (2018) [Global Parliament of Mayors Annual Summit 2018 Declaration](#).

25 Global Parliament of Mayors (2019) [GPM Durban Declaration 2019](#).

26 International Organization for Migration (2018) [Migration and the 2030 Agenda: A guide for practitioners](#).

27 City of Quito, et al (2015) [The Local Agenda on Migration and Development - The Second Mayoral Forum on Mobility, Migration and Development Quito Outcome Document \(2015\)](#).

28 Abeywardena, P. (2019) [New York City's global experience builds the case for city diplomacy](#). Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

29 UN-Habitat (2016) [The New Urban Agenda](#).

30 Amrith, M. (2016) [Cities for All? Migration and the New Urban Agenda](#); UNHCR and other UN agencies (2015) [Habitat III Issue Paper 2: Migration and Refugees in Urban Areas](#).

York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which set in motion the development in parallel of two major international agreements: the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR).³¹ At the summit, cities were recognised as key partners and first receivers of migrants and refugees in need of support.

2018: The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.³² Governments met in Marrakesh to adopt the GCM, a landmark document taking a 360-degree approach to migration governance, mapping out a number of principles, commitments, and possible policy actions. While the compact is non-binding, it is firmly rooted in international law, and aims to serve as a guidance document for policy development. It has been welcomed as a timely and much-needed first step to creating an “embryonic global migration governance system”.³³ While much will depend on how far states turn its words into policy or action, the GCM reflects a commitment to multilateralism, an understanding that no country can address migration alone.³⁴ The box below highlights selected references to cities in the GCM text and in its implementation and review provisions.

City-specific references in the GCM

- In the guiding principles, member states agree to apply a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to migration governance. These principles clearly set out that successful migration governance can only be achieved through full engagement of all levels and sectors of government, including local governments.
- Almost all the GCM’s 22 objectives mention the role of local government. Examples include:
 - the importance of localising data on migration (Art. 17a)
 - monitoring and anticipating risks that might trigger or affect migration movements (Art. 18c)
 - safeguarding non-discriminatory access to services to migrants (Art. 15c, d, & e)
 - fostering full inclusion and social cohesion (Art. 32f)
 - countering xenophobia and racism (Art. 33g)
- The text emphasises the need to involve and support local authorities in opportunities for international cooperation on the GCM, and to

integrate their perspectives in international development programming (Art. 39c).

- Through the establishment of national implementation plans, member states commit to implement and review the compact with stakeholders, including local authorities (Arts. 40 & 44).
- At International Migration Review Forums (IMRFs), held every four years, member states will discuss progress made in implementing the compact, while NGO stakeholders and representatives of local authorities will be given the opportunity to participate (Art 49).³⁵
- Regional Review Forums, also held every four years (alternating with IMRFs) will be open to all stakeholders. (Art. 50).
- The Multi Partner Trust Fund that provides seed funding for projects implementing the GCM objectives requires applicants to demonstrate a “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society approach” and to indicate how they will partner with local governments and other stakeholders.³⁶

2018: Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) Mayors Mechanism

With its launch of the Mayors Mechanism in December 2018, cities are now formally included in the GFMD as key stakeholders. The GFMD, a longstanding, informal and state-led process to discuss the migration and development nexus, has become an important space for exchange and building trust between governments and has paved the way for important processes on migration within the UN.³⁷ It also has a specific part to play in the GCM follow-up and review process, with the compact’s Article 51 stating: “We invite the Global Forum on Migration and Development to provide a space for annual informal exchange on the implementation of the Global Compact, and report the findings, best practices and innovative approaches to the International Migration Review Forum.” With this formal recognition in the GCM, the GFMD is currently discussing its place in this renewed migration governance ecosystem.³⁸

The GFMD has evolved from a closed and state-led process to one where all stakeholders can shape and

31 UN General Assembly (2016) [The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#).

32 Global Compact for Migration (2016) [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration - Final Draft](#).

33 Quote from Alexander Betts in the [Mixed Migration Review 2018](#) (p. 84)

34 GFMD (2018) [GFMD Ten Year Review](#).

35 United Nations General Assembly (2018) [The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#).

36 UNDP (2020) [Migration Multi Partner Trust Fund: Operations Manual](#).

37 GFMD (undated) [The relationship between the GFMD and the United Nations System](#).

38 GFMD (2018) op. cit.

take part in the discussions, including civil society, the private sector, and now cities, making it a unique space for cross-fertilisation and partnership building.³⁹ With local authorities expected to play an important role in the implementation of the GCM, and the GFMD as a space to share lessons learned and ideas for partnerships, the inclusion of local governments in the GFMD is widely considered to be mutually beneficial and relevant.

