



Protracted  
displacement  
in an urban  
world



SAMUEL HALL.

# CITY NOTE

ADDIS ABABA

URBAN SOLUTIONS FOR  
LOCAL INTEGRATION



## City note - Addis Ababa

### Out of camp or out of sight? Realigning responses to protracted displacement in an urban world

This major study ran from February 2020 to July 2023 across four countries – Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Jordan – through funding from the UK Research Institute (UKRI)'s Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF).

The research is being conducted by a global consortium - academics joining their research to practise.

The 10 partners are: International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) (lead), Cardiff University, Samuel Hall, Dilla University, Hashemite University, Slum Dwellers International, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Maseno University, ReDSS, the Women's Refugee Commission.

For further information, please visit: <https://www.protractedisplacement.org/>.

Samuel Hall is a social enterprise that conducts research, evaluates programmes, and designs policies in contexts of migration and displacement. Our approach is ethical, academically rigorous, and based on first-hand experience of complex and fragile settings.

Our research connects the voices of communities to changemakers for more inclusive societies. With offices in Afghanistan, Germany, Kenya, and Tunisia and a presence in Somalia, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates, we are based in the regions we study. For more information, please visit [www.samuelhall.org](http://www.samuelhall.org).

## Objectives

*Protracted displacement in an urban world* (PDUW)<sup>1</sup> is a research project that aimed to build an evidence base for national and local governments, humanitarian agencies and donors on the opportunities and challenges of hosting displaced people in camps versus urban areas. It also aims to assess current responses to urban protracted displacement, raise awareness of unmet needs and examine the economic contributions of refugees and IDPs. Finally, the project aims to support municipal authorities, displaced people, NGOs, organisations of the urban poor, and other local actors to use participatory planning to co-produce innovative and inclusive solutions to forced displacement in cities.

The research took place in **four countries: Ethiopia, Kenya, Afghanistan and Jordan** and focused on the wellbeing and livelihoods of people living in protracted displacement. In Ethiopia, the study focussed on Eritrean refugees and hosts living in Addis Ababa and Eritrean refugees Semera Logia town and Aysaita camp. Quantitative surveys of 365 refugees and 153 hosts living in Gofa Mebrat Haile condominium, and 372 refugees in Semera Logia and 366 Asyaita camp were supplemented by 150 qualitative interviews in the three locations.

A key aim of this project has been to promote interaction between urban displaced residents of low-income informal settlements, municipal authorities and other local actors. To this end, PDUW has supported **Participatory Forums** on urban displacement in Addis Ababa and other main project cities in which city stakeholders, including urban refugees have been involved in regular conversations about the challenges of protracted displacement and effects of the policy environment, informed by presentations from PDUW's quantitative and qualitative datasets. The forums were organised by research partners DICAC and MCMDO, with support from Samuel Hall and Cardiff University<sup>2</sup>.

The forums provided a platform to share the research findings and support co-produced solutions to the challenges of urban displacement. **Four forums were held – in April, July and December 2022 and in March 2023 – to build consensus among stakeholders on priorities for the inclusion of the displaced population in Addis Ababa.** This city note presents an overview of the major points discussed in the four participatory forums to inform current and future programming of relevant stakeholders, both at the city and country levels.

### Key facts and figures

- Nearly all (99.7%) Eritrean refugees in the quantitative survey in Addis Ababa were literate, around 4 in 10 had received technical and vocational training and nearly 8 in 10 had at least secondary or tertiary education.
- However, only around 1 in 5 refugees surveyed in Addis Ababa received an income from work. Out of those who were not working, 80% wanted to work, indicating a significant gap between the potential of urban refugees and their integration into the labour market.
- 78% of respondents who had lived in the city for more than 5 years reported that they speak Amharic either perfectly or well. This is in contrast with those who have lived in the city for less than a year, only 26% of whom said they speak the language perfectly or well.
- More than three quarters (76%) of refugee respondents in Addis Ababa reported having OCP status granting urban residency rights.

