

# Briefing

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Protracted  
displacement  
in an urban  
world



Mayors Migration Council



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## Policy pointers

**Participatory city** planning promotes collective action, practical solutions and political recognition of otherwise marginalised and underrepresented groups of internally displaced people and refugees.

**Meeting the needs of** displaced communities in cities requires participatory planning and meaningful joint priority setting to amplify their personal agency and improve their wellbeing.

**Displacement-affected** urban communities' own experiences, views, aspirations and goals should inform dialogue and collaboration between city governments, international humanitarian actors and local stakeholders, and the resulting actions.

**Collaboration between** international humanitarian actors, donors, city governments, local nongovernmental organisations and community leaders can best address urban displacement by providing support and agile funding for long-term participatory development planning.

## City planning with displaced communities: the benefits of inclusion

Displacement affects more than 100 million people worldwide and is often prolonged. Many displaced people seek opportunities in cities. Whereas participatory planning can be tokenistic and lack impact, the Protracted Displacement in an Urban World project explores participatory information gathering and decision making that meaningfully involve displaced and host communities in catalysing more equitable and inclusive urban development. The project's planning forums in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Jordan and Kenya enable displaced people to voice their needs and objectives and work with city authorities and other municipal stakeholders to co-develop practical solutions. There is transformative potential in involving displaced people as active participants, creating services that reflect local needs and knowledge, and addressing power imbalances. This requires strategic support and adequate, decentralised and agile international humanitarian and donor funding.

Displacement affects more than 100 million people worldwide, more than ever before.<sup>1</sup> Reluctant to put their lives on hold in remote camps, many internally displaced people (IDPs) and cross-border refugees gravitate to cities. According to UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates, more than 70% of displaced people live in urban environments.

It is common knowledge in the humanitarian sector that most IDPs and refugees reside in cities, not in camps. Yet there has been little research into how urban planning can include displaced people, or how displacement-affected people can engage in urban political processes. Such engagement is essential for IDPs and refugees to have a say in developing pathways to productive livelihoods.

These concerns are among the core themes that the IIED-led comparative research project Protracted Displacement in an Urban World (PDUW) explores in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Jordan and Kenya.<sup>2</sup> The project has a workstream on participatory planning processes to enable city planners, urban communities (displaced and other), civil society, private-sector actors, and aid organisations and donors to share perspectives and goals to inform development planning and implementation.

### Participatory planning forums

There are increasingly examples of organised low-income urban communities' inclusion in participatory planning involving partnerships and co-production of knowledge and joint objectives.

## *Displaced people are forced into camps in search of safety, but they move to towns and cities for opportunity*

Yet there are limited examples of such processes including IDPs or refugees, and fewer still led by such groups. The principal ambition of the PDUW project's participatory planning forums is to create

spaces where displaced groups can voice their needs and goals and collaborate with others to co-develop inclusive practical solutions.

Each PDUW participatory forum periodically convenes stakeholders in each city: municipal

governments, representatives of displaced communities, civil society, private-sector actors and aid/donor organisations, all of whom shape the lives of the displaced. The forums enable stakeholders to validate together the project's findings and use these as an evidence base to identify and take action to improve displacement-affected people's wellbeing and agency.

At least two participatory forums have taken place to date in each city involved in the project: Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Amman (Jordan), Jalalabad (Afghanistan)<sup>3</sup> and Nairobi (Kenya). As a result, stakeholders have a better understanding of how people affected by displacement are faring in cities (especially as compared to camps) and how inclusion and integration can be envisioned to benefit all residents. Beyond sharing information, the forums support city governments to help these communities improve their wellbeing, while displaced communities gain a stake in shaping their new home cities and can better realise the opportunities that brought them there.

### **The need for strategic and financial support**

International humanitarian actors and nongovernmental organisations such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Oxfam and Mercy Corps, and UN agencies such as UNHCR, working with the agreement of national governments, have dominated responses to internal and cross-border displacement. As displaced populations in urban areas increase, humanitarian actors have recognised cities' key role in responding to their needs, and that a longer-term, more development-focused response is required.