City diplomacy since the New York Declaration – an overview of city action

Cities have been active players and drivers of their inclusion in international deliberations. The table below gives a snapshot of cities' actions and engagement since the New York Declaration was adopted, and shows that cities have joined the conversation consistently and increasingly, through either existing networks or informal and ad-hoc city-led coalitions.

Table 2: City inclusion and action since the New York Declaration

	International migration governance milestones	City diplomacy efforts
2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the (September) New York Declaration, local governments are recognised as key partners and first receivers of migrants and refugees in need of support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> September: The official outcome document of the 3rd Mayoral Forum in Quezon City, in the Philippines, the Quezon City Commitment to Action, reaffirms the connections between good migration governance, respect for human rights, and the attainment of the SDGs.⁴⁰
2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GCM co-facilitators organise thematic consultations and a stocktaking conference in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, on the first draft of the compact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A high-level working group jointly is convened by the Brookings Institution, the International Rescue Committee, and 100 Resilient Cities to share practices and formulate recommendations with regards to displacement-related challenges.⁴¹ September: The New York City Global Mayors Summit on Migration and Refugee Policy and Practice highlights how cities overcome obstacles to implementing policies that promote, inter alia, refugee integration, rights protection, and empowerment.⁴² At the same event, cities meet the GCM co-facilitators. November: Global Conference on Cities and Migration in Mechelen, Belgium, results in the Mechelen Declaration, which calls on governments to address existing migration policy gaps and sets out a number of commitments cities agree to implement.⁴³ December: Metropolis submits its Position Paper as a Contribution to the GCM and GCR, signed by all 136 Metropolis members and 13 non-members, some of which joined after the US decision to withdraw from the GCM process.⁴⁴ Mayor Valérie Plante of Montreal presents the paper to the GCM Stocktaking Conference, an event drawing wide attention to the pivotal role of cities. The paper is also shared with Special Representative of the Secretary-General for International Migration Louise Arbor and with UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. December: 19 mayors write to Grandi to show their commitment to join the GCR consultations and to strongly request to be included in the consultation process.⁴⁵

39 GFMD (2019) [Engine, Exchange and Action: The GFMD and the 2019 Pivot to Practice](#).

40 JMDI (2016) [Quezon City Commitment to Action](#).

41 Brandt, J. (2017) [Engaging city leaders in the global compact process: Recommendations for action](#). In April 2019, the Rockefeller Foundation abruptly decided to stop funding 100 Resilient Cities, an initiative it had launched six years previously and which was widely regarded as very successful. In February 2020, two new independent organisations emerged as a result. See Carey, C. (2020) [100 Resilient Cities relaunches as an independent network](#). Cities Today.

