

Refugee Self-Reliance in Delhi: The Limits of a Market-Based Approach¹

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Background on Delhi

India has a long history of accepting people fleeing from conflict and natural disasters. Its cities are often hosts to large numbers of internally and externally displaced people living and surviving amongst the ‘local’ population. However, the country does not have a domestic legal framework to guarantee protection for such groups, and it is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Additional Protocol. As there is no domestic legal framework for status recognition, refugees are categorised as foreigners and fall under a range of Acts, the most relevant of which are the Foreigners Act of 1946 and the Citizenship Act of 1955. These Acts make it an offence to be in the country without valid travel and identity documents, which puts many refugees and stateless persons at risk of classification as an illegal immigrant and deportation. There is currently a government-sponsored amendment to the Citizenship Act (1955) working its way through parliament: The Citizenship Amendment Bill (2016), which seeks, essentially, to relax the requirements for Indian citizenship. However, it only recognises non-Muslim minority groups from the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. If passed, this would set a worrying precedent for codifying refugee protection in India on communal grounds – non-Muslim displaced people from (some) neighbouring countries count as ‘legitimate’ refugees and potential future citizens of India, Muslims do not.

While there is no official legal framework, the government does offer *prima facie* recognition for two refugee groups who enter the country – Tibetans and Sri Lankan Tamils – offering them a range of entitlements, including referral to relevant public services, a government-approved Refugee Certificate valid on a yearly basis and renewable on assessment, one-year work permits, and freedom to move in and out of the country. The government also enables UNHCR to operate in the country with a mandate to protect and assist certain refugee groups. This includes refugees from Afghanistan and Myanmar, and, in smaller numbers, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and Syria. These groups are engaged, to varying degrees, in UNHCR education, livelihoods and protection programmes, and are also – after Refugee Status

Determination – entitled to a Refugee Certificate. This may enable them to receive a Long Term Visa (LTV), to be renewed on a regular basis and essential for renting or employment, though the Government of India takes the final call on issuance. The final grouping of *de facto* refugees present in the country is those evaluated as foreigners on a case-by-case basis, with permission to remain only if they have a valid reason to do so (such as education enrolment or marriage to a citizen). Hindu refugees from Pakistan and Bangladesh find themselves in this grouping, and are *prima facie* viewed as migrants rather than people with well-founded fears of persecution in their countries of origin. This three-tiered system entails an administrative hierarchy of refugees that defines the variable protection and assistance one can receive, as well as the ability to secure jobs, education and homes.

According to UNHCR, India currently grants asylum and provides support to around 207,000 refugees, with a large majority of those receiving assistance from the organisation living in Delhi.² However, the total number of *de facto* refugees who have been forcibly displaced or had little choice but to cross the border into India is likely to be much higher, due to numerous unresolved conflicts in neighbouring countries. The difficulty in obtaining accurate numbers is due to a combination of porous borders, desire for anonymity, high mobility in South Asia, and the lack of a domestic or regional refugee regulatory framework requiring record-keeping of such individuals.

An emerging body of academic and policy literature is beginning to examine disparities in protection for different groups in India, in particular addressing urban environments and urbanisation as phenomena that exacerbate vulnerabilities.³ However, there are significant knowledge gaps. Not only are analyses on especially vulnerable refugee groups in urban India – such as the stateless Rohingya and non-Muslim Afghan refugees – largely missing from current research, but there is also insufficient qualitative data relating to the lived experiences of urban refugees attempting to survive and realise their aspirations in India's cities. Based on six months of field research, engaging with Rohingya refugees, as well as Sikh and Christian Afghan refugees in New Delhi, this study seeks to address some of these gaps.

As of 2014, 6,000 Rohingyas were registered with UNHCR, of which around 4,500 have refugee cards.⁴ Exact numbers are hard to establish as a result of poor registration numbers (current estimates are as high as 40,000), but the main settlement areas of Rohingya refugees in India are New Delhi, where UNHCR is the main body offering formal refugee support, Hyderabad, and Jammu. As a Muslim faith group, they experience general anti-Muslim discrimination and their case is a geo-politically sensitive one, affected by India's bilateral relations with Myanmar.

Afghan refugees fled to India in a first significant wave in the early 1980s, following an outbreak of war in the country after an invasion by the Soviet Union. The majority of the 10,000 or so refugees that entered over the 1980s

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and 1990s were Hindu and Sikh Afghans, who had previously enjoyed, according to Ashish Bose, a 'bhai-bhai' (brother) status with Muslim Afghans, but experienced increasing persecution and attacks after the outbreak of war.⁵ The current number of registered Afghan refugees (of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh faiths) is 12,154.⁶ Legally mandated for protection under UNHCR, Sikh Afghans are – in theory – entitled to Refugee Certificates, Long Term Visas, to apply for residential permits, and seek livelihoods in the formal and informal economy.

Christian Afghan refugees in India are much more recent arrivals, fleeing from Afghanistan, since 2005, in fear of religiously-motivated attacks. Their numbers have been placed at around 250,⁷ but are difficult to verify as they seek anonymity in Delhi and elsewhere due to confrontations they have faced with the Muslim Afghan refugee community in India. Very little is written about this refugee group, and they do not feature in UNHCR's 2014 evaluation of programming in the capital because the UN organisation does not work with them.

Introduction: From Dependency to the Market

In the late 1990s, in the wake of substantial global cuts to UNHCR budgets, the organisation's Delhi mission was experiencing financial difficulties and was forced into a 'process of triage' – namely, cutting back on the costliest activities.⁸ Urban refugee support, particularly subsistence allowances, was deemed very expensive. Additionally, urban refugees receiving, or seeking to receive, this support in Delhi were viewed negatively: as self-entitled, overly aggressive in their approach to UNHCR, and as less worthy (i.e. less poor) than refugees in camp settings.⁹ UNHCR also feared that continuing subsistence allowances would act as a draw for other asylum seekers to the capital. Therefore, the decision was made for a policy change: to focus on making refugees in Delhi and wider India 'self-reliant'. This was published as a global policy priority in UNHCR's 1997 'Comprehensive Policy on Urban Refugees'.

At the time, refugees were expected to survive on their own, to reduce 'the dependence [they] have on the international community and the burden they exercise on the local community'.¹⁰ Although the 1997 Policy outlines the intention of creating employment programmes, the caseload of 'legitimate' refugees was narrowly defined, and much of the thrust is towards minimising the role of UNHCR in day-to-day support and discouraging what was viewed as dependency.¹¹ This document was understandably met with heavy criticism. A (slow) review was undertaken, culminating in the publication of a revised strategy in 2009. While the tone regarding the legitimacy of refugees in urban environments has changed, the focus on 'support[ing] the efforts of urban refugees to become self-reliant, both by means of employment or self-employment', remains steadfast.¹² The market economy, with its promise of jobs and income, has become the antidote to the problem of aid dependence.

