FORCED MIGRATION
review

Knowledge, voice and power

*This **Editors' briefing** provides an overview of the content of **Forced Migration Review issue 70**, with links to the relevant articles, and a full contents listing of articles.*

In the main feature on **Knowledge, voice and power**, authors examine how knowledge is produced, shared and received in the forced migration sector, and what changes can and should be made to help ensure that power is shared and more diverse voices are heard and valued.

The special feature on **Social cohesion in refugee-hosting contexts** includes seven articles exploring the role of social cohesion in contexts of protracted displacement, with a particular focus on Kenya and Lebanon.

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KNOWLEDGE, VOICE AND POWER

Over recent years, debates about race, representation and inequality have brought questions of power and voice to people who had not previously engaged with issues of marginalisation and exclusion, and at the same time have given momentum to others who were already active in challenging the status quo. Localisation agendas within the aid sector, social movements such as Black Lives Matter and wider debates about decolonisation have generated reflection on the inequalities that exist within the field of forced migration, in research and knowledge, policy and practice. In this edition of *Forced Migration Review*, the authors reflect on progress made but also on the road still to travel. They challenge attitudes, highlight injustices and make practical recommendations for change.

Representation and partnerships: "Nothing about us without us"

A theme common to many articles in this issue is the importance of shared responsibility in bringing about change in the field of forced migration. On the global stage, several authors highlight the need for the meaningful inclusion of displaced people's voices in high-level fora and call for equitable, inclusive governance at all levels (Kanyamanza-Arnold-Fernandez; Harley-Lee-Wazefadost; Ivashuk). Representation must start "at the top", not only to ensure that those closest to the challenges of forced migration play a central role in decision-making and designing effective solutions, but also as a moral and ethical imperative. While civil society and refugee-led networks have begun to put this theory into practice, States and international bodies have fallen behind. For refugees to have equitable representation in global fora, UNHCR's Executive Committee should consider the model followed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and build a revised governance structure that includes 50% refugee representatives (Kanyamanza-ArnoldFernandez). Moreover, inclusion must go beyond the number of refugee representatives present. It is as important that other stakeholders listen to and respond to their voices. Enabling meaningful participation involves a recognition of the challenges of representation itself and support to remove barriers to participation that refugees face in order for diverse, inclusive and sustained refugee participation to be normalised across a range of decision-making areas (Harley-Lee-Wazefadost).

The call to rebalance imbalances of power and move from tokenistic inclusion to representation is also taken up in relation to the issue of statelessness. Given limited knowledge about statelessness worldwide, a first step is comprehensive and dedicated awareness-raising around the issue, to tackle misinformation and recognise State actors' strategy of denying statelessness. The international community must work with and provide a safe environment for stateless people to ensure their voices are heard. There is a growing need for shared accountability, from stateless-

led initiatives and networks to international bodies such as the UN, to fight all forms of discrimination and fight the disenfranchisement of stateless people (Ivashuk).

The involvement of stakeholders across humanitarian, governance and academic sectors is also essential in order to create meaningful partnerships where displaced populations fully participate in decisions made in policy and programming. In their assessment of what participation 'beyond consultation' looks like in practice, Kuntzelman and Noor propose a transformative framework that moves from 'doing to', through 'doing for', to the ultimate partnership goal of 'doing with'. They recommend steps forward to weaken persistent power asymmetries and empower displaced people to become equals in co-producing knowledge. Practical questions are proposed for stakeholders to evaluate their current participatory approaches (Kuntzelman-Noor).

Another model of empowering partnerships outlined in this issue is based on several authors' reflections of working together on refugee education in Indonesia. Four forms of refugee inclusion/exclusion in decision-making processes are identified, ranging from explicit exclusion through tokenistic inclusion to equal partnership and, ultimately, to refugee leadership. On the road to refugee leadership, privileged power-brokers and gatekeepers play a key role as 'allies' to enable people with lived experience of forced migration to influence policy and practice. This is far from ideal, but essential while systemic barriers to access remain (Sarwari-Ahmadi-Donehue).

A commitment to organisational change

The shared responsibility of working towards transformative change is deeply felt by practitioners contributing to this issue (Mustafa-Nambiar-Balasundaram; Mhretu-Akok; Davies-Elderfield). There is a recognition that for current practices and power dynamics to shift away from the "white dominant culture" predominant in the forced migration sector, international actors must commit to internal organisational change and ongoing learning. To make progress on this commitment, organisations must: invest in internal knowledge-building to understand historical and ongoing power dynamics; focus on refugee leadership, anti-racism and diversity, equity and inclusion; and recognise and implement trauma-informed practice and engagement. This process requires a deep commitment of energy, time and resources from leadership within all levels of an organisation and investments over time to bring about long-term change (Mustafa-Nambiar-Balasundaram).