<sup>1</sup> Out of Camp or Out of Sight: Realigning response to protected displacement in an urban world. <https://www.protractedisplacement.org/home>

<sup>2</sup> The lead research organisation is IIED (International Institute for Environment and Development). Partners in Ethiopia: Dilla University, EOC-DICAC (Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission), MCMDO (Mothers and Children Multisectoral Development Organization), Cardiff University and Samuel Hall.

## Context

While Ethiopia has a long history of hosting refugees from neighbouring countries, asylum seekers and refugees have primarily been housed in camps, located at the country's borders. Nonetheless, there is a growing urban refugee population. Two groups of registered refugees have urban residency rights, mainly for Addis Ababa. The first, 'urban assisted refugees', have urban residency rights for medical or protection reasons. The second, those with OCP (out-of-camp-policy) status, can live in the place of their choice if they receive sponsorship from friends and relatives and can sustain themselves, but have limited access to humanitarian support.<sup>3</sup> The policy was adopted in 2010, and in practice, most refugees with OCP status are Eritreans living in Addis Ababa. The urban displaced population in Ethiopia also includes self-relocated refugees and unregistered and undocumented asylum seekers.

With the outbreak of the conflict between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the federal government, the number of refugees in Addis Ababa has increased dramatically. Two out of the four refugee camps in Tigray were destroyed and closed in early 2021, while the presence of Eritrean forces in Tigray has raised concerns with regards to protection of Eritrean refugees'.<sup>4</sup> In this context, thousands have fled to neighbouring regions such as Afar, Amhara and Addis Ababa. As of 31 May 2023, there were 74,820 registered refugees in Addis Ababa according to UNHCR,<sup>5</sup> a number likely to be much higher in practice, as many refugees do not register in Addis Ababa for fear of being forcibly returned to Eritrea or to the recently established refugee camp in Dabat (Amhara region).

There was strong support for the participatory forums from the government, international and national NGOs, relevant UN agencies, as the number of refugees in Addis Ababa has been rapidly increasing. Following the nine pledges made by the Government of Ethiopia in 2016 to address refugees' needs in a more sustainable manner, Ethiopia adopted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees in 2018. In January 2019, Ethiopia adopted a new Refugee Proclamation (No. 1110/2019) granting additional rights to refugees and asylum seekers, such as greater freedom of movement and opportunities to take part in the local economy. The proclamation was implemented through a 10-year National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy (NCRRS) and three directives<sup>6</sup>, adopted to operationalise the new policy and with the objective to support projects promoting refugees' self-reliance and local integration.

In this context, representatives of the Ethiopian government attending the participatory forums stressed that "the core agenda of the research — the comparison between the outcomes of protracted displacement in camps versus cities — is particularly timely in Ethiopia as the National Government is developing new solutions to promote the self-reliance of refugees, including extending the Out of Camp policy" (Participatory Forum 1, 27 April 2022, RRS).

UNHCR as well as NGOs and CSOs taking part in the forums welcomed the initiative, hoping to identify synergies as well as durable solutions in improving their responses to protracted displacement in the city.

## Key issues raised

### 1. LEGAL RIGHTS, INFORMATION AND COUNSELLING: RAISING AWARENESS OF THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEES AND OBLIGATIONS OF OFFICIALS

Despite recent policy developments, refugees in Addis Ababa face numerous challenges in accessing livelihoods and basic services, and in terms of protection.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR / RRS, Ethiopia Country Refugee Response Plan, January 2022 – December 2022

<sup>4</sup> Miller Sarah, 3 March 2022, Nowhere to Run: Eritrean Refugees in Tigray, Refugees International.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, Country View (Ethiopia), available at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/eth>

<sup>6</sup> (i) the Directive to Determine Conditions for Movement and Residence of Refugees Outside of Camps, Directive No. 01/2019; (ii) the Directive to Determine the Procedure for Refugees Right to Work, Directive No. 02/2019; (iii) the Refugees and Returnees Grievances and Appeals Handling Directive, Directive No. 03/2019.