City governments can be equal partners with humanitarian organisations, capable of leading responses to displacement crises and putting in place sustainable, inclusive programmes for IDPs, refugees and marginalised host communities. UNHCR, for example, recognises that "cities and towns continue to demonstrate solidarity towards

their refugee, internally displaced, and stateless residents. They promote progressive policies around housing and employment, and work to create social cohesion."<sup>4</sup>

However, recognition has yet to translate into strategic or financial support. The international humanitarian community's 2016 Grand Bargain pledge to allocate 25% of humanitarian funding to local and national responders by 2020 achieved less than 5%.<sup>5</sup> The humanitarian community can and should do more to support city governments and other local actors in involving displacement-affected people in inclusive long-term development planning and implementation. The current lack of support misses a critical opportunity.

In the case of the PDUW project, city stakeholders, including municipal governments and displacement-affected people, have elaborated plans that now serve as living documents outlining a collaborative approach to IDP and refugee wellbeing. These plans can be refined and improved to support urban stakeholders in addressing their priorities, including over the longer term, to create more sustainable and inclusive cities.

### **Enhancing agency and addressing power imbalances**

In all four countries involved in the project, more displaced people in cities considered they had choice in their decision of where to live than people in camps, most of whom felt they had no choice (although the extent of differences varied across the countries). The decision to move to a city is an act of agency made to seek more agency. Displaced people move to cities largely because they expect to find better opportunities.

However, displacement-affected people who move to cities seeking to build a better life may not completely succeed. PDUW counts people's agency and independence as just as important as basic needs such as a livelihood, health or education. Project research has focused on a comprehensive comparison of wellbeing across cities and camps in each of the four countries. The results demonstrate how displaced people could have more dignified, productive and fulfilling lives in cities, but that this depends on the country and the setting, as well as on personal factors such as age and gender.

In addition, the PDUW participatory forums acknowledge the importance of addressing power imbalances by integrating IDPs and refugees in urban planning processes and ensuring that such processes link with durable solutions. Box 1 considers examples from the

## Box 1. Addressing power imbalances in participatory planning

Eritrean refugees in **Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**, have better access to housing, education and healthcare than those in Asayta camp, 650 kilometres from the capital and near Ethiopia's border with Djibouti. Yet, with recent political developments, refugees in Addis Ababa face numerous challenges in terms of livelihoods, basic services and protection. Their legal status remains a concern, as do government officials' gaps in awareness about refugee rights and state obligations.

The PDUW participatory forums in Addis Ababa are prioritising discussion about these responsibilities to shape the authorities' policy agenda, progress policy implementation and provide accountability to refugees. Discussions are moving towards planning for city resourcing at a time of need, because allocations for refugees have been mainly targeted at camps, with very limited urban funding.

Addis Ababa forum participants agree that hosting refugees requires human and financial/material capacity. This calls for a more holistic approach to urban displacement, starting in the capital and scaled across Ethiopia. The government's Refugees and Returnees Service has committed to working more closely with city authorities. The next forum will aim to integrate the municipality in managing the response to refugees' needs.

Thousands of Syrians now reside in the greater metropolitan area of **Amman, Jordan**, the country's main economic hub, in search of work and social connections and away from the refugee camps. UNHCR and the Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) estimate there are approximately 194,000 Syrian refugees in Amman, but the actual figure is likely larger. By comparison, Zaartari camp is home to 76,878 refugees, and Azraq camp 36,874.<sup>6,7</sup> The two largest refugee camps combined therefore host far fewer refugees than the city of Amman. Yet most investment is targeted to these camps, where electricity alone can cost millions of dollars per year.<sup>8</sup>

The PDUW participatory forums in Amman, co-hosted by GAM, seek to move away from internationally led responses to displacement to a more collaborative, locally led approach. Using data generated through PDUW, GAM and its partners seek to promote inclusivity and build relationships between Jordanians and refugees by improving conditions in low-income areas where refugees typically reside and by expanding community-led initiatives such as sporting events and outdoor socialising. GAM is also focused on providing job opportunities for low-income Jordanians and refugees, especially women.

In August 2022, after a year of political upheaval, the PDUW consortium, through its local partner Samuel Hall, collected updated survey data on the lives of displaced and host communities in urban **Jalalabad, Afghanistan**. This was to make the project data as relevant as possible to current challenges. The municipal administration agreed to use the data to develop a city-wide plan to support the wellbeing of both IDPs and long-standing city residents who have fallen into destitution given Afghanistan's economic downturn.