42 New York City Global Mayors Summit on migration and refugee policy and practice (2017) [Full Programme](#).

43 UCLG (2017) [The Mechelen Declaration](#).

44 Metropolis (2017) op. cit.

45 Numerous mayors (2017) [Letter to the UNHCR High Commissioner](#).

2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June: Local governments are recognised as first responders in the final draft of the GCR. • July: Formal recognition of local governments as partners and stakeholders in the final draft of the GCM. • September: GFMD Steering Group recognises cities as key stakeholders in the process and endorses the establishment of the a GFMD Mayors Mechanism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May: Written submissions are drafted by an informal consortium of cities offering recommendations to the GCM draft. For the first time, a mayor, (Marvin Rees, of Bristol) participates in GCM negotiations. • December: an informal consortium of cities writes the Mayors Marrakesh Declaration, which is endorsed at the 5th Mayoral Forum by the 150 city leaders present. The declaration is consequently presented at the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt the GCM and the UN General Assembly meeting which adopted the GCR. It sets out commitments of cities in the implementation and evaluation of both compacts in unison.⁴⁶ • December: Launch of the Mayors Migration Council, an initiative designed to support cities to become more influential at the global level on issues of human mobility.⁴⁷ • December: The Mayors Migration Council, UCLG, and IOM jointly commit to steer the GFMD Mayors Mechanism.⁴⁸
2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July: the IMRF Modalities⁴⁹ recognise participation of all stakeholders, if accredited, and participation of local authorities in the thematic roundtables. It also invites the GFMD and its mechanisms to provide a space for informal exchanges. • December: the Multi Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Steering Committee includes city-led organisations and encourages partnerships with cities.⁵⁰ • December: Cities are invited by UNHCR in the preparation of the Global Refugee Forum and are asked to be part of the closing plenary session.⁵¹ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November: In a Call to Action on Migration, launched by the GFMD Mayors Mechanism, cities commit to ensure the goals of the two compacts are met at the local level by pledging to implement bold and inclusive policies to welcome, integrate and protect migrants and refugees.⁵² • December: 13 representatives of cities or city-led organisations participate in the Global Refugee Forum.⁵³ • September: City networks participate in the UN Network on Migration Working Groups.
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January: Mayoral Forum becomes an integral part of the 12th GFMD Summit in Quito. • MPTF Steering Committee vets several projects with a direct city partnership to receive (future) funding.⁵⁴ • February: GFMD Mayors Mechanism co-chairs an Ad Hoc Working Group on Balancing Public Narratives on Migration, together with the government of Canada. This is the first time a GFMD mechanism co-chairs such a working group.⁵⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different city networks highlight city action to protect migrants in inclusive Covid-19 responses. • The GFMD Mayors Mechanism ensures cities are meaningfully engaged in GFMD activities, including the regional consultations and the Narratives Working Group. • Summer: Cities contribute to the first Secretary General's Biennial Report on the Global Compact on Migration, to be published in Autumn 2020. • Autumn: Cities prepare to engage in the Regional Migration Reviews taking place in the last quarter of 2020.

46 Numerous mayors and city leaders (2018) [The Mayors Marrakesh Declaration](#).

47 Global News Wire (2018) [Mayors Migration Council to Launch in Marrakesh ahead of UN Conference on Migration](#).

48 GFMD (2020) [The GFMD Mayors Mechanism](#).

49 UNGA (2019) [Final Draft of the resolution "Formal and organizational aspects of the international migration review forums"](#).

50 MPTF (2020) [Trust Fund Factsheet](#).

51 UNHCR (2019, [Global Refugee Forum Agenda](#).

52 UCLG/MMC/IOM (2020) [Call to Local Action on Migration - Cities Working Together for Migrants and Refugees](#).

53 UNHCR (2019) [List of Participants Global Refugee Forum](#).

54 UNDP (2020) op. cit.

55 GFMD (2020) op. cit.

Collective city organising on the topic of migration has gained significant momentum over the years, and statements such as the Metropolis Declaration and the Mayors Marrakesh Declaration, both featuring a large number of city signatories, bear testimony to that. It is important to note however, that the initiative for action has often been taken by just a handful of bigger cities, such as New York, Montreal, São Paulo, Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Bristol.

What messages have cities brought to the table?

When 150 city leaders endorsed the Mayors Marrakesh Declaration, they called for the full recognition of the role of local authorities in the implementation, follow-up, and review of both global compacts. The declaration summarises city commitments to implement the GCM and GCR and provides a number of recommendations. In the Call to Action, the Mayors Mechanism also set out to inspire city action to implement the compacts, and to incentivise bolder action by the international community. As summarised in below, both documents give a good overview of the primary city recommendations and messages:

Synthesis of cities' key messages

- Cities commit to advance the principles and objectives of both global compacts in unison. Administrative category labels such as “migrant”, “refugee”, and “internally displaced person” tend to obscure the similarity of vulnerabilities the different groups face.
- Cities fill the gaps of international and national responses by prioritising protection and non-discriminatory access to basic services for all residents, regardless of status.
- Migration is not a challenge, but a phenomenon that needs to be managed in a way that harnesses its full potential and enhances our communities.⁵⁶
- The visions of the GCM, GCR and SDGs underpin those that cities have committed to, namely, to “leave no one behind” and to make cities “inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable”.⁵⁷

- International goals cannot be achieved if cities fail to deliver. Institutionalised access of cities to state-led deliberations on migration is important, but if they are to be truly recognised as equal partners in designing responses, cities need:
 - national governments to provide the necessary institutional frameworks for cities to fulfil their mandates as the closest level of government to migrants and refugees;
 - new structures to meaningfully consult cities on migration policies; and
 - investment in new partnership models where cities can directly access technical support and financing.⁵⁸

What next?

