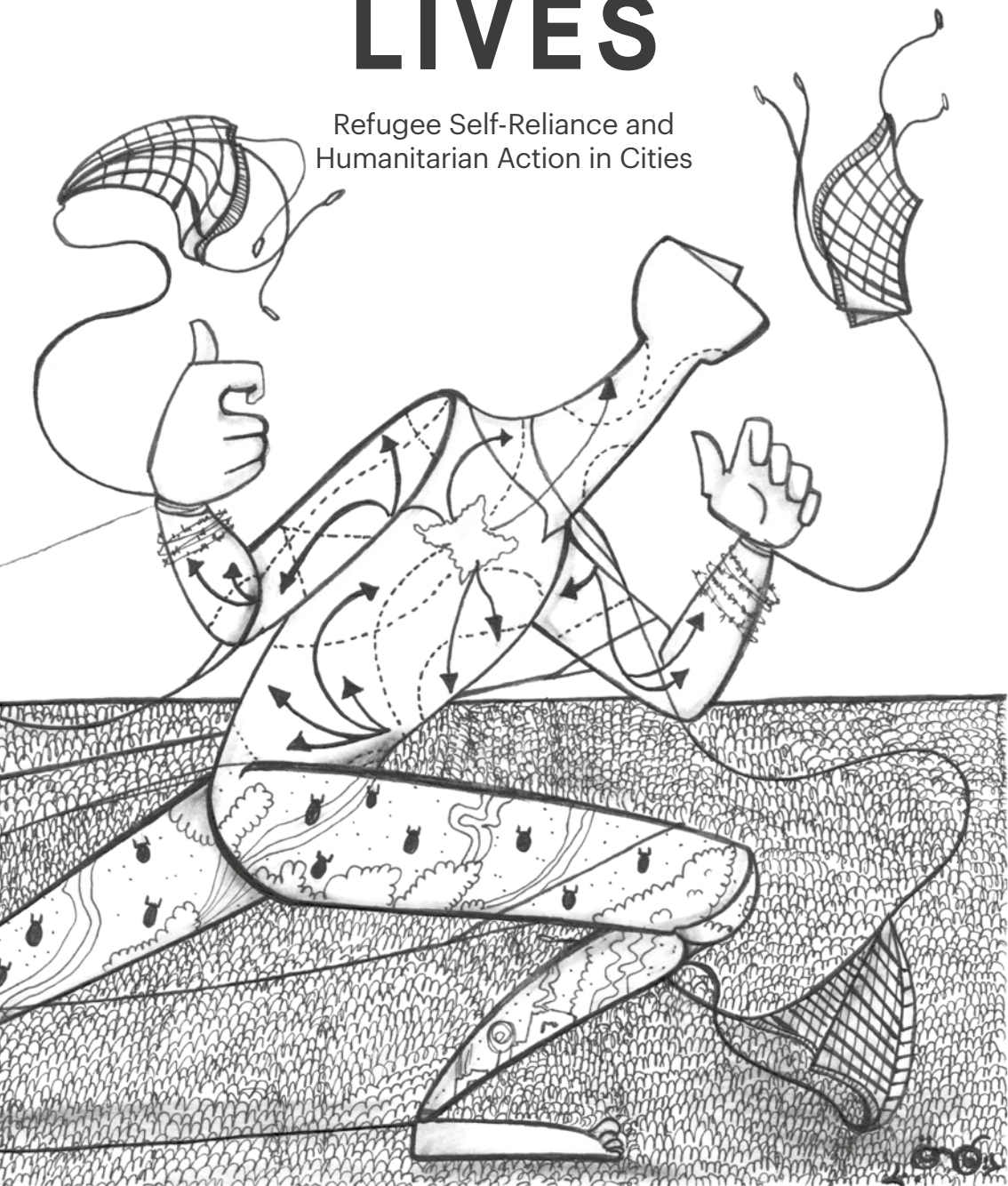


MAKING LIVES

Refugee Self-Reliance and
Humanitarian Action in Cities



Save the Children



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Refugee Self-Reliance and
Humanitarian Action in Cities

Edited by Juliano Fiori and Andrea Rigon

**The Humanitarian Affairs Team
Save the Children**

This book has been produced by the Humanitarian Affairs Team (Save the Children), the Development Planning Unit (University College London), and the Jindal School of International Affairs (O.P. Jindal Global University). It contains discussion papers that do not necessarily reflect organisational policy.



