

Makassar city government's urban refugee policy: filling in the gap?

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Abstract. Indonesia is home to 13,829 refugees and asylum seekers by the end of January 2017. In general, the number could be dichotomized into two categories: camp-based refugees and urban refugees. There are approximately 70.83% of urban refugees living in several cities across the country. The existence of refugees in urban environments has been considered as either bringing promise or peril to urban development. Makassar is one among the most populated cities by refugees in Indonesia. In the middle of the inadequacy of legal framework at the national level, the Makassar City Government initiated a policy to address the issues of refugees staying in the city specifically. In 2005, the Mayor of Makassar signed a Memorandum of Understanding with International Organization for Migration (IOM) to accommodate the needs for funding allocated from Regional Budget that could not be dispensed due to the absence of legal basis. The city also constituted a Joint Committee Monitoring (JCM), which comprises of various government agencies, to support the Immigration Office in monitoring the refugees. These initiatives allow refugees to access basic services that are not made available to them in other cities. Against this backdrop, this paper mainly discusses the initiatives and refugee policy of Makassar City Government, which had emulated the national government's policy to refugee management before the recently signed Presidential Decree No. 25/ 2016. It argues that the proactive and relatively integrative approach of the City Government alongside the social inclusion by the local community have contributed positively to the livelihoods of urban refugees in Makassar.

Keywords: urban refugees; city government; Makassar; refugee management; migration

1. Introduction

In 2007, there are 6.56 million forcibly displaced people worldwide. 22.5 million people are refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and only 189,300 refugees resettled in 2016 [1]. This problem demanded international organizations, and donors to pay an enormous amount of humanitarian aid bill. On the other hand, states tend to shift the responsibility of meeting the costs of refugees' care and medium-range needs to those organizations. In 2015, for instance, as the number of refugees growing due to heightened conflicts, the budget for humanitarian aid skyrocketed into an extraordinary USD 20.1 billion [2]. Based on the UNHCR blueprint for refugee's



support and assistance, only refugees settled in spatially segregated sites designated by the host government are eligible for such assistance. While the self-settled refugees, commonly live in urban areas, are not granted humanitarian assistance.

However, refugee settlement in the spatially segregated sites stipulates a limitation on freedom of movement that is meant to, among other things, dissuade refugees from integrating into the host societies and control them from belligerent acts. Notwithstanding that the 1951 UN Convention accorded refugees freedom of movement once they are lawfully granted refugee status in the country of asylum which also constitutes them the right to choose the place of residence [3]. The restriction leads to the increased phenomenon of refugees settlement in urban setting amidst no humanitarian assistance made available to them. Unlike some refugee crises in the past, today's refugee crises are mostly urban. Most refugees live self-sufficiently in either urban or rural host communities or informal settlement tent.

Indonesia, which geographically linking Asia to Australia, is one among host countries for refugees in Southeast Asia. Despite the fact that the country is not a party to the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol Related to the Refugee Status, Indonesia has become home for 13,829 UNHCR registered refugees and asylum seeker in February 2016 [4]. Some refugees initially aimed to reach Australia and regarded Indonesia as a transit point. However, due to varying reasons, some refugees reside in Indonesia for longer than they initially predicted. Some with a hope of resettlement, others have regarded the country as home.

Indonesia implements a relatively generous refugee policy in comparison to its neighbors as such Malaysia and Thailand. The latter are examples of what Kibreab (1996) defines as "what the eye refuses to see" to illustrate Eritrean and Ethiopian urban refugees in Khartoum. It depicts the situation where the host governments disregard the presence of refugees in their territory and succinctly provide any protection mechanism and humanitarian assistance. Indonesia has been maintaining a spatially segregated framework to settle inbound refugees through the establishment of special camps in Aceh, 13 detention centers, and 20 makeshift detention facilities across the countries [5]. This framework is used to concentrate refugees in one place to simplify the distribution of aid while also to deter them from conducting activities in the society. Unfortunately, in many cases, camps and detention centers are in a poor condition and refugees are prone to bribery and physical abuse [6]. Refugees have to live in overcrowded cells, insufficient food supply, and a minimum standard of health and sanitation. They are placed together with other illegal migrants, which entitle them with the same treatment as criminals.

Aside from camps and detention facilities, the Government also reserved community housings and motels which are mostly located in urban areas such as the city of Jakarta, Medan, Makassar, and Pontianak to accommodate more refugees. Amidst living in an urban setting, they are technically under a concentrated mechanism with the same restrictions. However, this type of settlement allows freedom of movement and other livelihood activities to some extent. Refugees are often seen leisurely strolling around the port in Makassar or hanging out in shopping malls in Jakarta. Moreover, some of them obtain job given by local communities or non-governmental organizations.