From a seat at the table to meaningful partnership

In the past few years, there has been a growing acknowledgement that for migration policies to work, they need to be rooted in local realities and evaluated according to local impact. Cities are therefore seen as key actors in the governance of migration, and as such deserve a seat at the table. Cities are also more and more willing and prepared to navigate the international migration ecosystem. It is therefore an important evolution to see their participation institutionalised in both the GCM and the GFMD. The upcoming GCM regional reviews, planned for the last quarter of 2020, and the IMRF planned for 2022, offer landmark entry points for cities to join the conversation. This could happen through the inclusion of cities in national delegations or through direct city participation. In a manner similar to the SDG process, cities could consider conducting voluntary city reviews to contribute to the RMRFs and IMRF.⁵⁹

Cities are now invited to join the main processes that shape the international governance of migration, which is an important achievement and first step. However, many observers consider that what matters most is that cities are seen as *partners* in designing and evaluating policies and practices.⁶⁰ This means, for example, that funding for migration management, as well as supporting migrant- and refugee-specific programmes, should respond to the reality of migration becoming an urban phenomenon and should therefore help cities foster inclusive urban planning strategies. This in turn creates an opportunity to test new partnerships where cities work directly with humanitarian and development actors and the private sector.⁶¹ The

56 GFMD (2020) [Speech Lord Mayor Carola Gunnarsson, Vice President of UCLG for Europe, Global Forum for Migration and Development GFMD European Consultation](#).

57 Numerous mayors and city leaders (2018) op. cit.

58 UCLG/MMC/IOM (2020) [From Large Movements to the Global Compacts: Cities as First Responders](#).

59 Abeywardena, P. (2019) op. cit.

60 International Rescue Committee (2018) op. cit.

61 GFMD Mayors Mechanism (2020), GFMD OESO Consultation – Outcome Report Mayors Mechanism (upcoming)

inclusion of city actors in the MPTF Steering Committee and eligibility criteria is a promising development which will hopefully be amplified going forward.

Processes such as the European Union Urban Agenda on Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees, established in 2016, where cities are equal partners in discussing policy gaps and solutions, provide insights as to how cities contribute to multilateral policymaking and financing instruments.⁶² Tools such as the International Rescue Committee's Urban Context Analysis Toolkit can help international actors understand and navigate city contexts, together with local actors and stakeholders.⁶³

Strong and coordinated city networks for peer learning and efficient city advocacy

City networks play a key role in bringing like-minded cities together and fostering a collective voice in international spaces. As the mapping in Table 1 shows, there are multiple networks that work on local and transnational migration governance as part of their programmatic focus, and an important development has been the establishment of the Mayors Migration Council, which is city-led and provides a support role for cities on the topics of migration and refugees.

Moving forward, there are both opportunities and challenges for cities to organise collectively. These include:

- To date, there is no platform to coordinate the engagement of cities with the GCM process. Such a space would help to foster information-sharing across cities and city networks and would allow for joint strategising and greater impact. Such a process would not function as a new network but would rather serve as a platform for cities and their existing networks to come together.
- Frameworks such as the Call to Action (see above) are important tools to help visualise how cities contribute to the GCM and GCR implementation processes, and therefore bring strategic coherence between different processes and city networks.
- City officials need a good understanding of multiple policy areas, as their day-to-day decision-making needs to take into account a wealth of sometimes competing priorities. This is also true for effectively managing migration, a topic closely intertwined with issues such as housing, access to health care, education, transportation, livelihoods, and climate change mitigation. The need for such integrated policy thinking should also be met by networks. In an increasingly specialised city network landscape, there

is a real opportunity for thematic networks to join hands on specific topics.⁶⁴

- Not all cities have the capacity to engage in the international arena. The initiative for international and collaborative action has been taken by just a handful of city leaders who have had the ambition but also capacity to take on this leadership role. To create a broadly carried city movement, it will be important to bring secondary and smaller cities into the global work, especially those from the global South. Also, not all mayors and city officials are willing to host, or attend to the specific needs of, migrants and refugees in their cities. There is a need for strategic outreach and dialogue with those cities as well.

Conclusion: towards inclusion and resilience

As this review of recent governance processes has illustrated, big strides have been made to identify and empower cities as the key actors and first responders in relation to refugees and migrants and to involve cities in various landmark global policy developments on migration. The world appears to be increasingly volatile, labouring under the combined waves of uncertain political forces, global inequality, continued population growth, pandemics, climate change, and rapid societal transformations. Mixed migratory flows are expected to continue both in the global South and global North but how they will be affected by these global trends is also uncertain.

