

Refugees in Urban Areas

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Abstract

This study aims to review recent studies that were written about refugees in urban areas, especially, about the case of Iraqi and Syrian refugees in Jordan. The study ends with summarizing the urban refugees' situation through theoretical model. The theoretical review shows that refugees from rural or urban areas prefer to settle in urban areas. Their settlement can affect the urban area context in negative or positive ways, and is encountered with socio cultural and institutional obstacles. Finally, studies indicate that refugees' integration can be enhanced through special programs. The success of these programs requires availability of resources and collaboration between: local communities, international organization and national institutions.

Keywords: Urban areas, urban context, push factors, pull factors, obstacles, integration.

1. Introduction

The past few decades have witnessed a growth in number of refugees around the world. It is estimated that each country was either origin, transit or distant for refugees. According to the UNHCR, (2016) there are 21.3 million refugees, and 59% of them live in urban areas. Since more refugees are expected to move to urban areas, hosting countries have to integrate refugees in their development plans on different scales: local, regional and national, with special attention for urban areas. In urban hosting communities, refugees constitute a recognized percentage, and they become a part of its urban socio cultural and economical context, whether they were consistent with the host community or not. In urban areas, refugees' movements reconsidered as a dynamic agent that affects their development and economic growth both positively and negatively. It reshapes the urban areas: size, location, internal structure and their physical and human characteristics.

2. Refugees origin and distant:

Recent studies indicated that the number and sources of refugees and their characteristics vary from one country to another. The origin and socio-economic states of refugees in their home determine the decision of refugees where to flee to, Kobia and Cranfield, (2009). Consequently, urban origin refugees will prefer to escape to urban areas, even if they were directed to camps when they arrive to distant country. They will later leave to urban areas. Also, they are differentiated from rural origin refugees with higher education and qualification. In a study for Norwegian Research Institute & Department of Statistics, (2007) on Iraqi refugees in Jordan found that 76% of refugees who settled in the capital Amman came from Bagdad (Iraqi capital) and 46% of them got a university degree, and 58.8% of Iraqi families were classified as middle – upper class. However the case was different for Syrian refugees, although most of them came from rural areas and 60% were holding elementary degree, just 24.4% settled in Za'atary camp, while 55.3% lived in major cities in Jordan: Amman, Irbid, Mefraq. Al Wazani et al, (2014).

3. Push and pull factors:

Many other factors that push more refugees to urban areas out of camps as:

- Very high population density and crowding in camps.
- Shortage of social security.
- Exposure to: diseases, hard weather condition and other environmental hazards.
- Inadequate education and health services.

- Shortage of other basic services: water, sewage and electricity.
- Poverty, Low income and limited work opportunities.
- Discrimination.

While many factors will pull refugees to settle in urban areas as:

- Higher work opportunities especially in informal sector.
- Higher income.
- Better life condition.
- Availability of telecommunication and basic needs like: water, sewage and electricity.
- Better health and education services.

4. Refugees Impacts

In urban areas, refugees can be effective tools in sustaining development and achieving economic urban growth. Refugees' settlement in urban areas transforms the urban areas texture. The UN-Habitat study (2015) indicated that refugees were active in urban market; refugees' settlement will induce higher demand on goods and services, which could be obtained from either local market or international aids. Furthermore, providing goods and services to refugees will create more jobs either for local or refugees workforce.

For instance, in Jordan, Iraqi refugees increased demand and prices of the real estate sector when 25% of them owned their home and the rest rented them, Norwegian Research Institute & Department of Statistics, (2007).

Also refugees work as a bridge between origin and distant areas, they create an interaction current; through which they transfer their skills and resources to recipients' cities. These cities can benefit by investing them. According to Pavanello et al, (2010) the urbanization level in Kenya rose because of refugees, and as result of influx of refugees, certain cities transformed to trade centers especially those on boarder with Somalia and Ethiopia. Refugees in Kenya also benefit the economy in three ways: money transfers, establishing shops and saloons and utilizing refugees' skills in low skill jobs. While in Jordan, it was found that 42% of Iraqi refugees depended on money transfers, Norwegian Research Institute & Department of Statistics, (2007).

Nevertheless, refugees are faced with many obstacles in hosting countries that vary from one to another. In hosting societies, Refugees integration is encountered with socio cultural factors and institutional laws. As a result, refugees are segregated socially, and prohibited from access to services and resources or obtain work opportunities in cities. However it was found that the degree of refugees' deprivation varies depending on institutional laws and refugees economic and educational characteristics.

Stave and Hillesund, (2015) indicated that when the Jordanian authorities stop issuing work permits unemployment between Syrian refugees reach 88% outside refugees camps. Moreover, local employees complain from higher competitiveness which limits work opportunities and reduces income, since refugees accept to work with less payment and longer work hours. However, Syrian refugees still affect work opportunities negatively in informal sector. When, 27% of refugees' families depend on their work in adjacent cities to Za'atari Camp as Irbid and Ramtha, Harvard Field Study Group (2014). Indeed, in the report of Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies (2015), it was found that refugees obtained 50,000 jobs in construction, restaurants and retail sectors. In addition, refugees could be a burden on urban society and its economy. Hosting refugees demand high costs mostly paid by host countries, in specific urban areas, these costs hamper economic growth and destroy urban market. Refugees cause increase in prices of goods and services. They also minimize the availability of basic needs for local urban communities.

