

# A framework for the analysis of refugee self-reliance and humanitarian action in urban markets



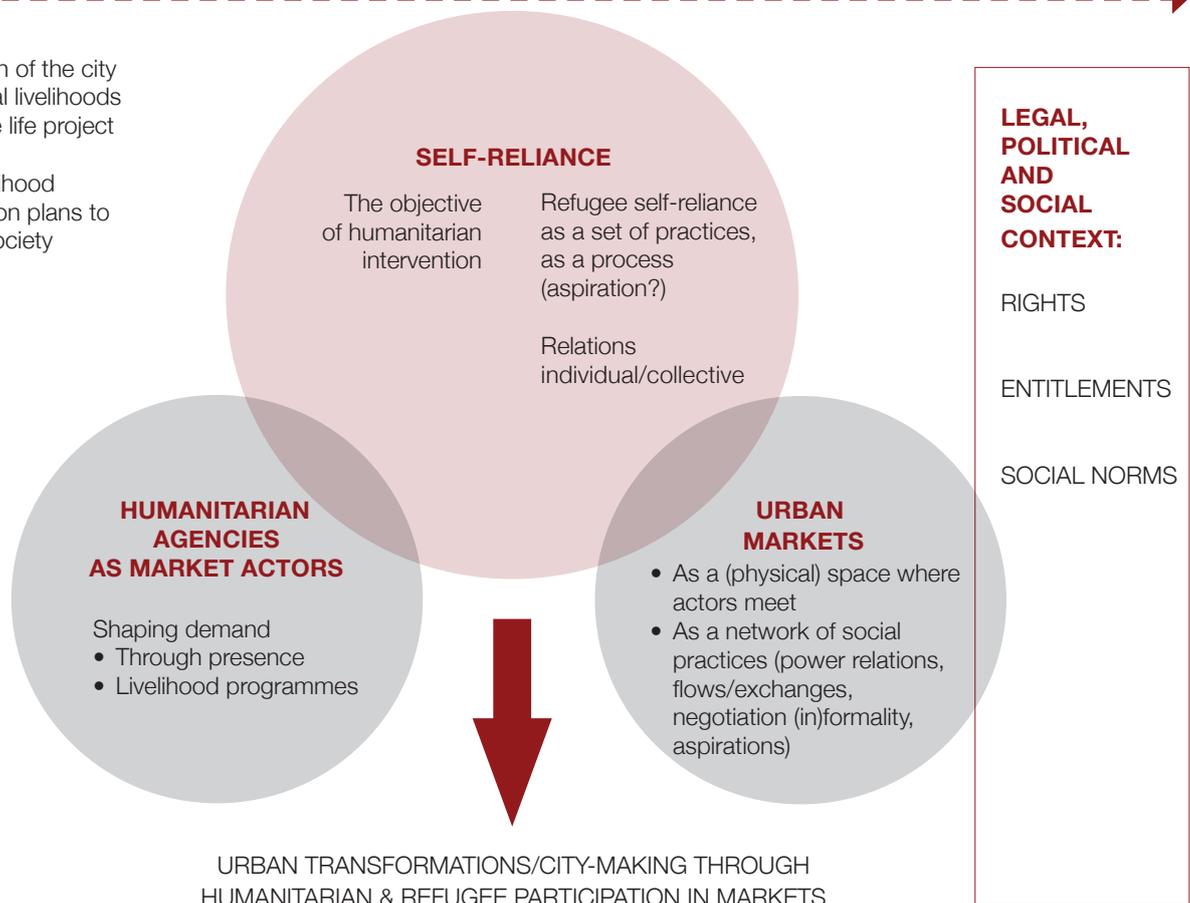
This framework is an initial outcome of a collaborative research project between the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London and the Humanitarian Affairs Team, Save the Children UK. With over 60% of the world's refugees living in cities, the project aims at developing understanding of: (1) refugee practices of self-reliance; (2) how these practices relate to humanitarian programmes; and (3) their impact on urban markets. The findings will contribute to identifying: (1) the role of humanitarian actors and refugees in urban markets in city-making and urban transformations; and (2) recommendations for how humanitarian practice in relation to urban markets can better support refugees.

## TIME / HISTORY

E.g.

- Transformation of the city
- History of local livelihoods
- Change of the life project of the refugee
- Impact of livelihood programmes on plans to stay in host society

## APPROACH: EVERYDAY PRACTICES



The above figure presents a simplified representation of the key elements of the research framework.

The framework is composed of three key elements: refugee self-reliance, urban markets, and humanitarian agencies (understood as market actors).

## REFUGEE SELF-RELIANCE

Refugee self-reliance is understood as a **set of practices** deployed by refugees. It is also conceptualised as a process, often building upon historical **social networks** of migration, support and labour. Self-reliance practices can be **individual** or **collective**, and **social relations** play a significant role. Refugees move towards self-reliance by deploying a number of strategies, including: fitting eligibility criteria to enrol into assistance regimes of humanitarian agencies; building from scratch or capitalising on previous self-started business networks and coping mechanisms of assistance; or implementing forms of reconstruction and self-reliance by acting as intermediaries between their communities and formal aid agencies. Such self-started networks and mechanisms proliferate in the absence – or in spite of the presence – of formal humanitarian providers.

