

## URBAN TRENDS: REFUGEE CITIES

In analyzing the state of cities around the world, UN-HABITAT says, in its report, *State of the World Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide*, many cities are faced with accommodating an increasing number of displaced people.

With one in four of **Amman's** two million residents being refugees, the Jordanian capital has the largest proportion of refugees in the world. Many Iraqis and Palestinians have sought shelter in Amman because of war. Those among them who have entered illegally strive to keep a low-profile in a bid to avoid expulsion. City authorities trying to maintain security, economic stability and public services - in an increasingly crowded environment - see them as threats to these efforts.

The city's education and health care systems have been burdened by the estimated 500,000 refugees who have flocked to the metropolis since 2003.

The report cautions that other cities around the world also face similar refugee challenges. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates one in two refugees (like a significant proportion of internally displaced persons) now lives in an urban area. The agency says 36% of all known refugees, displaced persons, asylum seekers and returnees combined - that is at least seven million people - lived in urban areas by the end of 2008.

While 16% of all persons displaced to cities have sought refuge in developed nations, more than 70% - representing 5.3 million people - now live in cities in the developing regions, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, Western and Southern Asia. Cities that can least afford it, typically those in conflict-prone regions, have had to absorb those needing special help.

Ongoing conflicts in southern and western Asia have created large numbers of refugees. In **Pakistan**, four cities host 30,000 refugees and displaced people; **Baluchistan** and **Punjab** each hosts hundreds of thousands; **Baku**, in Azerbaijan, follows Amman and Baluchistan with 180,000 people by December 2008.

Several cities in **Kuwait**, **Afghanistan**, **Egypt**, and **Somalia** each now hold some 100,000 displaced persons. **Kuala Lumpur**, the Malay capital and **Nairobi**, Kenya's capital, have each become home to at least 30,000 refugees and displaced persons because of internal and external conflicts. The cities of **Kinshasa** (the Democratic Republic of Congo), **Fugnido** (in Ethiopia's Gambella region), **Kampala** (Uganda); and **Khartoum** (Sudan) each hosts between 18,000 and 26,000.

### REFUGEE IN CITIES

Displaced people seeking refuge in cities, rather than rural areas, find better chances of making a living, receiving benefits, and being supported by relatives already there. However, they face the same challenges as the urban poor; lack of secure tenure, overcrowded living, slum conditions, poor access to basic services, high crime rates, unemployment and significant health risks. An example of some of these problems was seen in Sudan from 2003 to 2007; at least 300,000 displaced households in the capital, Khartoum, became homeless after their houses were brought down for planning purposes. In another case, thousands were forcibly evicted and made homeless when IDP settlements were pulled down under the government's effort to provide 13,000 homes.

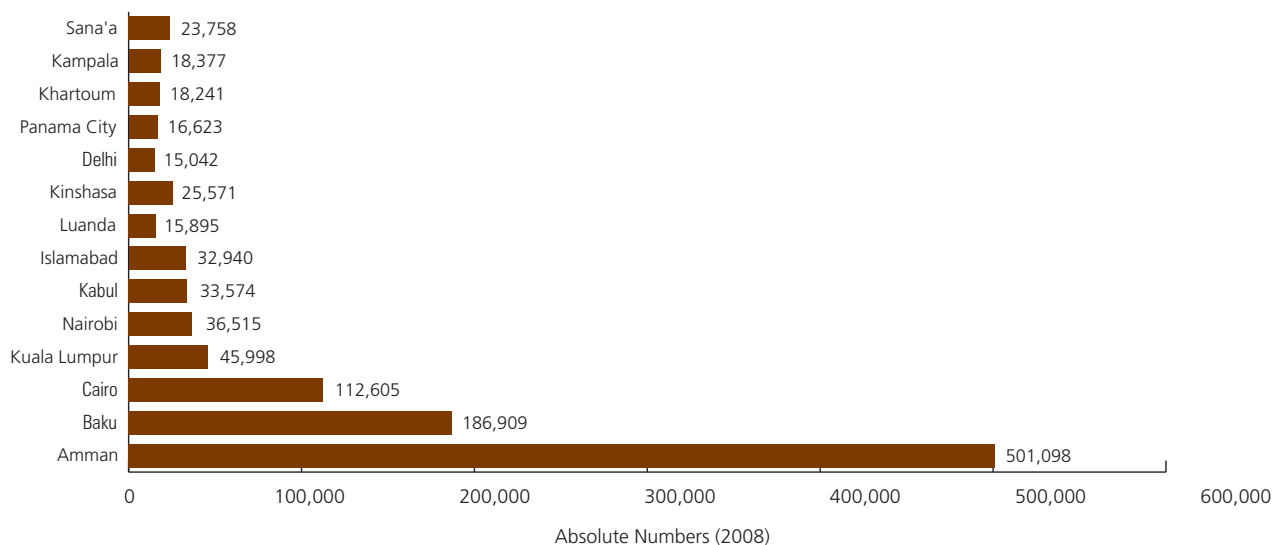
Refugees and the internally displaced in cities are more vulnerable to discrimination, violence and exploitation than those living in organized camps. Refugees without documents are vulnerable to exploitation by landlords, employers and others. Without legal status, they cannot gain legal help without the risk of expulsion. The urban displaced are also among those most likely to be affected by food crises.



However, the report points out that not all displaced people live in slums; many are absorbed into normal urban life in the host cities. In several countries, they are undocumented and their whereabouts are unknown. They avoid the attention of authorities, meaning they usually must lodge under some of the worse housing and health conditions.

In Syria, UNHCR estimates the number of refugees living in urban areas exceeds 1.1 million. The population of urban displaced in Somalia's South-Central region alone – including Mogadishu – is also more than 1 million.

### REFUGEES LIVING IN URBAN AREAS ACROSS THE WORLD\* (in absolute numbers - 2008)



Sources: UNHCR, 2008 *Global Trends, Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons*, 16 June 2009.

\* UNHCR's population of concern is composed of various groups of people including refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) protected/assisted by UNHCR, stateless persons and returnees (returned refugees and IDPs).

Sources: Elhawary, 2007; Fielden, 2008; Lyytinen, 2009; Payanello & Pantuliano, 2009; Sweis, 2007; UNHCR, 2009a; UNHCRb.