Cities are places where migrants and refugees arrive and settle. City governments by nature are not concerned about people's migratory status but seek to attend to *all* residents to the best of their abilities. Cities are hubs of innovation, and places where smart solutions to migration challenges can be found. As the urbanisation of migration continues at a growing rate, widespread recognition, consolidation, and inclusion of cities and city networks in national, regional and international migration policy development and partnerships will be critical if the international community is to effectively respond to the modern and future "age of migration" and to the reality of mixed migration that cities face on a daily basis. As the rise of populist governments threatens multilateralism, cities are more than ever prepared to invest and partner in this global migration agenda. In effect: when cities are empowered and organised to co-design, implement and evaluate the migration policies that shape the world, we might face a more inclusive and resilient future for all.

62 Heimann C. & Stürmer J. (2020) [Evaluation report: Urban partnership on the inclusion of migrants and refugees](#); European Commission (undated) [What is the Urban Agenda for the EU?](#)

63 International Rescue Committee (2018) [From Response to Resilience: Working with cities and city plans to address urban displacement](#).

64 Acuto, M. & Morissette, M. (2017) op. cit

Photo credit: Manoj Paateel / Shutterstock. Mumbai, India

Migrant workers sleep on roadsides on their journey back home during a nationwide lockdown to fight the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus in early 2020. India implemented one of the most stringent lockdowns globally that triggered an unexpected “reverse migration” involving millions.



Photo credit: Humphery / Shutterstock. Jiangxi, China

China's internal, rural-urban, migrant worker phenomenon - involving many millions of people - has been the dominant catalyst for growth in China's recent real estate development, rapid construction of new cities, infrastructure development and huge increase in manufacturing.



Interview

Cities of power

Seeing migrant newcomers to cities as competing with existing residents is a dangerous conceptual error that plays into the hands of right-wing populists and extremist groups, warns **Vittoria Zanuso**. Instead, city planners should embrace migration as an opportunity to build resilience and shape national policies.



Vittoria Zanuso is the executive director of the Mayors Migration Council (MMC), an organisation that helps cities influence national and international deliberations on migration, refugee protection, and inclusion. Prior to joining the MMC, Zanuso held multiple positions at the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities initiative.

There are lots of Fora mayors around the world. What does the Mayors Migration Council offer that's different, in terms of its added value? And what are your aspirations?

It has been fascinating to see the exponential increase in the number of city networks over the past few years. Many of these focus on environmental sustainability and climate change, but it is great to see more and more city networks now dealing with migration and refugee issues. But even with these inroads, cities continue to face obstacles when it comes to accessing and influencing national, regional, and international policy deliberations that have a great impact on local realities. The MMC was created back in 2018 by a group of visionary mayors as a direct response to this challenge. Rather than launching a new network, our founders felt there was a need for an agile organisation that would help mayors access key inter-state policy deliberations, build their diplomatic

skills, and unlock international funding.

While we work closely with C40 Cities, United Cities and Local Governments, and other networks, we differ in that we are not an exclusive club.¹ Without membership requirements, our resources are available to all cities, regardless of their size or geography. This allows us to work with a diverse group of mayors whose experience we can elevate to the global stage, while other organisations are limited to cities who fit specific criteria. Our flexible nature also allows us to move nimbly in this space and jump on opportunities more quickly than others that have more bureaucratic structures.

Mayors and city planners have been engaged in migration issues for years. Do you think commentators and academics been too slow to embrace migration as an urban phenomenon, or to realise it's extent?

¹ [C40](#) is a network of the world's megacities committed to addressing climate change. [United Cities and Local Governments](#) is an umbrella international organisation for cities, local and regional governments, and municipal associations throughout the world.

The responsibilities of city practitioners and academics are very different, and understandably so. Cities and mayors are on the front line, whether they want it or not, and migration has always been something they've been dealing with in a way or another. Academics are more removed from on-the-ground experiences, so it is understandable that they have been paying attention to this phenomenon a bit later. And this already feels like a generalisation because I am sure there is plenty of researchers who have predicted this new reality a long time ago.

“ Mayors are becoming aware that their leadership can inform global responses and accelerate the implementation of multilateral agreements. City diplomacy can—and does—incentivise bolder, faster steps among states and the international community. ”

While migration is not a new phenomenon for city leaders, what is new and what has changed very recently is mayors' awareness that their leadership and local action can actually inform global responses and accelerate the implementation of multilateral agreements. City diplomacy can—and does—incentivise bolder, faster steps among states and the international community. And the Mayors Migration Council has definitely played a big role in this by elevating the voices and successes of local leaders internationally.