Creating spaces to promote the ownership and agency of displaced people requires a tailored approach that responds to the unique needs of different groups. In Cairo, Saint Andrew's Refugee Services (StARS) have developed a Youth Advisory Board (YAB) to include the voices of unaccompanied refugee children and youth in decision-making and policy discussions, as a group who face particular challenges accessing education, health care and financial resources. The YAB is a replicable model of those with lived experience of displacement successfully advocating for and achieving tangible change at an institutional level. However, challenges remain to including the voices of unaccompanied refugee youth beyond individual organisations in wider humanitarian

contexts, where there are limited platforms and spaces accessible to youth advocates (Mhretu-Akok).

Addressing issues of power and voice in organisations in our sector must go beyond structural shifts to the tools used by individual practitioners. A number of practitioners writing for this issue illustrate how language barriers and communication issues affect whose voices are heard (Davies-Elderfield; Mhretu-Akok; Obiye). Paying attention to the role of language is essential for the inclusion of displaced people in decision-making and essential services. For humanitarian practitioners working to design and implement monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) frameworks, a checklist can be used to minimise the risks of language-related distortion and exclusion and ensure that language is an enabler of inclusion (Davies-Elderfield).

Listening and being heard

The importance of listening and being heard is emphasised from diverse perspectives. As well as individuals and organisations, the responsibility to facilitate appropriate listening involves global bodies, legislators and governments. Responding to calls for refugee representation must stand alongside really listening to refugees' voices, as illustrated through an analysis of speeches made by refugees at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum. Stakeholders across the forced migration sector must engage with refugees' messages on an individual and an institutional basis. This includes listening to how refugees self-identify and whom they seek to represent, as well as responding to their policy recommendations (Harley-Lee-Wazefadost).

The right of refugees to speak and be heard in the public realm is dependent on national policies and legal systems. Too often, marginalised groups are excluded from public participation. National organisations or refugee-led organisations play a key role in lobbying for refugee participation and in holding leaders to account. The involvement of refugees in the development of Kenya's 2019 Refugees Bill demonstrates how public participation can be used as a tool to empower refugees. This experience reveals key lessons, including the importance of ensuring policy documents are shared in accessible languages, giving special consideration to minority and marginalised groups, and equipping refugees with the skills and knowledge to participate (Obiye).

This issue also offers insights into situations where the voices of displaced people are not being represented or heard within established structures. In these contexts, refugees are acting to disrupt the politics of representation and gain agency over their own narratives (Secen; ZiaHero-Kent-Kotowski-Fatema). In Turkey and Germany, Syrian refugees are creating alternative independent news platforms to counter negative narratives imposed by mainstream media outlets and to provide a more balanced perspective. These refugee-run media bring to light the issues faced by diverse refugee groups, such as the implications and limitations of policies like the Temporary Protection Status in Turkey and the subsidiary protection status awarded to Syrian refugees in Germany, as well as giving visibility to positive contributions by refugees to their host countries (Secen).

A quest for self-representation as a means of advocacy similarly arises in the form of arts-based initiatives and

digital technologies. In the Rohingya refugee response, art and technology are employed as tools to overcome barriers and create opportunities for refugees and IDPs to directly engage with media or decision-makers in a space where their voices are not filtered or constrained. Social media channels are leveraged by Rohingya activists to draw global attention to the realities they face, as well as to act as an immediate feedback mechanism to inform the humanitarian response. Creative initiatives provide a space for photographers and other artists to advocate for their community and frame their own narratives (ZiaHero-Kent-Kotowski-Fatema).

The sharing of personal stories can be a compelling and effective way for displaced people's voices to be heard by people in positions of power (Harley-Lee-Wazefadost; Paw-Choi-Cha). Meh Sod's story of her resettlement to the US from a refugee camp in Thailand and her journey towards finding her identity and sense of belonging in a new country illustrates the importance of providing opportunities for those who have been forcibly displaced to share their experiences. Only by truly listening to voices such as Meh Sod's can culturally appropriate and relevant responses be developed in policy and practice (Paw-Choi-Cha).