Before the enactment of Presidential Decree No. 25/2016 on Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Indonesia had been managing refugees without a specific refugee policy at the national level. The national refugee policy was enacted only recently in December 2016 after being under discussion for almost five years. In the absence of national policy, refugee management mostly relied on international organizations and local government initiatives. The unclear line of coordination among the government agencies and unavailability of resources allocated from the national budget to respond to this issue have created confusions which resulted in poor living condition of refugees. On the other hand, local government initiative is possible as the Regional Autonomy policy provides discrepancy to local government to manage its socio-economic and political life in an accord to the national policy. It allows them to take initiatives specific to their regions and put forward policies that meet the needs of its community.

The City of Makassar is rather an interesting case of urban refugee management in Indonesia. According to the UNHCR, by August 2016, there were approximately 2,041 refugees living in the city which makes it as the second largest host after Jakarta. The Municipal Government has initiated some

notable initiatives to enhance refugee management such as the establishment of a Joint Committee Monitoring (JCM) to streamline the coordination among stakeholders, and a MoU signed with the International Organization on Migration (IOM). Furthermore, it has organized several events namely the International Seminar on Refugees and the International Multicultural Day in which the refugees enthusiastically participated. Moreover, the hospitable reception of local communities toward refugees becomes a determining factor that makes the city more attractive to refugees than any other cities in the country.

This paper has two main objectives: 1) to discuss the policy of Makassar City Government on urban refugees and 2) to examine factors underlying the urban refugee policy and their impact on the livelihood of refugees in the city. It primarily argues that Makassar City Government's refugee policy demonstrates a shift in perspective from viewing refugees as liability to recognizing their potential as resources to support the city's development. The policy goes along with the city branding and image that it purposely builds. Also, the local community's receptive attitude contributes to the overall benevolent condition of the city which positively affects the livelihoods of the refugees.

The following section of this paper would present the existing literature on the topic, specifically discussing the two main approaches of host countries towards refugees, as well as the pro and cons of perceiving refugees as assets or threat to the host countries. Research design, data collection, and data analysis are elaborated in the method section, followed by the findings and discussion on Makassar's long-term initiatives and relatively integrative approach to urban refugees. An inference is generated in the closing section, which also highlights the main findings and claims of the paper.

2. Literature Review

By definition, urban refugees are people displaced into urban areas due to war, persecution, or crisis. In the definition, Bailey [7] includes all individuals who meet the criteria laid out by the Refugee Convention such as asylum seekers, refugees who have been denied refugee status, refugees who have not applied for asylum, and those with refugee status. The growing number of refugees in recent years demands a further development in the study of urban refugees and refugee management in general. A shift of paradigm from the mainstream encampment set up is pertinent as refugees' settlements nowadays are mostly urban. Jacobsen [8] highlights refugees who used to live in an urban area in the country of origin would prefer to live in the same setting. Albeit the afforded service and protection are made available in the camps, the desire to exercise a higher degree of self-sufficiency, to avoid boredom and restriction lead to the growing urban settlement. Other factors include the need for particular services and a better communication access such as the internet and social networks that are more easily found in a city. Understanding the rationales behind refugees' preference to urban settlement *vis a vis* encampment is fundamental in this study to comprehend the argument that, for many, urban area increasingly becomes a more desirable destination to settle after displacement.

Indonesia has been a subject of numerous criticisms due to its detention practice, albeit the fact that placing refugees in government-designated and spatially segregated sites is evidently a common practice in many developing societies. Such policy offers logistical benefit for UNHCR, host government, and humanitarian agencies likewise since it simplifies the distribution of food aid and other humanitarian assistance. As for refugees, the benefit of staying in the camps is the access to these services is readily available therein. However, they ought to sacrifice their access to other livelihood activities such as travel or work beyond the encampment area [9]. In the worst-case scenario, refugees live in overcrowded camps or cells in a detention center with poor sanitation and food handling. To seek for a better living condition and other livelihood opportunities, refugees often attempt to escape from the camps and settle in the urban area. The only caveat is the urban settlement of refugees that is eventually sprung up remains highly informalized and improved living situations are unlikely. They can be more vulnerable to economic exploitation and harassment by local community or authority.