The 100 Resilient Cities initiative, where you used to work, has said “the factors pushing migrants to cities will only become more common and impactful” and “the mass migration we are witnessing today is not a temporary state of emergency, but the beginning of a new reality.”² In light of this, what will big cities look like in 20 or 30 years' time?

Most of the urban expansion that will take place by 2050 will happen in the developing world and likely through informal settlements. This is a challenge, but also a significant opportunity to reshape cities—some 75 percent of the infrastructure expected to be in place by 2050 has yet to be built. As cities will continue to grow, leaders can either follow business as usual, or instead take this opportunity to build more inclusive, diverse, and sustainable cities.

Of course, the Covid-19 crisis has introduced an element of unknown in all of this. Countries are closing borders and demonising migrants as carriers of the virus. We're

seeing migrant workers going back to rural areas because they're not able to sustain their livelihoods in cities due to lockdown measures and other restrictions. But this contraction of urban life after the pandemic will be temporary at best. As we recover and build back better, mayors will be the driving force in addressing the inequalities exposed by Covid-19. The optimism in me hopes for, and envisions, a brighter future where no one is left behind because of his or her immigration status.

Most movement into cities is occurring in the global South. How equipped are cities in developing countries to absorb large numbers of newcomers?

Yes, around 95 percent of urban expansion expected in the coming decades will take place in the developing world. By nature, global South cities are very flexible and adaptive. But most of this expansion will likely occur in informal settlements, beyond the scope of basic services and municipal assistance and at high risk from natural hazards and the effects of global climate change. Here's where we need to focus our attention and investments.

“ Most of the urban expansion that will take place by 2050 will happen in the developing world and likely through informal settlements. This is a challenge, but also a significant opportunity to reshape cities. ”

Previously with the 100 Resilient Cities program, you led the design and delivery of a network exchange on effective city-level practices to address migrant integration in urban settings. Do you see the Mayors Migration Council as an extension of that work that you were doing before?

Absolutely. I owe a lot to the 100 Resilient Cities Network, where I grew personally and professionally for over six years. It seems only yesterday that, when the Syrian crisis hit in 2015, we convened chief resilience officers from Los Angeles, Amman, Montreal, and other cities to frame urban migration as a key resilience opportunity, when back then many only saw a burden, a challenge, a shock. Most of the mayors that helped build that narrative and movement are members of the MMC Leadership Board, our mayor-led governance body. This includes Giorgos Kaminis, the former mayor of Athens who hosted the 100RC Network Exchange back when everything started. He now serves as special envoy for the MMC and C40, bridging the agendas of our organisations. But the overlap doesn't end here. At 100RC I worked closely with the mayors of Amman, Bristol, Los Angeles, Montreal, and Milan on migration

2 100 Resilient Cities (2018) [Global Migration - Resilient Cities at the Forefront - Strategic actions to adapt and transform our cities in an age of migration.](#)

Interview

Vittoria Zanuso

issues and they all sit in the MMC's Leadership Board. While at 100RC, we partnered to accelerate on-the-ground project implementation, now we are taking these experiences and elevating them at the global stage.

You once wrote that “we can reduce our reliance on crisis as a driver of change and proactively plan for a future that is bright for all migrants and residents living in our cities.” What would this kind of planning look like? Can you point to some examples of where it's happened or even where it's not happened?

I'll give you an example. In 2015, when the Syrian crisis hit and a number of European countries suddenly closed their borders, Athens found itself changing from being a place of transit—with millions of refugees coming through the city to go to most prosperous European countries—to becoming a destination city. With a tight budget, unclear political mandate, and competing priorities, the municipality had to do even more with less. It had to adapt its services and infrastructure and, most importantly, reorient its mandate from humanitarian relief to long-term development and inclusion. Among other things, the municipality launched a new innovative partnership with UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, to rehabilitate abandoned buildings and offer affordable rent to refugees. This is a good example because the municipality not only made more efficient use of unused assets, but also created a model that can accommodate other vulnerable residents, such as the unemployed, the homeless, the elderly, when a new crisis hits.

Back then, the mayor had to be resourceful and “build the plane while flying it”, but the big lesson he shared with me and his peers is that you don't need to wait for a shock to happen. The secret is to be proactive and design services and infrastructure that address the needs of multiple residents at once and that can quickly be adapted in the face of known and unknown risks.