Power dynamics in research and knowledge

A number of authors focus on issues of knowledge, voice and power in forced migration research. Each of these articles identifies significant barriers to research faced by those with lived experience of displacement or based in the Global South. A major obstacle is the lack of access to funding and the constraints placed on displaced researchers due to current funding practices (MárquezLameda; Silver-Oyat-Kim-Ismail). Academics conducting research on the Venezuelan displacement crisis highlight the failure of funding agencies in the North to acknowledge the cultural and social realities inherent in conducting research in the Global South. Bureaucratic hurdles are a major barrier to securing funding, due to limited institutional capacity to submit proposals for funding calls with costly or unfeasible requirements. Funding challenges are in turn related to a lack of academic credibility and visibility. In the Venezuelan displacement context, this is particularly the case for applied researchers interacting directly with migrants and refugees, who are less likely to be seen as credible authorities despite the unique perspectives they bring to the table (MárquezLameda). Despite progress in the localisation of knowledge production, barriers also impede efforts to support refugee-led research. The structure of funding applications and the stringent eligibility requirements of calls relegates refugee scholars and refugee-led organisations to secondary positions in research projects or blocks their participation. Technological challenges render scholars and their organisations in remote or resource-scarce environments systematically disadvantaged. All of these barriers hinder the long-term capacity of refugee-led organisations and the opportunities available to refugee researchers (Silver-Oyat-Kim-Ismail).

Although the voices of refugees are increasingly valued in research, displaced authors from Syria, East Africa and Afghanistan illustrate the progress needed to tackle systemic bias and exclusion in academic spheres (Akkad; Getachew-Gitahi-Ramazani-Yousif; Rabi-Ullah-Daltry). Displaced Syrian academics in Europe and the Middle East face marginalisation and exclusion from an academic world dominated by knowledge produced in the Global North. An inability to move freely and a lack of funding or sustainable support to navigate unfamiliar higher education systems forces many displaced scholars to occupy precarious positions (Akkad). The challenge of raising the voices of displaced people within research and policymaking is revisited in the context of displaced Afghan scholars, where multi-layered forms of exclusion are driven by barriers to accessing higher education, hostile local research cultures where refugee perspectives within academia are silenced, and the lack of opportunities to contribute to international conversations due to travel restrictions or high costs of participation (Rabi-Ullah-Daltry). Insights from 'insider researchers' leading a study on refugee-led organisations illustrate the unique perspectives those with lived experience of displacement contribute to the field of forced migration research. Their positionality is particularly beneficial in building trusting relationships with research participants, due to a shared nationality, language and varied experiences of displacement within the team. However, a critical challenge is being recognised as legitimate researchers by wider stakeholders. As identified above in the Indonesian context, insider researchers are forced to rely on gatekeeper allies to access humanitarian actors (Getachew-Gitahi-Ramazani-Yousif).

Complex and inflexible processes in forced migration publishing also prohibit refugee researchers and authors from sharing their perspectives. Biases towards scholarship in the Global North raises fundamental questions about the distribution of power within the field of forced migration itself (Alexander-Milner-Philip). Publication processes that prioritise Western modalities of writing over voices expressing lived experiences do not give space for non-academic ways of communicating or differing levels of digital literacy and academic writing skills among co-authors. Even in an iterative and participatory process where co-authors are empowered to provide each other with peer feedback, developing a truly equitable writing partnership is fraught with challenges of power imbalances and positionality (Kaur). Discrimination and prejudice have a direct and indirect impact on the exclusion of displaced scholars in research and language is often cited as a major barrier to access given the dominance of English in forced migration research publishing (Alexander-Milner-Philip; Akkad; Rabi-Ullah-Daltry).

Driving change in forced migration research

Authors reflect on how to tackle these challenges in the academic sphere and disrupt current patterns of exploitation and power imbalances. Research networks, seed funding and context-sensitive funding announce-ments could help to foster collaboration and increase access to funding opportunities (MárquezLameda). To overcome barriers that continue to impede the meaningful transfer of resources to refugee-led organisations, funding institutions can adapt their requirements and budget models, while offering tailored development opportunities to build organisational capacity (Silver-Oyat-Kim-Ismail). Donors should fund refugee-led research in topics identified by refugee researchers, and international NGOs

should consider refugee researchers as legitimate researchers (Getachew-Gitahi-Ramazani-Yousif).

To increase inclusion and participation in forced migration research, other stakeholders can offer support and mentorship to displaced academics and help them thrive (Akkad). Steps to diversify the conversation include prioritising refugee education, establishing awareness-raising initiatives and combining requirements for refugee participation with practical support to implement them (Rabi-Ullah-Daltry). Publishing inclusively and co-writing require greater structural support, innovation and willingness on the part of researchers, publishers and academic institutions (Kaur). An example of one avenue taken to increase inclusion in forced migration publishing is found at the start of this issue. In a partnership between the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network and *Forced Migration Review*, a new mentorship scheme aimed at increasing the inclusion of articles by previously underrepresented perspectives (Alexander-Milner-Philip). Proactive steps such as these can build awareness of the need for support to create an inclusive environment in publishing and the field of forced migration research more widely.