Significant numbers of literatures illustrate how perceived threats of refugees derive the restrictive policy and marginalization of refugees' potential as resources. Zetter [10] suggests some factors determine the negative perception toward refugees which include scapegoating of them for anti-social

behavior, blaming refugees for adding cost on social welfare, disturbing markets, rising food and commodities prices, causing environmental degradation, and creating fiscal pressure. In result, host government tends to establish a policy that removes refugees from the economic, social, political, and cultural life of host societies. Betts and Collier [11], Zetter [10] as well as Kibreab [12] suggest that most governments' policies on urban refugees draw some common patterns which include prevention of integration into host societies; tendency to label the presence of refugees a security threat; prevention of competition with nationals for employment, resources, and services; aversion to ethnic imbalance in border areas that may upset the pre-existing ethnic balance of power; voiding the burden to national budget and shifting responsibility in meeting refugees' needs to the international donor community such as UNHCR or IOM; creation of an opportunity to develop previously neglected remote areas; and prevention or minimization of societal insecurity.

There is a growing literature on urban refugee policy and its correlation to the livelihoods of refugees. Some substantial pieces prescribe integrative approach as a beneficial formula to ensure the livelihood of refugees while sustaining the urban development. The supporter of such approach argues that isolating refugees from local communities and access to employment in a long-run would leave UNHCR, host government, and other humanitarian organizations with large expenses. Landau [13] argues that urban refugee policy should shift from formalized methods of service delivery to a vision of self-reliance and variegated income strategies by progressively expanding the opportunity to enter the formal labor market and to organize socio-political activities to promote their rights, welfare, and security. Shelly Dick [14] suggests that exclusion would prohibit the host government in capitalizing human resources potential and skill of refugees' population, making them helpless victim rather than valuable resources. It would be more cost effective to plan assistance programs with long-term development strategies for urban refugees, rather than maintaining expensive camps intended initially to address short term crisis. Urban refugees who mingle freely with locals would safeguard security as they build solidarity and reciprocity.

The existing studies on urban refugees mostly discuss cases in the African context which shows a significant gap in the number of literature that elaborate cases in other regions. While some fundamental aspects of the debate remain relevant, specific settings pertaining variegated socio-economic and political context of host societies beyond Africa are hardly available. Moreover, those literatures highlight urban settlement by contrasting it with encampment approach and undermine an alternative method of settlement which is a mixture of both. In Indonesian context, particularly, aside from camps and detention centers, a large population of refugees is concentrated in community houses or motels in urban areas. While they can be defined as urban refugees as they live in urban area, the host government applies the same restrictions as those who settle in camps and detention centers. We argue that the fundamental problem is not about where refugees are being settled but the urban refugee policy the host government is pursuing. Host country's refugee policy and regulations are the central points to determine the extent to which refugees can integrate into the host society and exercise their livelihoods rights as defined in the 1961 Refugee Convention (e.g. nonrefoulement, freedom of movement, and employment) [7]. Countries with large populations of refugees rarely implement integrative mechanisms in their refugee policy. Integration is invariably restricted to inhibits permanent settlement [8].

Our argument in this article is based on the preposition that Makassar's urban refugee policy has been progressing into an integrative approach which juxtaposes the national government's interest in maintaining the status quo of exclusion approach. While most literatures fail to underpin the "middle" approach in the dichotomy between urban and encampment refugee settlement, they still provide a significant cognitive foundation on the issue of urban refugee. Besides, these existing studies purportedly validate the arguments laid out in this article.

3. Method

This article is a fragment of a broader research on refugee management in Southeast Asia conducted by the authors between September 2015 and June 2017. It relies on the data collected from semi-structured qualitative interviews with government officials as well as non-governmental organizations pertinent to

the topic. The parties interviewed were asked to describe the rationales underpin the government's policy, strategies to incorporate refugees to the city management, and challenges faced during the implementation. Interviews with non-governmental organizations were carried out to assemble the second opinion from stakeholders who work directly with the refugees alongside the government and UNHCR or IOM. The focus of interviews is to build a connection between the policy-making and the implementation side of refugee management, specifically in Makassar. This paper extensively utilizes previous study and investigation by UNHCR and SUAKA. UNHCR provides quantitative data such as the demography of refugees in each placement city and the condition of placement such as whether refugees are settled in detention centers, community houses, local motels, or a camp.

SUAKA (also known as Indonesian Civil Society Network for Refugee Rights Protection) is a non-governmental organization specialized in providing legal assistance and human rights advocacy for asylum seekers and refugees in Indonesia [15]. It has conducted an overarching research and published a report on Rohingya refugees' situation in Indonesia by comparing several cities in which refugees are placed. The report was particularly important to provide a general picture on how refugees are managed through varied approaches by the different city governments in Indonesia. Some of its findings that this paper would analyze further include the Memorandum of Understanding signed by Makassar City Government and International Organization on Migration (IOM) and the Joint Committee for Monitoring (JCM) initiated by the city government.