**“The first challenge is a lack of awareness on the refugee proclamation, not only from the refugees’ side but also from the government’s and partners’ side. There is also limited capacity to create jobs.** There is a gap between the existing demands of the labour market and supply. Thus, it is more difficult to engage more refugees in the labour market. **The other one is related to limited financial support by the international community.** As I said, the government of Ethiopia has committed to implement the pledges. Participants of the forum have highlighted that funding and international support is needed. The pledges cannot be realised only with the resources and the capacity of the government of Ethiopia. So, these are the main challenges” – Participatory Forum Participant, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022, Addis Ababa

**Until the adoption of the Refugee Proclamation (No. 1110/2019), legally registered refugees were not given the right to work,** which explains why many of refugees in Addis Ababa receive remittances, although many also take informal jobs to get by. In this context, the adoption of policies granting refugees a right to work had raised hope. As progress with the implementation is slow, their legal status remains a major source of concern. Many refugees are not aware of the 2019 proclamation, and even for those who are, access to work permits is a challenge. However, in 2023 the government’s Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) signed an MoU with the Ministry of Labour and Skills committing to provide work permits to urban refugees, and has already started issuing them. During the four Participatory Forums, the refugees’ representatives and NGOs active on refugees claimed that access to livelihoods was the main concern for refugees in Addis Ababa, especially as prices have risen substantially in the past few years. Refugees struggle to pay rent, and often face unfair demands from landlords, who demand higher rents when renting accommodation to refugees.

**NGOs involved in projects aiming to support refugees’ self-reliance stressed that providing training to refugees is not likely to improve refugees’ self-reliance unless they have access to work.** Participants also saw the participatory forums as an opportunity to help stakeholders understand perceptions and possibilities around local integration, and understand their own responsibilities in a context where, according to NGOs active in the response, “officials do not know about their obligations”.

**The forums also allowed refugee representatives to increase awareness of their status and the potential services they can access.** The forums also highlighted that service providers sometimes deny service to refugees because they are not familiar with refugee IDs and refugee policies, and need more awareness of refugee policy. This is true for public as well as private services; for example, refugees face difficulties accessing bank services, as some banks do not accept refugee IDs. During the second participatory forum, refugees also voiced concerns about the absence of clear guidance from RRS regarding the registration of new refugees and the issuance of documentation. A substantial number of refugees remains unregistered, and those who are registered have not received documentation since 2021. This is primarily due to the suspension of ID provision and vital event registration, with the exception of child registration for children born to registered refugees. As noted by NGO representatives during one of the participatory forums, urban refugees are diverse, and so are their channels of communication and ability to access information. It is important that any efforts to raise awareness about the rights of refugees and services available to them reach different refugee groups and take into account the needs of vulnerable individuals.

**Participants highlighted that there should also be awareness-raising activities targeting host communities** to strengthen social cohesion as the refugee populations are increasing in urban areas. In a period marked by high inflation, there is a concern that host communities may attribute the surge in prices to refugees.

“About the implementation of the policy, one challenge raised is the lack of awareness between social services providers such as woreda/district administrations, and banking services providers. They don’t have adequate awareness about refugees, their entitlement, and their obligations. For example, refugees may have an OCP ID but there is no clarity on what kind of services they can access with the ID and which they cannot. Fortunately, some banks provide the services with the OCP ID but not all. Some social service providers do not know the rights of the refugees and the ID itself. The refugee community lacks awareness about their entitlement. If they are not aware of their rights, they are not prepared to claim their rights.” Participatory Forum participant, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022, Addis Ababa.

### Priority for discussion / Key takeaways:

- Participatory forums are important for advocacy, to make progress on the implementation of the new national policy, to shape detailed policy agendas and enhance coordination and ensure accountability.
- Participants committed to raising awareness among officials and civilians, and to involving both the host communities and refugees in the design of interventions.