SOCIAL COHESION IN REFUGEE-HOSTING CONTEXTS

The special feature in FMR 70 examines the role of social cohesion in contexts of protracted displacement. There is a growing recognition of the importance of involving host communities in humanitarian responses to displacement, a trend most clearly enshrined in the Global Compact on Refugees. This policy shift has led to a proliferation of programmes promoting social cohesion in refugee-host relations. However, greater understanding is needed of how social cohesion policies and programmes are designed, their effectiveness in achieving intended outcomes, and the unintended consequences of extending the remit of humanitarian programmes to include host communities.

An introductory article explores the increasing attention paid to tensions between refugees and host communities in aid and development programming since the 1970s. While refugee protection actors previously focused on 'coexistence', the concept of 'cohesion' entails a more ambitious vision for the promotion of trust, social belonging, economic inclusion and political participation. However, key questions remain unanswered, as the concept has no coherent definition and policies on social cohesion are fragmented across different domains. A more explicit strategy about the specific role of social cohesion is needed in the mandate of UNHCR and other international bodies, in order to better incorporate social cohesion objectives into refugee assistance programming (Rodgers).

Two articles in this feature focus on social cohesion and stability in Lebanon (Chatty; Najdi). In a context of multiple crises, State and humanitarian actors have become increasingly concerned about inter-communal tensions between Lebanese nationals and displaced people. Concerns about the effects of displacement from the recent Syrian influx can best be understood by examining the long history of sectarian division in Lebanon and the attempts by external actors to promote stability. Civil society is fundamental to improving social cohesion between different groups in Lebanon, with many successful initiatives forged as collaborations between Lebanese and Syrian actors (Chatty). Following the 2020 Beirut port explosion, tensions arose and resentment grew due to perceptions of discrimination and unfair aid distribution. Humanitarian actors must recognise the *vertical* dimension of social cohesion frameworks (where anger is directed at the institutions responsible for targeting and distributing aid) as well as the *horizontal* dimension (where tensions involve intercommunal divides between diverse groups) to avoid exacerbating refugee-host tensions when providing humanitarian assistance (Najdi).

Including locals as beneficiaries in protection programming is one strategy for reducing tension in contexts of large-scale protracted displacement, but it can bring additional risks in the long term. At Kakuma camp in northern Kenya, humanitarian actors have responded to long-term low-level tensions between refugees and the local Turkana community by extending local aid services and job opportunities to locals. However, these efforts have had the unintended consequence of politicising aid, with the growing expectations by locals for 'host entitlements' left unmet. For the 'peaceful coexistence' agenda to move forward, there is a need to strengthen the legal basis of refugees' belonging in Kenya (Nabenyo).

Another article focusing on policies affecting refugee-host relations in Kenya explores the contradictions in the country's management of its refugee affairs since 2013. Today, Kenya follows a strict encampment policy that limits the movement of refugees and asylum seekers, while at the same time committing to promoting refugee self-reliance and socio-economic integration. Even more strikingly, despite these policies the country has repeatedly called for its camps to be closed. The 'Marshall Plan for Africa' is one step towards policy coherence, but leaves the contradiction between encampment and socio-economic integration unaddressed (Owiso).

These qualitative insights into understanding social cohesion in policy and programming are complemented by an article focused on the challenges of measuring cohesion in displacement contexts. In their assessment of social cohesion research instruments used in Kakuma camp, the authors emphasise the complexity of gathering and interpreting data using perception surveys. Their observations highlight that metrics for social cohesion and the interpretation of survey responses must be tailored to any given context to allow for meaningful and nuanced responses. Furthermore, perception surveys are a limited measure of cohesion and survey analysis should focus on extreme answers, which are more likely to align with in-depth interview responses (Hunt-Rodgers).

This special feature concludes with a series of reflections on reconciliation; a concept intimately linked with social cohesion. Common barriers to reconciliation are feelings of 'superiority versus inferiority' that cause marginalisation, discrimination and oppression, and frustration at feelings of powerlessness to stop violence and injustice. Working through these barriers starts at a personal level, with individuals and communities. The authors reflect on personal experiences of reconciliation in action shared by colleagues in Myanmar, Ethiopia and Uganda (Vella-Rueda).

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SOCIAL COHESION IN REFUGEE-HOSTING CONTEXTS

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