In a study by Alix-Garcia and Saah (2009), in Tanzania some food prices had raised in urban areas; namely, those goods that match the refugees' diets. But other types of food price had fallen because refugees sold their food quota of aids that mismatch their diet. As a result Tanzanian urban families and food traders suffered from instable food prices. A study for Sobeh et al, (2014), Syrian refugees caused 15.4% inflation in prices. In specific sectors prices have raised dramatically in Irbid and Mefraq cities that received high number of Syrian refugees between the periods (2010-2013). The prices raise included: apartment renting, food and clothes prices. In addition, 64% of Jordanian families lived in these cities suffered a shortage of water, and complained from inadequate of education and health institutions to serve locals and refugees.

Even more, urban municipalities push refugees back to camps to minimize political and social conflicts, and to obtain more international aids. Many voices from local community are asking for segregating refugees. For example in the Kenyan cities, conflicts arose between local communities and refugees, Pavanello et al, (2010). The situation of refugees in Tripoli and other Libyan cities is worse; their vulnerability worsens the longer they stay in the city, Phillips et al, (2015). In Tanzania, any refugees living outside camps in the country are required to have permits; those in Dar es Salaam are for the most part living in the city clandestinely, and without legal protection or access to humanitarian assistance, O’Loghlen, (2016).

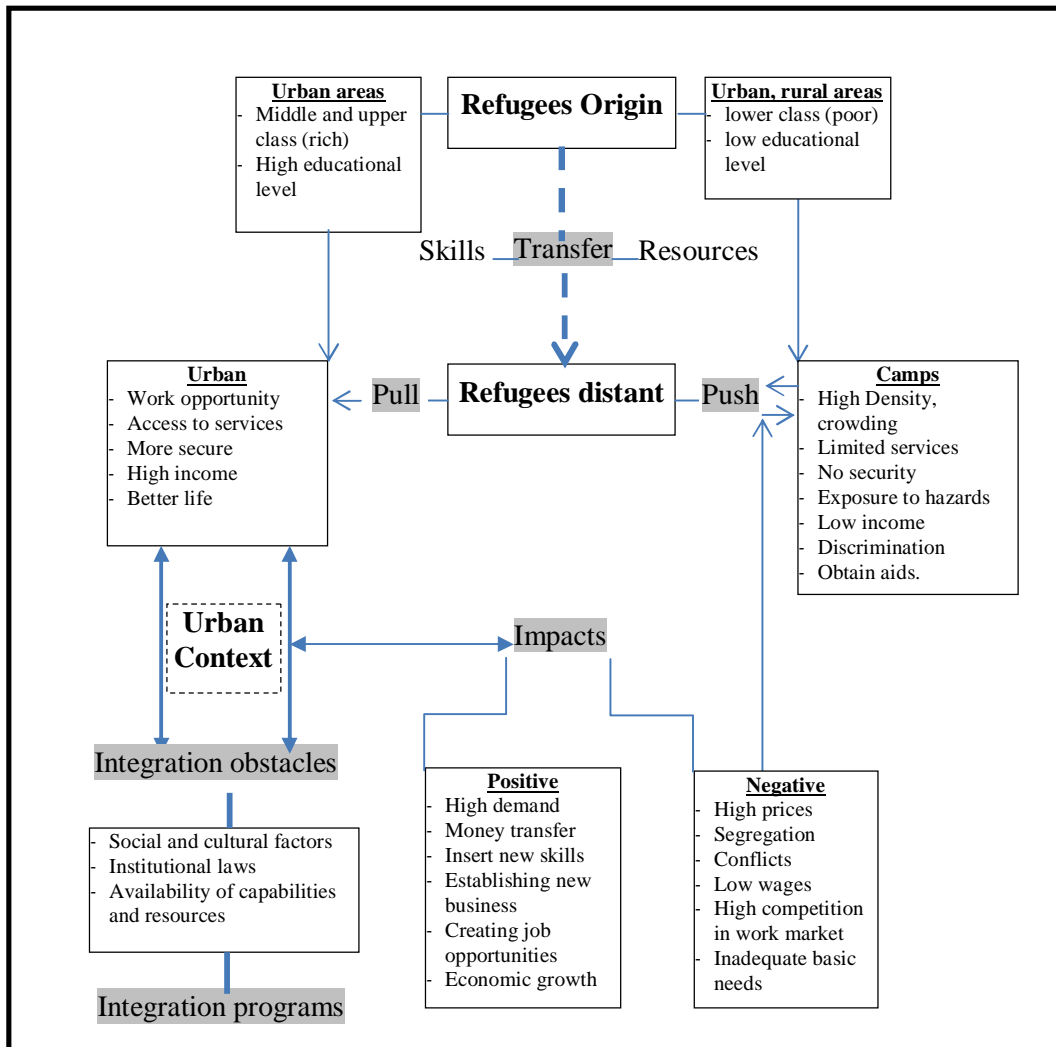
5. Refugees Integration

Finally, the capabilities of urban municipalities to host and integrate refugees are varied according to: population size, economic level, availability of capabilities and resources, integration between national and international institution and the size and the average speed of refugees' influx. In Jordan only the capital municipality has enough resources and capabilities to absorb new refugees. Other cities municipalities suffer a lot, especially, the north cities which are near to Syrian borders and refugees camps (Irbid, Mefraq, Ramtha, Jerash), Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, (2013). The international organization for migration report (2015) mentioned that countries need to build programs to integrate refugees. One of them was Glasgow business gateway program which deals with both migrants and refugees. This program targets to facilitate their introduction to local market by using methods such as: providing migrants and refugees with information about local market; and ways to access it through training, consulting and building trust to strengthen their relations with locals.

6. Theoretical model

The following model highlights the above theoretical review for refugees in urban areas:

Theoretical model: refugees in urban areas



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