How does such a market-driven approach work in a context where the government not only restricts refugee access to the economy through an exclusive documentation regime, but also codifies ideas of legitimacy of presence in India along communal lines? This paper explores such questions, in relation to refugee self-reliance in Delhi, reflecting on the role of identity politics, bureaucratic process, and urbanisation in shaping the circumstances of refugees to make meaningful lives in the city. With particular attention to the experiences of Christian and Sikh Afghans and Muslim Rohingya,¹³ it offers a critical analysis of self-reliance as a programmatic approach, and closes with some reflections on alternatives for humanitarian practice to support refugee well-being in Delhi.

First, however, it is important to put these policy shifts into wider historical perspective. Over the last century there has been a gradual shift in ideas of 'who counts' as an Indian citizen, with communal identity a marker of difference. As the country's economy has liberalised and its cities urbanised

– attracting wealth, investment, labour and requiring the expansion of public services – these communalised ideas of belonging have centred on the cities and the delimitation of the right to exist in them. Refugee/migrant (these terms are often used interchangeably in national rhetoric) exclusions from these spaces have been solidified and legitimised over the longer term, through use of the political language of risk and economic language of burden.

1947 Partition and the Communal Inscription of Urban Space

The British Empire retreated from the Indian subcontinent after World War II. The region was subject to a momentous territorial reconfiguration by the British government, with ‘devastating and largely unforeseen consequences’.¹⁴ Borders defining the new states of Pakistan and India were drawn hurriedly along ethno-religious lines; outbreaks of hostility and intense violence erupted between Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, as up to 20 million South Asians were displaced, fleeing to, or being forced to relocate to, Pakistan (the direction for most Muslims) and India (the direction for most Hindus, Sikhs and other non-Muslim peoples). The mass movements and violence that followed Partition resulted in the deaths of over 100,000 people and the displacement and dispossession of 15 million.¹⁵

Partition became a defining moment for modern South Asian experiences of forced displacement. One result was the emergence of an ethno-religious understanding of citizenship in India, and the technocratic policing of who counts as a citizen or refugee in the modern Indian state and its major cities. It was during Partition that norms emerged as to: the responsibilities of the state towards *de facto* refugees and vice versa; the role of governmental and non-governmental organisations in ‘managing’ the crisis; and who belonged to these new nations.¹⁶ Underlying the bureaucratic elements of resultant ‘rehabilitation and reconstruction’ programmes designed to (re)settle the displaced, were ethno-nationalist lines of question, including into whether Muslims could ever be Indian, and which groups have a right to reside in urban areas.¹⁷

Institutions of displaced population governance that sprung up included the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, which was created to ‘manage’ the movement, settlement and well-being of the displaced. Camps were established throughout India’s major cities, as a temporary humanitarian response to the sheer numbers of those forced from their homes – and security officials, specifically policemen, were the government agents deemed most appropriate to ‘control’ the camp inhabitants, particularly in Muslim camps.¹⁸ These *ad hoc* settlements were the quintessential spaces of administrative and bureaucratic control, and categorisation.¹⁹ But they were to be temporary, and contained only a fraction of those on the move. The longer-term ‘solution’

to this mass displacement situation, for many new leaders of the Indian state, was for Muslims to leave India for Pakistan, and for newly arriving Hindu and Sikh refugees to be able to return 'home' and occupy Muslim 'evacuee' property.²⁰ The Indian Government even passed the Administration of Evacuee Property Act, 1950, 'to provide for the administration of Evacuee Properties and for compensating the refugees who had lost their properties in Pakistan'.²¹ Thus, in the few years following Partition, several developments were simultaneously occurring: Firstly, the politico-bureaucratic development of an apparatus for refugee relief and 'rehabilitation' in urban centres that had policing, security, and population control as core functions. Secondly, there was a shifting relationship to place developing among the emerging nations and their displaced inhabitants, particularly regarding cities with a perceived urgent need to reconfigure and re-establish a connection to land, which had been violently ruptured.²² This self-conscious (re)inscription of place was partly ethno-religious in foundation: City spaces were becoming as 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' in (self-)identification as their inhabitants, and this seemingly entitled certain groups to occupy certain areas, and relegated others to the periphery.

Delhi was central to this reconfiguration process, because it was (and still is) the political and administrative capital of the colonial state and the Republic of India, and therefore a historically important centre of production, political contestation and, during Partition, population flows in and out of India. It had (has) a somewhat 'special status' in the Indian context: as a national capital, it has had to project a particular idea of India on the international stage, and also as a State, it is responsible for citizens' rights and social justice.²³

Delhi's centrality in the history of Indian Muslims is well-established, given it was a seat of power under the Mughal Empire for many centuries. Gayer and Jaffrelot note that Mughal Indian cities were 'a haven for Muslim elites and commoners fleeing invasions or persecutions in their homeland'.²⁴ These were cities of 'composite culture', they argue, with a Muslim ruler-ship that was in constant interaction with Hindu-dominated society. Such composite culture, however, began to wane with the rise of communalism and nationalism in the later years of the British Raj (with codification of ethnic and religious differences used by the British as a technology of control), during the violence of Partition, and the increasing prominence of an anti-Muslim nationalist agenda (fuelled by Hindu-nationalist movements) in more recent decades.²⁵

The vast numbers of displaced people after Partition, and the resultant development of urban instruments of 'migration management' (i.e. the creation of city camps; the legitimisation of occupation by Hindus and Sikhs of 'abandoned' Muslim property; the provision of trains from Delhi to Pakistan, etc.) meant that Delhi and India's other urban centres became, to borrow from Jonathan Darling, 'strategic locations for the enforcement of border control'²⁶ – places for restricting and removing non-citizens of the Indian state.

These processes were increasingly framed as economically and bureaucratically rational, and therefore legitimate. As Zaminder argues, economic rationalisation ‘provided the logic’ for Indian and Pakistani governments to officially support the ‘transfer of populations’ in the Punjab, and this logic ‘became central to the notion that Muslim refugees from elsewhere in India could not be accommodated, that they were an economic liability’.²⁷

Such logic was arguably evident during India’s assistance to refugees fleeing from East Pakistan (soon-to-be Bangladesh) in 1971, when the Government made it clear that its doors were open to the displaced and it would do as much as possible to help, but that no refugees could remain in the country’s camps and on its roadsides beyond the short term.²⁸ India’s permanent representative to the UN, Samar Sen, stated at the time: ‘Voluntary repatriation was the only lasting solution to the problem. This was not only the best, but also an imperative, solution. And it must come soon... [T]he relief operation should not become yet another political and economic burden on the international community’.²⁹ While understandably presented as an economic issue (India would struggle to support all 10 million refugees in the long-term), this policy framing was also intimately bound with concerns over the stability of the State of Assam, where an influx of refugees from East Pakistan was met with protest from indigenous communities, as the state was already experiencing communal conflict related to historic Bengali migration.³⁰ Political and economic concerns entwined with those of identity.