Self-reliance has also been an **objective of humanitarian programmes**. UNHCR defines it as “the social and economic ability of an individual, household, or community, to meet basic needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health, and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity” (UNHCR, 2005, p. 1). It is meant to reduce dependency amongst aid recipients. As a programme approach, self-reliance refers to developing and strengthening livelihoods of persons of concern (PoC), reducing their vulnerability and their long-term reliance on assistance other than their own. The relationships and possible tensions between these two understandings of self-reliance open an interesting field of inquiry.

## URBAN MARKETS

Urban markets are both **spaces** (located in specific places of the city) where different actors physically meet and a **network of social practices** characterised by flows and exchanges, negotiation, and power relations between different actors and social groups. These practices also shape refugee aspirations. Markets involve specific practices on a continuum between **formal** and **informal** (Çargoklu and Eder, 2006).

Through the analysis of social and economic practices that characterise the daily encounters between different groups in urban markets, it is possible to better understand human relations in the city and ultimately the city itself. This is because urban markets are a key dimension of city systems and offer privileged entry points where encounters, networks

and tensions are more easily observed. It is in markets that important negotiations over access to resources and networks – the core of urban crisis – take place.

## HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES UNDERSTOOD AS MARKET ACTORS

Humanitarian actors, which include local and international NGOs and UN agencies have an impact upon **local markets** in the cities where they operate. Some of their programmes may generate demand directly by purchasing goods and services locally, or indirectly by increasing the resources available to their beneficiaries. However, they may also hinder some local market players if humanitarian programmes supply elsewhere and then provide goods and services free or at subsidised rate. The impact can be at different scales, across different market systems, and may be significantly different depending on the timeframe considered.

Humanitarian actors and their staff also become consumers and their presence can play a significant role in local urban markets. Employees need housing, transport, food, etc. Their daily practices and their presence in these spaces beyond their professional engagement shape local markets.

Humanitarian action in cities hosting refugees has an **impact on different groups** and produces redistributive effects, which may be contested by different actors in the urban market, depending on how such action includes/excludes existing socio-economic actors.

Practices of humanitarian actors have shifted from maintenance and care to self-reliance and livelihood development, see for example the widespread use of cash transfers and support to income-generating activities.

## LEGAL, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

The **legal, political and social systems** in the host context facilitate or impinge self-reliance practices, and influence the type of strategies to achieve self-reliance. For example, the refugee rights in the host state make self-reliance more or less likely (i.e. the right to own property, access to quality education and health, and the right to work). Cities are generally more ideal environments for developing self-reliance mechanisms and self-support networks because they tend to offer more opportunities and spaces of encounter, but could also expose the newcomers to challenging pre-existing power relations and more complex systems of governance and control than rural areas.

## RESEARCH APPROACH:

### Everyday practices

The research adopts a practice-based approach, which means that the entry point is the study of **everyday socio-economic practices**. Socio-economic behaviour is located in the context of wider historical processes, by identifying the trajectories and the interconnections of human practices. Consumption and other **market-related activities** are analysed **as a collective practice** rather than isolated individual acts (Warde, 2014), refuting methodological individualism approaches and rational choice models. An analysis based on shared practices enables us to observe how these relate (or not) to other collective identities based for instance on ethnicity and religion.

### Time

Tracing the history of refugee socio-economic practices through time reveals the (un)willing life project of the refugee, and the ways in which livelihood programmes affect it. Given that only 2.5% of refugee crises are resolved within three years (ODI, 2016, p. 7), situations initially conceived as temporary evolve and change refugee life projects, demanding a change in humanitarian programming, and deeply transforming host cities. Therefore, the emphasis on time allows for investigation into how host cities are changeably approached by refugees as mere transit areas or permanent resettlement. Such **collective** and **individual intentions** of urban refugees – shifting from going back to the country of origin, to moving onwards to a third country, to staying – challenge the temporal character of policy-making and humanitarian assistance regimes, which have often been started with the specific intention of rendering human flows provisional.

In order to inform urban and humanitarian practices *vis-à-vis* refugee self-reliance, our research examines different time scales of practices. It explores the different temporalities of the urgent/immediate timeframe in which the humanitarian apparatus traditionally operates, and the long term timeframe of pre-existing city systems, which need to adapt to accommodate both refugee and humanitarians.

## REFERENCES

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### **The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London**

The DPU conducts world-leading 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. We are part of The Bartlett: University College London's global faculty of the built environment.

### **Humanitarian Affairs Team, Save the Children UK**

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

## **CASE STUDIES**

### **Halba, Lebanon**

Pop. 44,000  
Urban refugees: 17,000  
Syrians since 2011

### **Gaziantep, Turkey**

Pop. 1.8 million  
Urban refugees: 350,000  
Mostly Syrians since 2011

### **New Delhi, India**

Pop. 22 million  
Urban refugees: 22,000  
Half of them Rohingya in 2012-4

### **Thessaloniki, Greece**

Pop. 1 million  
Urban refugees: unknown  
Syrians, Eritreans, Palestinians, Afghans

### **Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

Pop. 3.5 million  
Urban refugees: 20,000  
Eritreans, South Sudanese, Sudanese, Somali, Yemenite



Disclaimer: Figures are based on estimates from various sources and may not be accurate.