While Afghanistan's de facto authorities still do not have international political recognition as a government, city-level technocrats are using PDUW data and participatory forums to unlock local solutions. These include approaches to promote women and girls' wellbeing in Jalalabad (whose physical and social welfare is less than that of their male neighbours), and to expand the city space while developing a cleaner and greener urban environment, with more recreational and social spaces for children, youth and women. Forum participants have committed to further work on these priorities.

The prevalence of displaced communities in **Nairobi, Kenya**, has received increasing attention from the Nairobi City County Government (NCCG) and national government. Kenya has an encampment policy at national level, and there have been advances with a new Refugee Bill in 2022 that recognises refugees' rights. Nairobi's participatory forums (hosted by the Kenyan affiliate of Slum Dwellers International) have enhanced local coordination by bringing together urban actors and refugee protection specialists via referral pathways for five key stakeholder groups: government (national and city levels); service providers; humanitarian organisations; refugee representatives; and host community leaders.

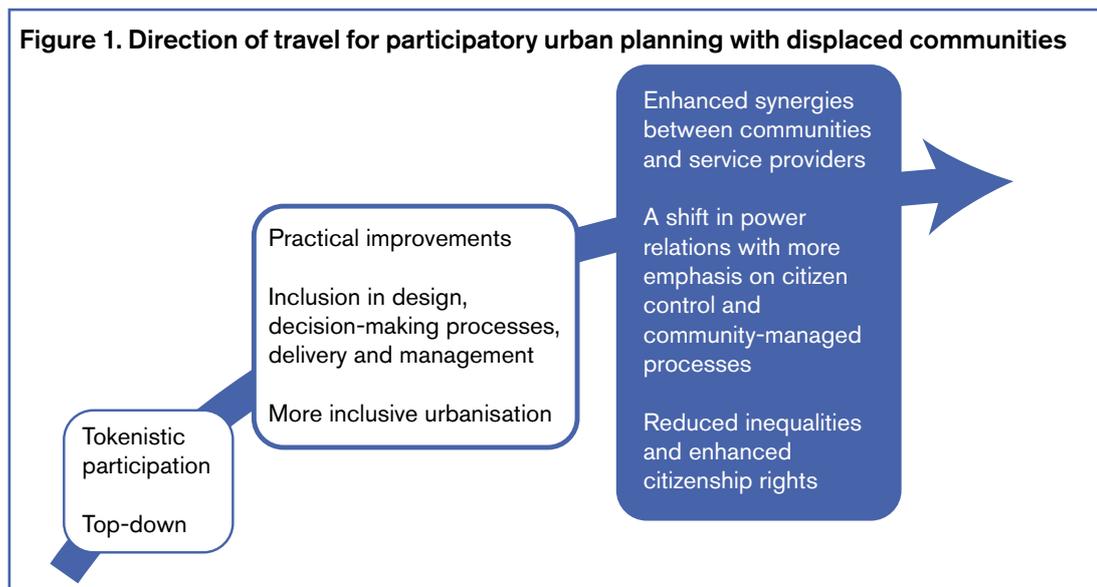
The Nairobi forums have enabled more inclusive policy and project development on the part of the NCCG, including key insights from the national government's Department of Refugee Services (DRS), Kenya's official mandate holder for refugees. Forum members have provided input from their biannual discussions and qualitative data from key informant interviews, focus groups and learning exchanges with urban refugee-hosting communities outside Nairobi facilitated by the DRS. This has been supplemented by ethnographic research walks based exclusively on refugee voices and survey evidence to inform the County Integrated Development Plan 2023–2027, which the NCCG will launch in 2023 as its first plan to include policies related to refugee wellbeing.

project of how participatory planning can address power imbalances.

In the contexts given in Box 1, displaced communities' inclusion has progressed from tokenistic measures to active participation in research and planning. This has helped redress the "division between the visible and the invisible ... the audible and the inaudible".<sup>9,10</sup> Figure 1 illustrates the intended trajectory for integrating displaced communities meaningfully in urban planning.