The rationalisation of ethno-religious exclusion saw echoes in the capital several decades later, between 1996 and 1999, when thousands of Bengali-speaking Muslim slum-dwellers were deleted from the electoral rolls by one party of the Central coalition government, the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – also in power in Delhi State.³¹ These undocumented Muslims were declared to be illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, and this claim was used to strip them of their rights. They could well have been self-settled internally displaced persons (IDPs) from within West Bengal in India, or refugees from neighbouring Bangladesh, but the BJP made a conscious and public decision to differentiate between perceived ‘legitimate’ Hindu refugees from those areas, and Muslim ‘infiltrators’ with the potential for political and economic destabilisation. As one pro-BJP publication explained, in 1991:

The Hindu refugees [from Bangladesh] had to seek shelter. They have already declared themselves as refugees, whereas the infiltrators [Bangladeshi Muslims] are illegally trespassing our national borders, maintaining dual citizenships and creating havoc to the State’s economy.³²

Of course, concerns over the ‘burden’ of these non-citizens in India was (and still is) not exclusively ethno-religious, but also socioeconomic. The poor in general in India ‘are seen as a drain by creating disorder, squalor and stress on the city’.³³ These markers of difference (poverty, religion, ethnicity etc.) have all been deployed as mutually reinforcing markers of urban undesirability. They act together as a ‘gate-keeping system’ that is, to quote Baviskar, ‘designed to play upon ... anxieties around the breakdown of urban infrastructure, ... apprehensions about the scarcity of water and electricity, the increase in crime and disease, and the proliferation of unruly places and peoples’.³⁴ This system has been specifically deployed to define ‘insiders’ entitled to benefit from urban social systems and security, and ‘outsiders’ who are not. As Sanyal argues, refugees now are often viewed through ‘a particular prism of fear and mistrust’ – as prone to ‘criminal activities and lawlessness, and as economic burdens at best’.³⁵

Ethno-Religious Identities and the Refugee as ‘Outsider’

The concepts of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ have taken on complex meanings, both institutionally – for official bodies determining who a refugee is, where a refugee should be settled (or placed), and their concomitant entitlements – and also among refugees themselves, who seek to locate themselves within these inscribed categories. As the above analysis shows, the distinction between *de facto* refugee and migrant in India has always been a slippery one – often conveniently so. To quote Ghosh, ‘because of the absence of legal regimes, quite often the categories get mixed up and migrants, refugees, illegal settlers or stateless persons become one and the same’.³⁶ These unfixed and fluid status-ascriptions have resulted in, for example, Rohingya refugees being knowingly and unknowingly harassed by police authorities, labelled as ‘illegal Bengali migrants’ and jailed.³⁷ They have also enabled the state to move deftly between projections of welcome, (‘India’s refugee policy is an example for the world to follow’, declared the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 2013³⁸), and actions of exclusion, such as the selective issuance of LTVs to different Afghan refugee groups, and recent moves to ‘identify, arrest and deport’ Rohingya Muslim ‘migrants’.³⁹ As Sarbani Sen explains, ‘For the GoI, the ad hoc approach to refugee issues is politically more convenient in the context of the bilateral relations that India has with the country of origin of the refugees’.⁴⁰

However, as touched upon above, rhetorical slippage is not restricted to ideas of the refugee/migrant. On the far right of Hindu nationalist discourse, the language of ‘infiltration’ has frequently been used to describe the presence and purpose of Muslim migrants (who may also be *de facto* refugees) in India. Indeed, the BJP staked its leadership campaign on ending Bangladeshi ‘infiltration’ in 1993.⁴¹

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As 'refugee' is muddled with 'migrant', and the latter has been used interchangeably with criminal or terrorist 'infiltrator' (especially when describing Muslims), broader associations of refugees with illegality and feelings of undue state responsibility (economic burden) and risk (political destabilisation) are being reinforced, and boundaries between the 'in-group' and 'out-group' solidified. This is translating to refugee experiences of marginalisation:

In renting ... there are problems about religion, some people don't want to rent to Muslims ... Muslims will never get nationality or any help in India, so we can't think of that kind of 'hope' [Male Rohingya refugee]

For the landlords there is a concern. Refugees are foreigners and can be considered a security issue. As there is a security issue, there has to be a premium charge. They feel they are taking a risk. There are a lot of terrorism activities nowadays and these people are belonging to a particular community – you know which I am speaking about – they come from that particular background. These Rohingyas, they are all Muslims, so this is picked up ... if there is a risk, people charge a premium. [NGO worker]

This out-group reinforcement is not restricted to Muslim refugees. For instance, the Sikh Afghan refugee community, some of whom have resided in India for over 30 years, have faced constant problems attempting to get legal recognition as naturalised citizens and social recognition as legitimate, long-term residents of India. They often find themselves caught between contradictory social identities. For instance, Afghan refugees are categorised by UNHCR into two types: as ethnic (meaning Muslim) Afghans, or non-ethnic (meaning Hindu, Sikh and Christian Afghans). Many feel the distinction is paradoxical with negative effects, as one refugee explained:

Firstly, they [UNHCR and the GoI] recognize us as refugees. Ok, fine but then they categorise us as Muslims or non-Muslims, and also as Indian-origin Afghans. ... If we are Indian origin, why did you categorise us as refugees? But when there is talk of resettlement, I am an Indian-origin Afghan or Indian, so no need for resettlement! This is discrimination... In Afghanistan we were mistreated because we were 'Indians', here the government mistreats us because they call us refugees or Afghans. [Afghan Sikh male]

The ambiguous space that the non-ethnic Afghan refugees perceive they occupy, between ethnic/Muslim refugee identity (perceived as favoured for third country resettlement) and ‘Indianness’ (their ascribed roots as historic Indian migrants in Afghanistan), cause confusion. They fit neither category at the ‘right time’, and it feels paralysing. The only category they do occupy is outsider, both in Afghanistan and India.

Even when refugees have passed the current 12-years of required residency for a citizenship application, there’s no guarantee they will be able to make the transition. One Afghan refugee explained the situation of his friend: ‘He applied for citizenship in 2000. The file was misplaced, then he reapplied in 2003, and that is still pending! He came to India in 1989’.

Bureaucratic Entanglements

The paralysis that refugees face as they seek various kinds of documentation and recognition from the authorities can be explained, in part, as a result of institutionalised corruption. It is common in India, and elsewhere in the world, for officials such as police officers or civil servants to mistreat refugees, delay processes, or unfairly imprison them in anticipation of a bribe.⁴² A 2009 study of refugees in Delhi noted that: ‘For verification of residency, the local police ... require excessive payments or bribes of up to 300 rupees [approx. 3.50 GBP]’.⁴³ In our study, the refugee that spoke of the delayed citizenship application reflected on the cause: ‘The main reason for this discrimination is corruption. If you have money then the Home Ministry will do anything for you. For example – mostly people who have got citizenship in India have paid a lot of money. So the poorer refugees can’t manage this’.

