# War refugees, as a special category of migrants, in cities

Migration and human mobility have been at the center of attention of the GPM since its inaugural meeting in 2016 (The Hague). In 2017 (Stavanger, Norway) the focus was on "inclusive cities", emphasizing that maintaining social and territorial cohesion in a competitive globalised world demands local governance oriented to maintaining human rights, requires attention to integrating newcomers and to mobilizing local populations in an inclusive local democracy. At the GPM Annual Summit 2018 in Bristol (UK) we committed to implementing the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees in our cities, emphasizing the benefits of migration in our cities and using the language of inclusion, welcoming and belonging, ending the use of dehumanizing language in relation to migrants and refugees.

In 2019 (Durban) migration was put again at the center of debating urban policies. GPM Mayors committed to institutionalizing welcoming standards to ensure that every person's basic needs are provided for and that all feel welcome, irrespective of nationality, point of origin, or immigration status; providing opportunities to live a safe, inclusive and dignified life free of discrimination; and implementing the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees in our cities. In 2021, we addressed specially climate migration as an urban phenomenon, allowing access to funds and grants assigned for climate action and disaster risk management.

The multi-level Call to Action on Climate Change, Cities and Forced Migration: Advancing Knowledge, Action and Collaboration signed by more than 45 mayors at the beginning of this year advocated for

migration-related resilience and adaptation projects financed at the urban level and investments for urban solutions and inclusive development. During this Summit in Katowice, so close to the Ukrainian border, our attention on migration and human mobility will be focused on the specific category of war refugees.

In 2019, the number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate rose to 20.7 million. A further 5.7 million registered refugees are cared for in some 60 camps across the Middle East by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which was set up in 1949 to care for displaced Palestinians. More than half the refugees UNHCR serves now live in urban areas.

Over 38 million people in the war zones of Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, and Syria have been displaced, either abroad or within their own countries, and are living in grossly inadequate conditions. This is a very conservative estimate but the figure could be as high as 49-60 million. At the end of 2020 at least 82.4 million people around the world were forced to flee their homes. Among them are nearly 26.4 million refugees, around half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also millions of stateless people, who have been denied a nationality and lack access to basic rights such as education, health care, employment, and freedom of movement.

At a time when **1 in every 95 people on earth has fled their home** as a result of conflict or persecution, the work of UNHCR is more important than ever before. More than 14 million of the Ukrainian people have fled their homes since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the United Nations (UN) says. Almost seven million left for neighboring countries, while eight million people are displaced inside Ukraine itself.

The EU has granted Ukrainians the right to stay and work throughout its 27 member states for up to three years. Refugees are housed in reception centers if they can't stay with friends or relatives. They are given food and medical care, and information about onward travel. They are entitled to social welfare payments and access to housing, medical treatment and schools.

Major cities in neighboring countries quickly mobilized to provide basic services to refugees and now require effective multi-level governance mechanisms to seek support from higher levels of government tailored to their needs. Poland, which has taken the highest number of refugees, and Moldova, with the largest concentration of Ukrainian refugees by population, have both asked for international support to help fund their efforts.

War refugees are defined and protected by international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key legal document. The protection of refugees has many aspects. These include safety from being returned to danger, access to fair and efficient asylum procedures, and measures to ensure that their basic human rights are respected while they secure a longer-term solution. As these human rights are universal and enforceable, they need to be accompanied with an informational and educational effort towards the local population, especially in contexts where human rights are contested.

As the majority of refugees arrive and stay in cities, not only urban governments but also inhabitants, civil society, and the local economies are confronted with specific challenges. As opposed to other types of migration, war refugees tend to arrive in numbers and have to be accepted under their legal rights. t does produce immediate reception challenges at the level of infrastructures as well as at the level of hospitality by the population. Urgency measures often count on the contribution of private persons and/or voluntary organizations. War refugees are more or less accepted in relation to the proximity and the sympathy for the conflict zones and also in relation to the overall mentality of solidarity in the city (acceptance of universal human rights).

A specific element in coping with the urgencies is the temporality as refugees are mostly fleeing with a desire of returning, especially when they are part of split families - woman only or kids without parents. Asylum is of another nature than integration. It raises specific challenges of integrating children in the education system (e.g., language), offering specific psychological care, supporting staff staff and personnel in adapting to respond to these contexts appropriately. The integration of adults in the housing market, the labor market and access to other facilities raises challenges of temporality and discrimination towards other categories. Care and help for elderly and increased demand for support for mental health related issues also raise specific requirements not always present in all

cities. Because refugees need support in multiple policy sectors, coordination among relevant local stakeholders is greatly beneficial. War refugees while the conflict is still ongoing need special help for information, contact with the home country and participation in solidarity movements. Where other migrants are requested to integrate in the local society, war refugees are allowed to remain in their own community.

The influx of high numbers of war refugees in cities produces an increasing stress to other political challenges in the city. It raises several questions:

- Is there a consensus to deal with the crisis based on the universal human rights of the individual?
- Is there discrimination depending on degrees of sympathy for the victims in a conflict?
- Is this position related to available resources and infrastructure?

The response to these questions depends then on the help of regional, national and even international bodies to compensate for the relatively higher burden put on cities in accepting refugees from conflict zones. In turn, this refers to the endeavor of empowering cities in national and global governance as the effects of geopolitical and planetary dynamics tend to be concentrated in cities already hosting the vast majority of humanity.

Some key questions for debate:
- How and under what conditions do you analyze the reaction of a (your) local urban population to receiving high numbers of war refugees?
- What are the main challenges for integration in regular or temporal sectors, infrastructures, or institutions?
- How does the refugee challenge reset the agenda of the relationship between global, continental, national and local governance?

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