“You don't need to wait for a shock to happen. The secret is to be proactive and design services and infrastructure that address the needs of multiple residents at once and that can quickly be adapted in the face of known and unknown risks.”

In your publication, *Global Migration: Resilient Cities at the Forefront*, in 2018, you called for cities to embrace and include newcomers.³ Is this an optional policy for cities, or do you see it is an unavoidable imperative? And if so, then why?

Yes [it's a must]. And mayors should do this not only because it's the right thing to do, but also because it's the smart thing to do. With more migrants and refugees moving to cities, local leaders must meet the needs of newcomers on top of those of existing vulnerable groups. That means housing, educating, training, and ultimately integrating individuals from different backgrounds and cultures, while maintaining public order and safety. Ineffective management of these challenges can exacerbate existing stresses on city systems and services, as well as social tension between newcomers and existing residents. Settlement patterns can intensify the problem, given that newcomers with limited resources and networks settle into already marginalised neighbourhoods.

Put simply, if cities do not embrace or include newcomers, they make their city more susceptible to damage from sudden shocks. But if they incorporate migration into their planning—developing proactive, rather than reactive inclusion strategies—they can turn this into a major opportunity, one that can have a positive impact on everyone. That's because, when cities make their plans work for the most vulnerable, they make them work for all residents.

Can you identify forces or ideologies that are against new arrivals of migrants in cities? How would you identify or characterise these forces, and do you think they will last?

It's critical to tamping down the perception of competition between newcomers and long-time residents, and ultimately, resentment among them. When residents believe that migrants are the cause of deteriorating living conditions, it is likely easier for right-wing populists to promote their politics. When social alienation increases, the same is true for extremist organisations, which often attempt to radicalise the disaffected. Developing thoughtful strategies for pre-empting tensions and promoting an environment where cohesion can grow should be high on city leaders' agendas.

Moving onto other, less obvious, existential threats that keep me up at night: first, we need to be careful about the “cities versus states” narrative and consider moving towards “cities with states,” cities as an asset that complements and supports national efforts, rather than replacing them, otherwise we risk alienating the very actors we're trying to influence. This won't always be feasible nor desirable, especially with those national leaders that are spreading toxic anti-immigrant narratives and building walls. But it is definitely something to keep in mind. Second, in our field, we are all tempted to romanticise cities as transnational actors driving progress and innovation. And in doing so, we tend to focus our attention on big, influential, global

3 100 Resilient Cities (2018) op. cit.

cities to carry out key messages. But by doing this we risk exacerbating the rural-urban divide and cause the very radicalisation and polarisation of politics we're trying to combat. The involvement of rural towns and surroundings and a "meeting people where they are" approach will be key to mitigate this risk.

In so far that the MMC is an offshoot of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, what is its position on irregular migrants?

While cities cannot—and should not—have control over who enters national borders, they have a responsibility to address the needs of all those who live within their boundaries, regardless of status.

Immigration policy is and should be the prerogative of states, but once people get into a country, they will likely move to cities, and when they arrive, it is mayors and city officials who are responsible for their wellbeing. Mayors don't really care about labels like "refugee", "asylum seeker" and "IDP". What they care about is whether they can keep all their residents, including undocumented immigrants, healthy, safe and thriving.

“ Mayors don't really care about labels like “refugee”, “asylum seeker” and “IDP”. What they care about is whether they can keep all their residents, including undocumented immigrants, healthy, safe and thriving. ”

Do you fear that the fallout of Covid-19 will set back the aspirations of the Global Compact? What's your sense so far?

With this pandemic, we are seeing xenophobia against foreigners spreading faster than the virus. We're seeing national leaders using Covid-19 to build walls and challenge the whole idea of human mobility and migration as an engine of sustainable economic growth. This is ironic given that, especially in cities, migrants and refugees are playing a key role as essential workers delivering anything from healthcare to food (and all in between) to their neighbours and receiving communities.

At the same time, the international community of states and multilateral agencies is really stepping up and showcasing solidarity towards migrants, refugees, and other groups who are putting their lives at risk in the midst of the pandemic. I'm encouraged by this movement and I see the opportunity to use this

momentum to build back better. First, we must ensure safe, equitable access to Covid-19 assistance regardless of immigration status, including healthcare and financial relief. Second, we must empower migrants and refugees to be part of the solution to Covid-19, including through the regularisation of immigrant essential workers. And third, we must combat misinformation, racism, and xenophobia, working to strengthen community solidarity in all Covid-19 response and recovery efforts.⁴

Finally, what do you see as the future major drivers of mobility to cities? Will they be noticeably different from today's drivers?