Key informants also told anecdotes of government officials issuing contradictory statements on which documentation is necessary for which purpose (*this* document on one day, *that* document on another), and rejecting legitimate paperwork as though ignorant of its validity. Therefore, a responsibility of the state, and an opportunity for non-governmental organisations, must be the education of front-line civil servants and police authorities on refugee entitlements, and the development of an oversight mechanism for observing and enforcing corruption charges against officials. Aspects of this much-needed change might not be so unrealistic. A workshop held in April 2017 by the Women’s Refugee Council in Delhi was attended by a senior member of the Delhi police force who, upon hearing the difficulties refugees were facing when dealing with police authorities, declared the possibility of setting up a Refugee Help Desk in Delhi police headquarters as a first point of contact for refugees in the city with official concerns. If implemented, it would be a small step towards public authorities’ recognition of their responsibility for mitigating refugee vulnerability.

This single, technocratic recommendation would certainly not counter many of the structural problems of ‘bureaucratic violence’, through which ‘political, administrative and judicial action and inaction prevent poor people from making a living, obtaining medical aid, and securing the necessities of life as food, clothing, shelter and sanitation’.⁴⁴ Such violence is enabled by the ‘production of indifference’ among civil servants and government authorities, as well as the communalisation of identity and the mobilisation of hostility against the outgroup for the purposes of diffusing a threat or attaining influence and power.⁴⁵

When refugees navigating Indian bureaucracy are not experiencing outright brutality, they often face simple arbitrariness: seemingly chaotic and inconsistent treatment by officials; the misplacement and delay by the government of the citizenship application, as in the case of the Afghan refugee mentioned above; differential entitlements given to Sikh and Muslim Afghan refugees, who are entitled to LTVs, and Christian Afghans, who are not. In the legal sphere, too, when refugees require representation they are often assigned government lawyers with little knowledge of either the refugee group they are representing or Indian refugee case history more broadly, which results in inadequate representation and understanding of processes and rights.⁴⁶ Through the effective delegation of the majority of refugee protection to UNHCR – a form of distancing – Indian authorities have reinforced the outsider identity of the refugee. UNHCR’s role here as the main arbiters of protection for refugees in an otherwise indifferent bureaucracy, raises questions about the delegation of responsibility without requisite authority, and therefore reinforcement of refugee powerlessness. As UNHCR is the main document-issuing authority for refugees in India, and as documentation is essential for claiming any entitlements, it has been referred to by refugees as their government. One Rohingya refugee exclaimed during the interview: ‘your government is Modi, my government is UNHCR!’ And almost mirroring the arbitrariness of the GoI’s bureaucratic immigration process, UNHCR’s processes also require multiple visits for status verification. Another Rohingya refugee explained:

You need a lot of money to come here from there, around 500-1000 [rupees] is what you have to spend to come with your children [from Mewat, a Rohingya settlement in the neighbouring state of Haryana], that’s why they feel that if they come to Delhi to get their cards made then they have to give three or four interviews. So imagine for one interview they spend 1000, where will they get so much money to keep going and coming?

Barriers to Refugee Employment, and Livelihoods Programmes

UNHCR's Head of Mission is currently located in New Delhi (it has a second office in Chennai). This presence in Delhi, and the level of support or entitlements UNHCR is perceived to provide, seems to be a draw for refugees to the capital city. One female Rohingya informant explained: 'We were told by family to come here [to Delhi] as things are easier. You get the UNHCR card here ... Mewat [another Rohingya settlement area in Haryana] is very far away, it creates a problem ... you get more facilities here [in Delhi] through the UNHCR'. And another: 'The biggest reason for staying in Delhi for us is that the refugee card from the UNHCR, you only get that here'. These Refugee Cards are essential documents for accessing any services, for themselves or their children.

Technically, registered asylum seekers and refugees have equal access to government services, such as public schools, and critical healthcare. Despite entitlements to access many public services, refugees and UNHCR currently face difficulties proving those entitlements after the introduction of the Aadhaar, a unique 12-digit number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India, recorded on a card, which identifies every Indian resident by biometric and demographic data.

Though a voluntary identification card, it has fast become the main accepted identification to ensure access to public services for all Indians. Foreigners are entitled to an Aadhaar Card but, at present, the law is ambiguous as to what documents count in the application process as proof of identity. Refugee Certificates are not listed explicitly as valid documents, and this is creating confusion – UNHCR report that some refugees have been able to receive one using their Refugee Certificate, while others have been refused. And even when refugees do have one, they are not always believed to be legitimate card-holders. As one Rohingya refugee explains:

People who have got Aadhaar without refugee card or LTV, police can catch them for fraud and even UNHCR can't help ... Once the police stopped me and asked for the refugee card and when I was taking out the card, even the Aadhaar card came out. He said that you aren't allowed to get Aadhaar. He also said it's not written here that you can get Aadhaar but eventually I showed him that it's not for citizenship. So he let me go. The situation is very tricky with Aadhaar.

Interestingly, in this instance, the police officer was concerned that the refugee might be fraudulently holding *citizenship* documentation and was persuaded of the refugee's right to carry the card, only when he was convinced that it

wasn't proof of citizenship. Again, the impression given is that refugees are permitted to exist in India, but not 'belong'.

Meanwhile, Aadhaar Cards are becoming increasingly essential for work purposes. The same refugee continued:

The Refugee Card [Certificate] is not the most helpful but at least to move around it's good for us. For example – whenever police authorities stop us we show them our Refugee Card and it's fine. That is good for us! But for work, it's not useful at all ... I was working in a factory in Aligarh, where after a while maybe the owner realised that I am not Indian. He called me and asked for my documents. I showed him the Refugee Card, he said this is not valid and he fired me. I went to the market and got a duplicate Aadhaar card for 350 rupees. What could I have done? I had to work at any cost. I took the card back to the owner and he said ya this is fine and now you can work.

While this refugee was able to work around the bureaucratic issue of documentation in the short term by obtaining a fake copy of the Aadhaar Card, he placed himself at risk of arrest for carrying falsified documentation. This is a common situation for refugees in India and the world over. Not only does it put the refugees at risk of arrest and deportation, but employers can use the vulnerable position of the refugees to underpay, not pay, or abuse them without fear of the refugees reporting the exploitation. Refugees remain powerless. 'This guy', explained one Rohingya informant about another also in the interview, 'has four or five children, how will he survive without work? He works as a daily wager in Noida. He has not been paid for 15 days of his work and he has been chasing the contractor. This is very common. The contractors don't pay the whole amount ever'. Another shared his experience: 'Yesterday, I worked almost for four hours to earn 250 rupees [approx. 3 GBP] but didn't get paid'.

The Afghans, though a typically better educated and higher skilled group, have also struggled because of documentation. Their main difficulty is getting jobs in the first place. As one Afghan explained: 'UNHCR basically don't have any authority to get jobs for us. ... Even if there are jobs available its difficult because of documentation. Even if we know English or are educated. Still it's a big no for us because of the documentation problem'. Another: 'For jobs, they ask us for Aadhaar card. Who will give us jobs?'

These experiences reinforce the corruption and arbitrariness of Indian bureaucracy that refugees experience – with haphazard understandings of entitlement to a card that legally *is* available for foreigners (as noted above, the limited legal status that refugees do have in India is as foreigners), and an application process dependent on an ambiguous list of valid application

documents. Here, the GoI should seek to clarify the legitimacy of Refugee Cards for Aadhaar applications. In the meantime, legal aid organisations supporting refugees must continue to sensitise officials on the legitimacy of refugee applicants, assuming a right to the card in the absence of a law excluding them. This is an essential step for ensuring that refugees have, at least, the opportunity to access livelihoods, as well as education and health services. Though it will not be sufficient in itself to provide refugees with the opportunities to make a life and livelihood in Delhi, to become 'self-reliant'.