First published in 2017

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ISBN 978-1-78808-109-2

Suggested citation:

Fiori, Juliano & Andrea Rigon (eds). Making Lives: *Refugee Self-Reliance and Humanitarian Action in Cities*. London: Humanitarian Affairs Team, Save the Children, 2017.

Contact the Humanitarian Affairs Team:
humanitarianaffairs@savethechildren.org.uk

www.refugeesinthecity.com

Cover illustration: Dima Nashawi

ACRONYMS

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EU	European Union
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GBP	British pound
GoI	Government of India
HRLN	Human Rights Law Network
IDP	Internally displaced person
IGNOU	Indira Gandhi National Open University
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IT	Information technology
LTV	Long Term Visa
NFI	Non-food item
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
REACT	Refugee Assistance Collaboration in Thessaloniki
SLIC	Socio-Legal Information Centre
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States dollar
WFP	World Food Programme

INTRODUCTION

This publication presents the results of a one-year research project at the intersection of urban, humanitarian and forced migration studies. As protracted displacement increasingly contributes to urban change and poses a challenge for city governance and infrastructures, this research project focuses on ‘urban-itarian’ settings – cities that are home to a growing number of ‘persons of concern’ (a category that includes refugees and returned refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs and returned IDPs, stateless people, and others), and increased humanitarian activity. In these contexts, humanitarian organisations provide an additional layer of urban infrastructure, on top of the conventional provisions for protection, basic services, and livelihoods for persons of concern. They face growing pressure from governmental donors to provide more specialised responses to conflicts and disasters that cannot be isolated from wider urban dynamics.

The project focuses on refugee self-reliance in the city. It explores the socio-economic practices of refugees and host communities, the challenges faced by refugees in gaining access to labour markets, and the ways in which humanitarian actors, often in collaboration with city authorities, seek to promote refugee livelihoods. A broad notion of the market as a space of social practices (characterised by power relations, flows and exchanges, negotiation, and the pursuit of aspirations) informs an analysis of the way in which the activities of institutional actors become enmeshed with those of informal actors, which offer an alternative support network for refugees unable to engage in formal labour. While humanitarian organisations have placed particular emphasis on the economic dimensions of refugee self-reliance, this project explores other aspects of refugee well-being too. Understanding the barriers and limits to refugee self-reliance, as well as the potential shortcomings of self-reliance as a conceptual and programmatic framework, is key to improving the support that is available to refugees in urban settings.

In short, the project sought to:

- identify and contextualise socio-economic practices adopted by refugees in urban settings, as well as the opportunities and challenges that refugees encounter;

- analyse the practice of self-reliance programming by humanitarian organisations in urban settings, including its contribution to refugee well-being;
- increase humanitarian actors’ understanding of how their self-reliance programmes affect, and are affected by, political and economic systems, and processes of urban change;
- contribute to humanitarian strategies aimed at promoting refugee well-being in changing urban environments.

This project was undertaken as part of a broader partnership between by the Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London, and Save the Children’s Humanitarian Affairs Team (HAT).

For more than 60 years, the DPU has conducted research, consultancy and postgraduate teaching that helps to build the capacity of national governments, local authorities, NGOs, aid agencies and businesses working towards socially just and sustainable development in the global south. The DPU is a department of the Bartlett: University College London’s global faculty of the built environment.

Through critical reflection, research, and outreach, the HAT informs Save the Children strategy, offers proposals for policy and practice within the organisation and across the humanitarian sector, and works to translate these proposals into practicable plans of action.

The DPU and the HAT developed this partnership as an opportunity to conduct research that contributes to theory and practice, to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, and to offer professional pathways for UCL students. It offers the DPU a chance to strengthen its impact on policy and practice, informing strategy at one of the humanitarian sector’s largest and most influential NGOs. In turn, the partnership enables the HAT to draw upon the DPU’s academic expertise and research capacity. The DPU and the HAT jointly appointed a Humanitarian Affairs Adviser/Research Associate, who worked as a liaison between the two institutions, developing this initial collaborative research project on refugee self-reliance in cities. The partnership will promote the exchange of knowledge between researchers and practitioners through the development of a community of practice beyond this research project.