## 2. ENHANCING COORDINATION AND CAPACITIES TO RESPOND TO URBAN REFUGEES' NEEDS: PLANNING FOR CITY RESOURCING AT A TIME OF NEED

"We need to coordinate more as Ethiopia is one of the biggest refugee hosting countries in Africa and now needs a proper response, to the refugees, to the city. The existing coordination is only focusing on humanitarian and development actors – so we have to expand it to city actors." – one PF participant, July 2022

**While resources allocated to refugee response have been targeted at camps, resources and capacities are limited for an urban refugee response.** Refugee representatives emphasised that urban refugees face difficulties accessing basic services, such as education and health, stressing that the referral system is limited to refugees with a severe medical condition. UNHCR explained that its urban refugee programme prioritises medical emergencies as OCP refugees are expected to be self-reliant, which explains why OCP refugees do not receive any other support. UNHCR, however, does provide financial assistance and protection services to urban assisted refugees (about 5,200 refugees in 2022) who had to leave camps due to security, medical, or other critical grounds. As part of the urban refugee programme, UNHCR currently has established partnerships with different organisations to address the needs of these refugees<sup>7</sup>, including:

- The organisation EOC-DIDAC/RRAD (Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission, Refugee and Returnee Affairs Department, a local NGO), which provides monthly stipends for refugees, facilitates and provides health, psychosocial and educational support. The organisation also has a safe house for refugees that need protection.
- JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service), which provides services for refugee children: the organisation has a Child Protection Centre in Addis Ababa with child friendly spaces for unaccompanied, separated, and other vulnerable refugee children, providing individual case management services.
- Addis Ababa University School of Law, which provides free legal aid for refugees.

**UNHCR representatives emphasised that while OCP refugees are expected to be self-reliant, the lack of durable solutions prevents them from building a life and sustaining themselves.** In this context, UNHCR deplored the lack of resources available for the urban refugee programme, compared to the number of refugees living in Addis Ababa. All participants agreed that Ethiopia's new policies are positive developments but that there are still legal and practical barriers preventing refugees from being self-reliant.

**Finally, a recurring theme during the forum was that of the lack of coordination and the lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the different actors in the collective urban refugee response.** Historically, refugee issues have been centralised and managed exclusively by the Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS). Ethiopia's encampment policy has meant that municipal actors have not been involved in refugee issues. As the implementation of the new proclamation is expected to result in an increase of the refugee population in urban areas, a new Urban Refugee Service was created within RRS in 2022. However, even in Addis Ababa, the

<sup>7</sup> <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/101535>

coordination between RRS, Addis Ababa City Government and the relevant Sub-Cities remains underdeveloped and the division of roles unclear. Still today, it remains difficult to identify relevant focal persons in municipalities to address the refugee response, especially as staff have limited knowledge of refugee issues.

**The Participatory Forums thus called for a more coordinated approach to urban displacement and a stronger engagement of municipal actors.** In addition, respondents unanimously stressed that the refugee response requires increased capacity – in terms of human resources, material resources, and city services. While RRS is committed to collaborating more closely with municipal actors, representatives at the forums emphasised that there is a need for additional resources and knowledge, and that the RRS requires capacity building and support to coordinate the urban response and scale up interventions. In this regard, participants also stressed that the forums could help mobilise resources.

**Participants also stressed that more donors are needed to support the urban response.** One of the suggestions was to also involve partners from the private sector to diversify funding. However, there was an agreement that it is essential to think beyond refugees and consider expanding the scope: as Addis Ababa faces a dramatic surge in IDPs and returnees, participants believed that forced displacement should rather be addressed in a holistic manner, targeting both refugee, returnee and IDP populations.