UNHCR's work largely revolves around determining refugee status for documentation and entitlements. It works closely with NGO partners to offer needs assessments, referrals to relevant agencies, and support in integrating in the host community and labour market. These organisations include: Don Bosco, focused on education, assistance in access to healthcare, youth clubs, psychosocial support, and outreach on issues such as gender-based violence; the Socio-Legal Information Centre (SLIC) which provides legal assistance to refugees; and Access, which is primarily focused on supporting refugees' entry into employment, through Life Skills Training classes, which mentor refugees in how to approach job searches and interviews, vocational training and job placements, which typically involve the attachment of refugees to an agency for on-the-job learning of low-skill manufacturing work, and enterprise training as part of an entrepreneurship programme, which offers a small number of refugees (around 80) a year's grant to set up a small business. Refugees participating in the programmes of these NGOs are usually referrals from UNHCR or self-referrals that have become aware of the opportunity through word of mouth. The programmes take place at project sites near the main refugee settlement areas in order to mitigate travel cost and time burdens for these refugees, and to augment employment and education opportunities in their surrounding neighbourhoods.

Despite these programmes, many refugees are still struggling at a basic level to provide for themselves and their families, and in a deeper sense to attain livelihood opportunities and living standards that meet their changing needs, expectations and aspirations. The difficulties and disappointments in this area were broadly echoed by refugees, UNHCR and their implementing partners alike: limited access to the formal economy due to insufficient documentation; high levels of employment dissatisfaction in terms of available jobs and experiences of working in them; high attrition rates in job placements; and low take-up for, and interest in, certain classes, trainings and livelihood opportunities.

In terms of livelihood programmes, what happens is that some people take up such trainings with hope of a job. For this they leave their old work. But after training there are no jobs, even when there are jobs then

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it will be for example for a waiter in a restaurant for 5000 rupees [per month, approx. 60 GBP] whereas earlier the same person was earning 8000 rupees [approx. 95 GBP]. So what's the point? [Male Rohingya refugee]

When I came [to India] I did business management [with an implementing partner of UNHCR]. But the diploma I got from there is useless. [Male Afghan]

Unskilled and poor refugees – typically Rohingya males – often end up in construction, factory work or *ad hoc* service jobs for low pay, like most unskilled migrants moving to urban areas.⁴⁷ Three of the better-educated Rohingyas had established their own community-based organisation dedicated to improving the literacy levels of their community (Rohingya Literacy Group), but this was a social enterprise rather than a for-profit venture. For women, the main livelihood stream is through home-based enterprises, though these are very small in scale and not large in number for reasons that will be explored shortly. The most regular work for many of the refugees with language skills, particularly English, is in translation. For Rohingya refugees, this largely means working for UNHCR or NGOs and engaging with new Rohingya asylum seekers and refugees (one male and two female Rohingya refugees were currently in this position, another one having worked the role previously).

For the Afghans this is a much more reliable source of employment, given the significant numbers of Afghan visitors – medical tourists, sight-seers, diaspora and extended families – that pass-through Delhi regularly. However, the form of work raises a number of protection concerns. A Don Bosco manager noted that female translators are at high risk of being propositioned for ‘favours’, particularly of a sexual nature, and there have been instances where translators have been asked to accompany a client to nightclubs and other inappropriate venues. The nature of private contracts can also present moral and legal dilemmas. As one refugee explained:

For those who know English there is a good job prospect in translation for medical tourists coming from Afghanistan. But the setup is quite shady since the private hospitals have a kind of deal where they overcharge the Afghans and in return provide incentives to the Afghan translators to get the medical tourists to their hospital.

The informant expressed discomfort at this practice for moral reasons, and refrains from it himself, but it remains an attractive opportunity: commission can earn a translator a significant percentage of the total expenditure on treatment.

Precarious and irregular labour is a feature of the informal economy in India, and the way 82 per cent of the Indian population attempt to make ends meet.⁴⁸ It prevents any long-term accumulation of wealth and access to institutions of power – restrictions that some scholars argue are deliberately constructed to prevent ‘undesirables’ (the poor, migrants, ethnic and faith minorities) from tipping the balance of power and de-stabilising the authority of the establishment.⁴⁹ Here, the city (as a space to be protected) is particularly important, explains David Harvey, as it is the storehouse of a country’s assets, and the centre around which the dominant mode of production is organised. Refugees, migrants and other ‘undesirables’ are essential to its functioning but represent potential disruption, so must therefore remain disenfranchised.⁵⁰

As discussed, the primary technical obstacle that prevents refugees from finding regular and safe employment is the lack of official status and documentation. No codified refugee status, precarious, temporary and changeable documentation, and their broad inability to open bank accounts⁵¹ means that most refugees cannot enter the formal labour market, where at least the more educated and English-speaking refugees might find opportunities that better match their skills and aspirations. However, beyond this legal protection deficit and the bureaucratic barriers that limit the possibility of self-reliance, there are also aspects of humanitarian programming aimed at fostering self-sufficiency that arguably further undermine refugee resilience to urban shocks and challenges.

From Self-Reliance to Inter-Generational Dependency?

Programming tensions – between short-term humanitarian norms and longer-term development needs – reflect a lack of research into and understanding of the way that urban economies are experienced and navigated by refugees with diverse needs and social identities. For instance, our study strongly suggested that Rohingya women experienced the city and livelihoods differently from Rohingya and Afghan men, which was not reflected in humanitarian programming. In some cases, livelihoods programming seemed to be inadvertently reinforcing gender hierarchies.

In interviews, both male and female refugees – across the Afghan and Rohingya communities placed a high value on the welfare of the family unit and the importance of education for children. Their future prosperity, fostered by keeping them healthy and getting them to school, was framed as the most basic measure of community well-being. Some spoke of their refugee children’s poor schooling experiences in terms of a skills loss for the community:

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In 30 years unfortunately not one professional has come out of our community ... Some girls, around ten to twelve, do studies through long-distance. In Afghanistan, we had doctors, professors, ministers, surgeon, in every profession but here in 30 years not one [certified] doctor or teacher or engineer or pilot – biggest loss for us! [Sikh Afghan Male]

Some framed child refugee experiences as a protection concern, interrelated with their own sense of space and stability:

As soon as we put our children into school, the landlord comes and tells us to leave, then we have to hop from place to place ... this is ruining our children's lives too, they aren't able to have a proper education. [Rohingya female]

They [the children] don't have places to play. The place is small, smoke from one house goes to the other house, which results in fight[s]. Space is a problem. [Rohingya male]

Others spoke of education as a neglected necessity and right:

In India, first priority is shelter, food. Education suffers. [Rohingya male]

We follow all the Indian government's rules and laws but it does not follow human rights in this country. Low-paying jobs here. Main point is education was free back home – here there is so much corruption that even though education is a fundamental right in India, we still have to pay in the form of donations – if we pay then how is it a fundamental right? [Afghan Sikh male]

And some shared their hopes and expectations for their children's well-being in relation to themselves and the wider community, stretching from Delhi to Burma:

My kids are very smart, they will do great. They even recite the things I have taught them on the phone to my mother and other relatives back in Burma. [Rohingya male]

We want to go [back to Burma] but our children won't go ... My children want to become 'big people' here. [Rohingya female]

The first point to take from these interview excerpts is that they hint at the relational understandings of family and community well-being, and the interconnectedness of children's right to education with long-term opportunities for family and community prosperity. A 'self-reliant' refugee in this framework is not purely a wage-earning individual, but is part of a group made up of interdependent generations, which experiences meaningful settlement beyond wage employment (though not exclusive of it), and through education opportunities for the next generation.