The project also involved researchers from O.P. Jindal Global University’s School of International Affairs (JSIA). JSIA is ‘India’s first global policy school’. Bringing together scholarship on International Relations, International Law, and International Business, JSIA aims to produce knowledge that can contribute to India’s engagement in international affairs and can address pressing global challenges.

The project’s research team included Estella Carpi, jointly appointed by the DPU and the HAT; Sophie Dicker, Julianio Fiori, and Fernando Espada

from the HAT; Andrea Rigon, Camillo Boano, and Cassidy Johnson from the DPU; and Jessica Field, Yamini Mookherjee, and Anubhav Dutt Tiwari from O.P. Jindal Global University. During a workshop in December 2016, an initial conceptual framework was developed with input from various experts, including Diane Archer (International Institute for Environment and Development), Elena Fiddian-Qasmieh (UCL), Caitlin Wake (Overseas Development Institute), Jonathan Darling (University of Manchester), and Michaelle Tauson (Save the Children). The project then identified three cities in different regions – Halba (Lebanon), Delhi (India), and Thessaloniki (Greece) – as sites for field research. Findings have been shared at various events, and feedback has contributed to the presentation of the findings in this publication.

Carpi conducted the study in Halba, where Syrian refugees make up over a third of the population. Her paper analyses the impact of humanitarian livelihoods programmes in the context of severely limited access to the labour market for refugees, who are only allowed to work in cleaning, gardening, agriculture, and construction. In this scenario, while livelihoods programmes transfer some skills to refugees and provide them with leisure activities, self-reliance remains largely unachievable. The actual agenda of livelihoods programming seems to be more about social cohesion and the reduction of tensions between refugee and host communities. In fact, Carpi argues that it is the host middle-class that, with access to new job opportunities, benefits economically from the livelihoods programmes, and the very presence of humanitarian organisations.

The study conducted by Field, Tiwari, and Mookherjee, in Delhi, focuses on two particularly vulnerable refugee groups: stateless Rohingyas and non-Muslim Afghans. Their research explores the lived experiences of urban refugees attempting to survive and realise their aspirations. They found social hierarchies between refugees who have different levels of legal recognition and entitlements. Limited legal protection and an unclear understanding of rights has led to arbitrary treatment by state officials and exploitation by employers and landlords. In emphasising individual entrepreneurship and economic independence, humanitarian organisations can overlook other important dimensions of refugee well-being, and they can place additional burdens on women, who are often also responsible for domestic work.

Finally, Dicker conducted the study in Thessaloniki, investigating refugee support mechanisms beyond those provided by humanitarian organisations and the state. Many refugees and migrants have been engaging in practices of ‘self-support’ to meet everyday needs. Moreover, local autonomous solidarity initiatives have provided spaces to promote social and political participation in a way that humanitarian organisations have been unable or unwilling to do. She emphasises the need for humanitarian response to engage with local civil society without undermining their solidarity practices.

Shared learning across the field studies is presented in the final chapter – an overview, focused particularly on humanitarian agencies and their approach to self-reliance. This chapter also aims to inform humanitarian policy and practice in the context of protracted displacement in cities, acknowledging the importance of understanding processes of urban change in the planning and implementation of humanitarian activities.

All the outputs from this project can be accessed on the project website: <http://refugeesinthecity.org>



Bringing together three studies, on Halba (Lebanon), Delhi (India), and Thessaloniki (Greece), *Making Lives* offers a critical perspective on self-reliance as a conceptual and programmatic framework that privileges economic aspects of refugee well-being and market-based interventions by humanitarian organisations. Economic self-reliance through employment becomes an unachievable goal for humanitarian organisations when access to the formal labour market is restricted for refugees by political and legal barriers. Therefore, humanitarian livelihoods interventions focused on self-reliance end up providing a form of distraction through leisure activities, and, at best, supporting refugees' own coping strategies. The authors propose that, if it is to inform efforts to support the well-being of urban refugees, 'self-reliance' should be imagined as an abstract and perhaps ultimately unachievable status, dependent on structural changes, but to which humanitarian programmes might in some way contribute; and as multi-dimensional (not just an economic concern, but also a political, legal, social, and cultural one), multi-scalar (a challenge for individuals, households, and communities, with their mutual dependencies), and multi-temporal (dependent on conditions in the short term and long term).