## Unlocking financing for co-produced solutions

PDUW's participatory forums indicate the potential of city governments, displacement-affected communities and others working together to make cities more inclusive of IDPs and refugees and more conducive to their productive livelihoods and wellbeing. The forums also point to the beneficial role international humanitarian actors can play in nurturing such



connections and investing in cities rather than perpetuating camp-based approaches.

Displaced people are forced into camps in search of safety, but they move to towns and cities for opportunity. The progress made in Addis Ababa, Amman, Jalalabad and Nairobi demonstrates what is possible in the many urban centres where IDPs and refugees live. By investing in and working with city governments and communities affected by displacement, international humanitarian actors can go beyond camp-based emergency responses and strengthen cities' efforts towards inclusivity, sustainability and wellbeing.

To demonstrate and promote good practice, the Mayors Migration Council, a PDUW consortium partner, has launched the Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees.<sup>11</sup> The fund responds to the needs of cities as they support IDPs, migrants and refugees by directly funding cities to implement inclusive programmes of their own design. The fund builds precedents of fiscal feasibility among city governments where donors with low risk tolerance often disregard such potential.

The fund's grantees include Addis Ababa and Nairobi. The intention is that these cities' efforts inspire international humanitarian actors to view city governments as equal partners in addressing urban migration and displacement issues. It is also hoped that a major increase in urban-focused international humanitarian funding will help unlock participatory processes' potential to improve the lives of tens of millions of urban migrants, displaced people and other marginalised city communities worldwide.

Together with additional finance, funding needs to be more agile and decentralised. This will support city administrations and others in ensuring that gains from participatory planning result in better long-term integration and displacement-affected communities being more enabled to realise their agency and potential.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR (2022) Refugee Data Finder: More than 100 million people are forcibly displaced. [www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/insights/explainers/100-million-forcibly-displaced.html](http://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/insights/explainers/100-million-forcibly-displaced.html) / <sup>2</sup> Protracted displacement in an urban world. [www.protractedisplacement.org/](http://www.protractedisplacement.org/) / <sup>3</sup> See Majidi, N (10 June 2021) Tricky questions and frank discussions: a participatory forum on protracted displacement in Afghanistan. [www.iied.org/tricky-questions-frank-discussions-participatory-forum-protracted-displacement-afghanistan](http://www.iied.org/tricky-questions-frank-discussions-participatory-forum-protracted-displacement-afghanistan) / <sup>4</sup> UNHCR. Global Compact on Refugees: Cities and Municipalities as first responders to refugee situations. <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/compact-action/cities-and-municipalities/> / <sup>5</sup> Alexander, J (11 June 2021) Renewing the Grand Bargain, Part 2: Old goals, a new path. *The New Humanitarian*. [www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2021/6/11/Grand-Bargain-international-aid-sector-part-2](http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2021/6/11/Grand-Bargain-international-aid-sector-part-2) / <sup>6</sup> UNHCR (May 2020) Jordan – Zaatari Camp Factsheet. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/77148> / <sup>7</sup> UNHCR (July 2020) Jordan: Azraq Camp Factsheet. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/78179> / <sup>8</sup> Jiwani, S (18 April 2019) Powering life in the world's largest Syrian refugee camp. United Nations Foundation. <https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/powering-life-in-the-worlds-largest-syrian-refugee-camp> / <sup>9</sup> Schimanski, J (2017) Glass borders. *AntiAtlas Journal*. [www.antiatlas-journal.net/02-johann-schimanski-glass-borders](http://www.antiatlas-journal.net/02-johann-schimanski-glass-borders) / <sup>10</sup> Quotation from Brambilla, C and Pötzsch, H (2017) In/visibility. In: Schimanski, J and Wolfe, SF (eds) *Border aesthetics: Concepts and intersections*, Ch. 3, p68. Berghahn, New York. / <sup>11</sup> Mayors Migration Council. The Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees. [www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf](http://www.mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf)



The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges.

Protracted displacement in an urban world is a comparative research project on the wellbeing, livelihoods and enterprises of displaced people in urban areas and camps in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya and Jordan

Mayors Migration Council is a coalition founded by mayors for mayors to accelerate ambitious global action on migration and create a world where urban migrants, displaced people, and receiving communities can thrive.

Samuel Hall is a social enterprise that conducts research, evaluates programmes, and designs policies in contexts of migration and displacement.

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