Humanitarian policy literature often begins with the acknowledgement that education is 'one of the crucial ways to prepare for self-reliance'.⁵² However, humanitarian narratives regarding 'self-reliance' tend to ignore inter-generational dependencies, focussing on the refugee as an individual whose success is measured in technocratic terms against the attainment of some form of economic independence (i.e. job placements for adults). They ignore the network of *mutually-reliant* individuals within a family and a community that must contribute to the larger 'self-reliant' collective over the longer term. And they are gendered, as it is largely women who are responsible for unpaid childcare and housework, which are foundational components of quality education, alongside access to, and quality of, schooling.

The 'Double Burden' of Refugee Self-Reliance for Female Refugees

The Rohingya women interviewed as part of this research are experiencing what is known as 'the double burden':⁵³ Many are responsible for housework and childcare while also undertaking some form of paid work. Though they did not use the language of 'burden' themselves, their narratives invoked the heavy responsibilities of their dual role. One discussion between two Rohingya women – one in her mid-30s (A) and the other late 20s/early 30s (B) – who live in a riverbank slum settlement in the east of the city, offered an example of a daily routine.

B: She [referring to interviewee A] works in rubbish collection, her husband is old and she has four or five children. She works herself, she supports their education.

A: I wake up at 5[am], then I cook, wash clothes for my children, go to work.

B: She works from 8[am] to 5[pm].

A: I come back and cook, feed the children. In Burma, we don't go outside.

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B: In Burma women only work inside the homes, they don't even see men. Here you have to work, talk with everyone.

A: I used to sit at home and make hats, chairs. We don't make them here.

Refugee A is responsible for childcare, the home *and* breadwinning. While female-earner households was not the norm of all Rohingya families interviewed, childcare and domestic work certainly formed the backbone of most of the women's daily routines in Delhi. Longstanding gender ideologies dictating what is appropriate work for men (wage labour in the public sphere) and women (unpaid care and domestic work in the private sphere) in the Asian context have contributed to this dichotomy. Humanitarian actors have long-recognised the need to increase the access of women to opportunities and resources; the need for female empowerment and gender equality. However, their 'productivity' is largely imagined in livelihoods and wage-labour terms – childcare and domestic work are not recognised as essential activities for successful, self-reliant communities. As UNHCR's *Livelihoods and Self-Reliance* strategy explains, effective support will 'match programming interventions with corresponding levels of livelihood capacity (*existing livelihoods assets such as skills and past work experience*) and needs identified in the refugee population, and the demands of the market' [emphasis added].⁵⁴ Thus, according to humanitarian narratives, and recognising traditional divisions of private and public labour, women – to gain an equal footing with men and empower themselves as rightful wage earners – must do domestic work *in addition* to developing livelihoods capacity, in order to be recognised as self-reliant.

This is not to argue that women are 'natural' caregivers and should be acknowledged/encouraged as such, but that childcare and domestic work must be recognised as productive contributions to the interdependent self-sufficiency (or self-reliance) of a family and community, regardless of which gender takes responsibility. Family and community self-reliance does not rest on the ability of each individual in a given refugee group to maximise their earning potential, but on the interconnected public and private activities that enable a group to make progress without substantial external aid. Acknowledging this should eventually lead to two shifts in research and policy work.

Firstly, a focus on the interconnected activities and processes that enable and inhibit self-reliance for an intergenerational, and intersectional, network (rather than at an individual level) will encourage analysis of broader structural factors that may be impacting refugee capabilities to make meaningful and self-reliant lives for themselves over the longer term – particularly in the case of women. This is a necessary counterbalance to the dominant focus on the market, and individual participation in it, as the 'solution' to aid dependency. Secondly,

this focus on non-economic interdependency in self-reliance should open up the possibility of understanding how men and boys are also productively engaged in unpaid work. A key observation taken from the study was that voluntary work contributed as both a social safety net in the communities (to keep the unemployed active), but also to a collective sense of well-being.

Self-reliance for Unpaid Work?

The absence of meaningful employment was perceived differently by male Afghan and Rohingya refugees in this study, or at least the 'opportunity' of not being able to work in gainful employment was approached differently. Rohingyas were much more instrumental in their voluntary undertakings – consciously seeking to create and use their non-profit organisations, or unpaid work in their own community, to achieve certain ends including: gaining experience that would enable them to get a foothold on the job ladder; expanding contacts that might assist in national advocacy for the Rohingya refugee cause; or *ad hoc* benefits such as supporting widows in paying the utility bills and helping new refugee arrivals navigate the Refugee Status Determination process.

Of the Afghan Christians we interviewed, many of the youth assisted the pastor in various capacities, mostly without formal monthly pay. This faith-based occupation offered a social safety net and the security of the church network for the individuals engaged in the activities. A key pastime that has emerged for this youth in Delhi is music: a small group would play and perform together, both in church services and in teaching. One of the youth recounted: 'Five years ago, I was in a show, there was a boy who introduced me to a *Dhol* [a percussion instrument]. I didn't even know. He told me to play like this. Till then I didn't know about music. Then I said let's just try and learn music ... When I played music, people appreciated me. Slowly I started singing'. This youth has now turned his music into an income stream, teaching others to play, and touring India giving shows. While this is now a form of livelihood, of wage-earning employment, it also remains an important non-economic community activity that gives 'solace' to individuals and the wider community, to quote another Afghan refugee.

For the Afghan Sikhs, it is mostly the older men who engage in community service work, running education programmes for children in their self-started refugee organisation Khalsa Diwan. These elders have been in the country for the longest, and so are generally seen as wiser, with valuable experience to share. However, educating the youth and engaging children in play was not the preserve of the older generation – the younger male refugees offer music sessions and other entertainment activities at the gurudwara (Sikh temple) and Khalsa Diwan.

