

**IN WHAT WAYS HAVE REFUGEES IN URBAN AREAS BENEFITED FROM
THE UNHCR “URBAN REFUGEE” POLICY?**

THE REALITIES OF REFUGEE PROTECTION IN SOUTH ASIAN REGION.

Calcutta Research Group Forced Migration Training Course Dissertation

Submitted by Rajkumar Nagarajah

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Under the supervision of Dr. Sahana

2013 Rajkumar Nagarajah

rajacqueline@yahoo.com

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Introduction

South Asia is moving towards a process of rapid urbanization. In 1950, less than 30 per cent of the world’s population lived in urban areas and over the years that figure has now increased to over 50 per cent and is expected to reach 60 per cent by 2030. According to current estimates, as many as almost seven million refugees and asylum seekers are living in cities, potentially more than half of the world’s refugees. UNHCR 2013

Due to rapid economic development in South Asia, majority of the South Asia’s refugees are also to be found in urban areas. According to UNHCR’s most recent statistics, almost half of the world’s 10.5 million refugees now reside in cities and towns, compared to one third who lives in camps. Safety guidelines for sensitive individual Refugee cases in an urban context 2002.

In the past, a significant proportion of the urban refugees registered with UNHCR in developing and middle-income countries were young men who possessed the capacity and determination needed to survive in the city. UNHCR Policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas, 2009.

However, currently, not only just young men but also large numbers of refugee women, children and older people are also to be found in urban areas, where in most cases there are no facilities for proper shelter or organized institutions to provide protection. These vulnerable people are often confronted with a range of protection risks: the threat of arrest and detention, *refoulement*, harassment, exploitation, discrimination, inadequate and overcrowded shelter, as well as vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), HIV-AIDS, human smuggling and trafficking.

The asylum seekers and refugees of the world are constantly moving to urban areas. Out of the current total estimated 10.4 million refugees as of the end of 2011, an estimated 4.3 to 7 million refugees are residing in urban centers. The Urban refugees population are often confronted with a range of protection risks, including: the threat of arrest and detention, *refoulement*, harassment, exploitation, discrimination, vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), HIV-AIDS, human smuggling and trafficking. UNHCR Global Survey, 2012.

These urban refugees mostly live in a poor socio economic condition and live in overcrowded accommodation in urban areas where there is a lack of access to basic services such as health, education and protection and inadequate employment opportunities as they have to compete with the urban host communities who are poor for their livelihoods.

In South Asia some refugees have government permission to reside in urban areas while others do not. This situation creates a system of legal and illegal urban refugees. Faced with limited or non-existent assistance, all of these refugees are left to their own resources in order to meet the basic needs of food and shelter and eventually move beyond a survivalist existence. UNHCR Policy on refugee protection and solutions in urban areas, 2009

The purpose of the study

This study examines the extent to which refugees living in urban areas in South Asian region benefited from the UNHCR's "urban refugee" policy. The paper also discusses about the legal and human rights perspectives that are established to protect the refugees in the urban areas. The study also analyses the legal obligation of the host government to respect the legal rights of the refugees (refugee status) as some of the rights are guaranteed only when some is accepted as a legal refugee.

The study also investigates the livelihoods challenges and protection issues faced by the urban refugees and finally the paper concludes by discussing about how the urban refugees have benefited from the UNHCR urban policy.

The objective of the study

The objective of this study was to assess in what ways the refugees in Urban Areas benefited from the UNHCR "Urban Refugee" Policy in South Asian region

- to identify what type of information on urban reintegration is available
- to highlight where the UNHCR has made strategic efforts to address the needs of returnees in urban areas.
- to identify and address the gaps in the protection needs of the Urban refugees
- to provide recommendations as to whether or for how these gaps can be addressed to ensure better protection to the refugees in the Urban areas as per the UNHCR Urban Refugee Policy.