#### Priority for discussion / Key takeaways:

- RRS' new department of urban refugee services aims to work more closely with the municipality- it will need extra effort in resources and knowledge from partners to achieve this aim.
- The goal of the fourth participatory forum was to bring the municipality to be part of the process and manage the response to refugees' needs, and to the needs of displacement-affected communities.

### 3. BUILDING DATA PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN ACADEMIA, MUNICIPAL and OTHER STAKEHOLDERS: TOWARDS AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO INCLUSIVE URBAN PLANNING

**The data gathered in the PDUW project and participatory forums helped raise awareness of the situation faced by urban refugees in Addis Ababa and their potential social and economic contributions.** Participants also expressed an interest in partnering with universities to collect additional data to help planning and programming. Participants stressed that more data is needed on the impact of the conflict in the North, as for instance, the number of refugees currently in Addis Ababa is unknown. Participants also called for the discussions to be inclusive of internally displaced persons, asking "what about IDPs?" in the discussions on self-reliance and wellbeing.

**Finally, participants also agreed that they did not know enough about the existing response to urban refugees – with a gap in monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL).** Are the results of the work sustainable? What do we tell communities? Participants recognised that participatory planning has to include greater accountability, transparency and a feedback loop that is currently missing.

#### Priority for discussion / Key takeaways:

- Expand work on urban refugees to include other displaced people, in the light of current events in Ethiopia, and update information on the displacement impact of the conflict in the North.
- Assess the results of existing programming by engaging the government and NGOs in evaluations for joint learning and disseminating the results for lessons learned and for feedback loops with the communities.

## Looking ahead

During the four participatory forums, local officials, NGOs, community representatives and the PDUW team discussed the main issues and possible solutions faced by urban refugees and other displaced groups in Addis Ababa. The future trajectories that need further improvement can be summarised as follows:

- 1) **It is key to sustain the participatory discussions involving different stakeholders, including but not limited to Addis Ababa municipality administration and relevant bureaux in Addis Ababa.** The format of the participatory forums allows people to share relevant practices and knowledge, helps to improve coordination between different actors and leads to a more informed, better managed response to the challenges and opportunities of urban displacement.
- 2) **As there is a lack of awareness on the rights and services available to urban refugees, a citywide mapping of service provision is an first step in building a more coordinated ecosystem for assistance and integration.** This would enable refugees to find out about and use the services available to them. Following the initial exercise in Addis Ababa, the practice could be expanded to other regional towns hosting large numbers of urban refugees. The mapping would also assist the newly established Urban Refugee Service in improving inter-institutional coordination between different service providers and creating partnerships with other city bureaux to provide durable solutions to urban refugees.
- 3) **Finally, evidence and data should lead a discussion on the issues and opportunities of urban displacement.** Further steps would include making existing data and relevant findings both available and known to relevant stakeholders so that they can use it in the decision-making process. Cooperation between Addis Ababa City Administration, community leaders, the refugee community and researchers is key in filling information gaps as well enabling evidence-based capacity-building and awareness raising activities. Building a platform for advocacy, joint planning and learning would make the most of the lessons and knowledge already held by individual actors and would enable further information exchange among relevant stakeholders.

In the final forum, participants agreed a Resolution that called for eight key actions to:

- Establish a quarterly **Urban Refugee Response Platform (URRP)** to better coordinate aid and development response to the needs of refugees and host communities in Addis Ababa;
- Facilitate **city-wide mapping** and coordination of services and resources to support the needs of refugees and other vulnerable city populations;
- Facilitate **economic inclusion** of refugees, to facilitate entry into the labour market in Addis Ababa;
- Facilitate **area-based approaches** to economic and social inclusion of refugees and other vulnerable city populations to improve health and education and key interventions such as community hubs;
- Encourage **private sector involvement** in employment of refugees and other vulnerable populations;
- Facilitate and coordinate interventions to support vulnerable populations such as **women, youth and people with disabilities** within both refugee and host populations, and
- **Celebrate the diversity** of refugee and migrant populations in Addis Ababa through **festivals and events**.



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