While this unpaid youth engagement cannot be compared to the (feminised) labour of child-rearing – especially given that the former is a much more optional vocation than the latter, which is essential to the functioning of a community – these endeavours should still be viewed as small examples of non-economic coping mechanisms refugee communities use to contribute to the well-being of the community and carve out a meaningful existence for themselves. To quote Halvorsen: ‘work can be socially useful even if the market is not willing to pay its price. But the problem with activities outside the labour market is that their usefulness is difficult to measure and account for formally’. This is especially true of childrearing and caregiving.⁵⁵

Ghettoisation: Gender, Identity and the City

The city of Delhi offers opportunities for the breakdown of traditional roles, and, conversely, for reinforcing social hierarchies. The position of risk, opportunity and security that Rohingya women find themselves in in Delhi is complex, and infused with feelings of relativity: freedoms and restrictions in rural Burma compared with freedoms and restrictions in urban India. Almost all of the Rohingya women interviewed as part of this study reminisced about the space and landscape of Burma. They missed the fresh fruits and river fish that they could eat, and the kinds of trees they could use for home-making; especially the broad tree trunks of a specific tree, with which they built their homes. This contrasted with the plastic and cardboard they had to use in their settlements in Delhi, and the fact that they have ‘no space’ (i.e. land) upon which to settle and develop a level of self-sufficiency over the longer term. One of the Rohingya *jhuggi* (slum) settlements is situated on land donated by a charitable foundation; another is urban wasteland – neither are suitable for development of permanent housing or subsistence activities. The latter is shared with Indian migrant populations, and both are located some distance from basic public services (though aid organisations have sought to provide drop-in centres within reasonable distance to mitigate travel costs).

However, despite the warm recollections of ‘home’ and the difficulties of finding adequate ‘space’ in India, there was also a broadly positive reflection on the opportunities that Delhi offered. For example, where aid organisations expressed concern over the inability and/or unwillingness of Rohingya refugee women to leave their *jhuggis* for education, training or employment opportunities, some Rohingya women themselves expressed a sense of freedom they felt in a city that allowed such movement. In Delhi, *the possibility* of being able to leave the settlement felt, in a small way, empowering. Indeed, the women with the highest levels of education were engaged in gainful employment outside of the settlement camps (primarily as translators), which was noted as a sharp contrast to the situation in Burma, where ‘women only work in the homes’.

The gender hierarchies, urban insecurity, and financial precariousness that still discourage (or prevent) these women from leaving the camp-like accommodation cannot be dismissed simply because some feel a sense of empowerment. Indeed, it was clear from the interviews that the ‘unfreedoms’ the women were facing (to participate in public life, to have the opportunity to receive basic education, and to receive healthcare) were more common, shaped by an intersection of factors including gender, ethnicity and religion. ‘We have one problem. It is that we are Rohingya. If we weren’t Rohingya we would not have these problems ... If we were Indian we could educate our children’, exclaimed one woman, who felt her ethnicity was impeding the opportunities of the future generation. Another highlighted the impact of this difference on inter-community relations: ‘We have no similarities, nothing in common with Hindustanis, we can’t go to them ... it’s possible some people feel scared. We don’t speak the language. When we go anywhere, this is always in the back of our minds, if we go somewhere and someone disturbs us, if we step out of our houses, we worry about this’. A third and fourth mentioned that assistance comes from those with shared identity characteristics: ‘The government doesn’t help us but the people from Shaheenbagh [other Muslims] helped us a lot’.

As city spaces are deeply inscribed with communal and class identities (as outlined above), it is possible to observe a tacit ghettoisation of these communities (and, particularly, the women within them). Invisible borders are mapped around in-groups and out-groups, which in turn makes livelihoods-promotion activities undertaken by aid organisations, as they are currently structured, more complex. Moves to offer women ‘home-based’ enterprise opportunities that capitalise on their desire to work and their reluctance or inability to move outside of the settlement area can reinforce that boundary-making. However, requiring women to move outside of the settlement sphere in search of enterprise opportunities can put them at risk of intersectional discrimination on the basis of their gender (from fellow refugee men who may seek to limit the role of women in ‘their’ public sphere, or from translation clients who solicit them for sex), ethnicity (from institutions and other communities) and faith (from non-Muslims). One Rohingya woman has experienced verbal abuse on several occasions (once in front of investigators) from a male Rohingya community member, for working a job that, he believed, unduly increased her influence as an interlocutor with the aid community. In the Sikh and Christian Afghan refugee communities, female refugees were notable by their absence as we unsuccessfully tried to include them in our interview sample.

Humanitarian organisations must, then, move beyond conventional conceptualisations of livelihoods and self-reliance. Understanding and measuring these goals in terms of jobs, income and market participation does not go far enough to address the structural inequalities that prevent

individuals, families and communities from living long and living well. Current programmatic frameworks fail to account for the fact that historical inscriptions of urban space, and the lived experience of the city, exacerbate those inequalities and marginalisation. A job or a steady income cannot be the primary indicator of the attainment of self-reliance when opportunities to engage in the market are delimited by documentation, invisible urban boundaries, and the politics that lie behind identity, including faith and gender.

Aid workers interviewed for this research certainly recognised the disconnect between refugee aspirations, capacities, the conditions of their urban settlement, and the limited job opportunities that their legal status and cultural differences enable them to take up. But humanitarian approaches to self-reliance are ideologically rooted in concepts of short-term assistance and longer-term, individualised self-care. What these variable urban experiences suggest is the need for a more flexible and longer-term framing of refugee self-reliance and community resilience, where the goal is less about individualised, entrepreneurial self-sufficiency, and more about the ability of refugees (collectively, and collaboratively with the wider community) to convert places, services and opportunities into human well-being. In other words, to view self-reliance through the lens of capabilities. This is not to say that livelihoods programming should be abandoned. Alongside continued advocacy for a legal framework, organisations should create livelihood opportunities and education programmes that: have longer and more flexible time-frames; are more capability-driven than market-driven; focus on agency and well-being; and are less defined by quantitative and technocratic measurements for success.

As outlined above, one of the key problems with current self-reliance programming is that the ultimate objectives for sustainable well-being centre around jobs and income in the market space. These important aims are currently framed as *end goals*. Sustainable livelihoods are understood as indicators of self-sufficiency, and so programming is directed to increasing access to them, and the level of income a refugee can command. However, looking at self-reliance through the lens of capabilities,⁵⁶ it is possible to see that jobs and income should actually be considered as part of a package of *means* that enable a person to live long and live well. The freedom to work (i.e. the ability and opportunity to work) is a constituent *component* of well-being and development, rather than an end goal in itself. Other components include political freedoms, social facilities and transparency.

The urban environment has been instrumental in the perpetuation of the idea of livelihoods as ends. The city appears to be a centre of choice, opportunity and (entrepreneurial) prosperity; refugees seem only to need, the argument would follow, humanitarian or state support to meet market-entry requirements – documentation, a certain level of education, health, language skills, etc. – to be able to gain access to the jobs required to ensure a sustainable

income, a reduction in poverty, and a better quality of life. However, as we have seen, this emphasis on self-care through work and the ‘responsibilisation’ of the individual refugee doesn’t account for the intersectional discrimination refugees face due to the politics surrounding their ethnicity, faith and gender, nor does it recognise or support the non-economic ways in which refugees seek to make their lives meaningful. The key problem in refugee self-reliance/livelihoods programming is that the ‘freedom to work’ is viewed only in terms of its direct contribution to a sustainable income, rather than as a core part of an interconnected set of freedoms – political participation, health and education – that are essential for development.