I think today's drivers are interlinked, complex, and multiple, so I would only expect that the trend is going to continue. Something we're paying close attention to is climate-induced migration. Climate change, combined with other trends, is increasingly a key driver of human mobility. In 2018 alone, it was estimated that 17.2 million people were newly displaced as a result of disasters linked to natural hazards, most of which were climate- and weather-related. If one also accounts for people compelled to move due to slow-onset events linked to climate change and environmental degradation, this number would be even higher. Worse still, entire nations in the Pacific Ocean are facing complete destruction. The World Bank recently projected that, without significant climate and development action, by 2050 up to 143 million people may move internally in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia alone.⁵

“ With the Covid-19, we are seeing xenophobia against foreigners spreading faster than the virus. ”

As the majority of people who move as a result of climate change settle in urban areas, cities are the first responders. In the coming years, they will face increasing pressures, both from direct climate impacts and from climate-induced movements. MMC Leadership Board members have recognised that it is up to them to identify solutions for these major challenges. With our partners at C40 Cities, we will work to coordinate and streamline cities' diplomatic activities to promote conducive national and international policy frameworks, highlight concrete recommendations and best practices on integrating inclusive climate with integration and inclusion policies in cities, and explore joint and targeted approaches towards climate and migration related funding instruments and streams.

4 The MMC launched a Global Mayors Solidarity Campaign to draw international attention to the unique needs and vulnerabilities of migrants and refugees living in cities during the Covid-19 crisis. Supported by [a joint statement](#), [video](#) and [virtual hub](#) highlighting practices shared by Leadership Board mayors and beyond.

5 Rigaud, K. et al (2018) [Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration](#). World Bank.

Photo credit: Alexander V Evstafyev / Shutterstock.
St. Petersburg, Russia

Construction site and workers housing on the outskirts of St. Petersburg. Russia accepts about 4.5 million international labour migrants annually, most of them from three Central Asian states. Less noticeable are internal migrant workers—Russian nationals – who number approximately 2.5-3 million – both groups are a small proportion of the more than 75 million people employed, but housing cost in cities mean they are sometimes forced to live in temporary housing close to their place of work.



Photo credit: George Georgiou / Panos. Glasgow, Scotland, UK

Migration and resettlement as a refugee can be lonely and disorienting - to be settled in another country and in another city, especially for those living alone and having left a world of conflict and trauma with the likely loss of family members and often suddenly wrenched from one's own community. Even when cities such as Glasgow try to be welcoming and generous to refugees, the reality is that they are often given refuge in the poorer parts of cities where many existing social problems and deprivations exist.



Back cover photo credit: Kaarthikeyan. SM / Shutterstock. Bengaluru, India

The contrasts of living standards for migrant workers in cities around the world compared to the urban community they serve can be very stark. For some migrants their “arrival city” offers the first steps in a journey of upward mobility and increased opportunities but many also remain locked in poverty and precarious living situations for years or decades.



Cities are on the frontlines of mixed migration. In a context of accelerating urbanisation, the future of migration will be increasingly shaped by towns and settlements. What are the experiences of refugees and migrants in different urban centres around the world? Which risks and opportunities do cities present to refugees and migrants, and what risks and opportunities do they offer cities? To what extent do cities offer protection to refugees and migrants? How will refugees and migrants in cities be affected by climate vulnerabilities? How do different global and regional processes influence urban approaches to mobility, and what can we learn from how cities govern migration issues compared to national migration policies? What are existing data gaps regarding mobile populations in cities? And what is the relation between cities, migration and Covid-19?

All this and more is explored in the 2020 edition of MMC's annual flagship report, the Mixed Migration Review (MMR), examining the role of cities in human mobility as an overarching focus. The MMR 2020 contains the year's regional mixed migration overviews, essays, interviews with leading experts and thought leaders, case studies ('urban spotlights'), as well as individual stories of refugees and migrants on the move and selected data presentations from the MMC's primary data gathering network, 4Mi.

For a full electronic copy of the Mixed Migration Review 2020, extensive data from the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi), and additional commentary, visit our website at: www.mixedmigration.org