Conclusion

In this paper we have argued that historically contingent identity politics, state-making, and urbanisation processes have contributed in Delhi to the socio-economic marginalisation of Sikh Afghan, Christian Afghan, and Rohingya refugees, as well as the emergence of a bureaucratic, corrupt, and arbitrary system of management of their rights and entitlements. Ideas of belonging and citizenship in the post-Partition state have taken on a communal hue, as Muslim refugees/migrants, in particular, have been subjected to a politics of exclusion. This has impacted the lived experiences of non-Muslim refugees attempting to survive and prosper in Delhi too, as rhetorical slippage between ideas of the refugee, foreigner, (illegal) migrant, (Muslim) infiltrator and even urban poor have resulted in these terms becoming mutually reinforcing ideas of difference (from Indian citizens), economic burden (for the state) and risk (to the city).

An arbitrary status hierarchy, which offers refugees varying levels of legal recognition and entitlements, stands in the place of a robust domestic legal framework for refugees and adherence to International Law. It is often not clear what exactly refugees are entitled to – the Aadhaar card, for example – and how those entitlements might differ between groups. This can lead to arbitrary treatment by state officials and exploitation by employers, who know refugees do not have much recourse to legal action. Refugees in Delhi find it difficult to find jobs, homes, and a sense of settlement, let alone autonomy and ‘self-reliance’ – even those that have lived in the city for more than 30 years. The GoI has a huge responsibility, in the short term, to make efforts to clarify the legitimacy of refugee documentation for employment and housing, and refugee entitlement to Aadhaar identification. In the longer term, there needs to be a shift away from the increasing communalisation of refugee/migrant identity, and towards the creation of a robust and inclusive legal framework for protecting refugees across India.

Humanitarian organisations also have significant opportunities to augment their support for urban refugee well-being in the capital, though this will require a shift in programming goals away from the conceptual and programmatic framework of self-reliance. Current approaches to supporting self-reliance are falling short, due to an overreliance on the labour market, particularly the informal sector, as the main source of opportunity and socio-economic prosperity. Employment options are often precarious, underpaid and exploitative, and refugees – situated as an outgroup on the socio-economic and political periphery of the city – cannot vote with their feet and leave for an alternative if they are unhappy with the ‘opportunities’ they have been presented. Moreover, expectations of self-enterprise and economic independence can place additional burdens on those, typically women, who are also responsible for caregiving in the home. Though economic relations play an important role in humanitarian organisations and refugees working together towards improving well-being, that does not mean economic imperatives have to dictate all aspects of programming, especially the ways that aid organisations approach the idea of ‘self-reliance’ and their interactions with recipients of assistance.⁵⁷

Instead of understanding ‘self-reliance’ in terms of income, jobs and transferable market skills, we argue that aid organisations should take a broader look at refugee well-being and factor in the non-economic – and non-individualistic – components of living a fulfilling and meaningful life in a complex urban environment such as Delhi. These include family care-giving, leisure opportunities and voluntary work. It is only through understanding sustainable livelihoods as *constituent parts* of refugee well-being, rather than *end goals*, that humanitarian organisations can more effectively support urban refugees to convert places, services and opportunities into things they have reason to value.

APPENDIX

Note on Methodology

Analysis began with a desk-based literature review that drew on history and refugee studies (particularly focusing on India, and Rohingya and non-Muslim Afghan refugees); relevant urban cultural histories of New Delhi; topical aid studies; and grey literature on humanitarian, development and refugee-related work in this context. Rohingya and non-Muslim Afghan refugees were specifically selected because of the general absence of analysis on their lived experiences in India compared with other refugee groups – such as Tibetans, Chins from Burma and Chakmas from Bangladesh (Singh, 2010; Mishra, 2014; Dasgupta, 2016).⁵⁸ But also because their faith differences – Muslim, Sikh and Christian – offer an important opportunity to take a comparative perspective on how faith impacts urban refugee experiences in a Hindu-majority host environment.

The investigators undertook a series of semi-structured interviews with key informants: UNHCR officials and NGO implementing partners, and members of the refugee communities. The latter included walking interviews, one-to-one conversations, and some group discussions, the majority of which were in the refugees' settlement localities and community spaces. Whenever possible, interviews were carried out by the authors in English, Hindi and Bengali; if interviewees didn't speak one of these languages, a local translator was hired. Questions to refugees focused on their daily routine, their experiences of the city, their sources of support and perceived limits to their autonomy.

A total of 55 key informants contributed to this project through such interviews: 33 Rohingya refugees (who are more recent arrivals), nine Afghan Christians (who arrived since 2005), two Sikh Afghans (who had been in India for three decades) and 11 NGO workers and UNHCR staff. Participants were selected through snowball sampling, with implementing NGOs and refugee community groups providing initial contacts. Opportunities for networking contacts were also sought through events where prominent refugee community members from the Rohingya community were giving talks on the situation in Myanmar. Refugee community centres and spaces were particularly crucial for contacts, but difficulties included finding suitable times to speak, and accessing the wider community beyond the gate-keeping leaders. In some instances, it took weeks of return visits to secure one interview.

While gender parity was sought in key informant interview numbers, it was not always possible, due to the reluctance of many women to engage with the researchers, and male community-leader gate-keeping, which was difficult to work around in the short time-frame. Women make up just over a third of the Rohingya refugees interviewed, and none of the Afghan community.

Research was also ethnographic, with investigators undertaking walking tours of refugee settlement areas, regular observations of daily economic and social life, and informal conversations with refugee and local communities over the course of 3 months. Informal conversations offered a rich insight into the lived experience of refugees in New Delhi, and were one of the ways women refugees felt most comfortable engaging with investigators. Through informal discussions, investigators additionally engaged with eight more Rohingya women and 10 Rohingya men, seven Afghan Christian women and six Afghan Christian men, three Afghan Sikh women and six Afghan Sikh men. Though these conversations were not recorded through note-taking or voice recorder at the time, verbal consent was given for such discussions and investigators were able to gain a deeper impression of daily life, which in turn informed this analysis.

While snowball sampling entails clear limitations, including the potential bias of sampling within networked communities and the exclusion of those marginalised within refugee groups themselves,⁵⁹ the project was limited by time constraints.

Finally, two interactive workshops were held in Delhi and Manchester to share early findings with relevant policymakers and experts in the field, as well as representatives from the refugee groups themselves. Attendees numbered 35 and 30, respectively. Discussions and feedback from these events has, in turn, fed back into this analysis.

ENDNOTES

1. A longer version of this paper was originally published by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), as a Working Paper entitled 'Urban Refugees in Delhi: Identity, Entitlements and Well-Being in India's Capital' [October 2017]. This research was funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the Urban Crises Learning Fund, managed by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). The fund is part of DFID's Urban Crises Programme on the urban aspects of humanitarian action, which involves IIED and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Further details can be found at www.iied.org/urbancrises
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