This study exercises a rather flexible methodological approach in which it considers as many differing viewpoints and perspectives as possible. It sought to see a common pattern by also incorporating refugees' opinion and feedback on Makassar city government's initiatives to present a comprehensive analysis from the perspectives of both. Newspaper articles and local media sources were examined to better understand the relationship between refugees and the locals. Further information about refugee livelihoods was obtained through a virtual data collection, mainly from social media posts and citizen journalist videos. Many refugees in Indonesia use social media to communicate with each other, their families at home, and to voice out their aspirations, raise public awareness on their plight or simply expose their activities. In many cases, it is easier to find information through refugees' social media posts than from official reports or news articles. Only a limited number of coverage on refugees' activities or events published by local Makassar newspapers can be found on both printed and online platforms.

4. Results and Discussions

In recent years, Makassar has been raising as the fastest growing port city in the Eastern part of Indonesia. Its economic growth emulates that of national level with a stunning 7.4%. Alongside the satisfactory economic performance, Makassar City had initiated a project called Makassar Smart City in collaboration with Microsoft, a world-class IT company, since 2014. With a tagline "Makassar *Sombere* and Smart City", the project aims to maximize the advancement of technology and communication to improve service for the city residents [16]. It complements the vision of the city government which says, "to create a world-class city for all, to arrange the alley to build a world-class city" (*Mewujudkan Kota Dunia Untuk Semua, Tata Lorong Bangun Kota Dunia*) [17]. The concept means "heart" in local language by which the city government attempts to underpin the importance of good mind, solidarity, modesty, and brotherhood in using technology. New programs introduced under the Smart City flag include digital health service, call center service for emergency (called as War Room), vertical garden, apartment in the valley (*Apartemen Lorong*), and business in the valley (*Badan Usaha Lorong*) [18].

War Room was built by the Government to monitor residents' activities in the city through 115 CCTV installed in some strategic areas [16]. Its goal is to enable a prompt response to social problems once it happens. A speedy and reliable response to social and security problems might increase city population's trust to the city government. Refugees are often prematurely blamed for belligerent behavior, which let the host society to be unduly alarmed by their existence. However, the improvement

in security service can give a significant impact on reassuring public safety and reduce anxiety toward the non-locals.

Understanding the establishment of Makassar's city development planning highlighted above is prominent to examine in what sense the urban refugee policy in Makassar was developed. Further analysis of *Sombere* concept might lead us to a fundamental question on whether it inherently drives the benevolent approach of Makassar City Government toward refugees. A caveat here is that such approach may be implemented to produce a favorable image of the city according to its stated vision instead of imposing a more integrative urban refugee policy. An image of being open to foreigners and to some extent, being a generous city in the brink of humanitarian tragedy would attract more attention to the city from both national and international community.

Technically, Makassar still imposes restrictions to refugees in many aspects of livelihoods such as employment and education. However, in the past few years, access to livelihoods has been limitedly granted. For education, the Municipal Education Department had given permission to 22 refugee children to be admitted to local primary schools with full funding from IOM [19]. After graduating from the primary level, these children are also eligible to continue their study at the local middle school. Due to their circumstances, especially related to the language barrier and cultural adjustment capacity, the arrangement may vary, as some of them are admitted to a private school for children with special needs while some other can attend the Metro School of Makassar [20][21].

Makassar hosts more than two thousand refugees among which approximately 826 are settled in community houses and a thousand in temporary shelters. There are 30 community houses (*asrama*) designated for refugees which are dominated by those coming from Afghanistan (50%), followed by Somalia, Rohingya (Myanmar), Iran, Iraq, and Sudan [4]. To those who have been released from detention facilities and settled in community housings, freedom of movement is invariably granted. A group of refugees walking along the Losari beachside, which is the icon of the city, is a common sight for the locals. The Mayor of Makassar, Mohammad Ramdhan Pomanto, a central figure in this development, issued 'residence' permit to identify the refugees who mainly live in community houses [22]. He stated that the city had tried to provide safe and comfortable accommodation for the refugees amidst recognizing that the existing law limits the rights of foreigners [23].

The signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Makassar and the International Organization on Migration (IOM) in September 2015 becomes a significant milestone in the city's refugee policy. The MoU aims to ensure a streamlined coordination between IOM and the city government, for example in the distribution of basic service, accommodation, health service, and education as well as assistance for children without parents. It also accommodates the needs for funding that were not possible to be distributed by the city government to address refugees and asylum seekers' problem amidst the absence of legal basis to legitimize the utilization of regional budget (APBD) [22]. As a follow up of the MoU, the city government proposed a blueprint ahead of the Presidential Decree to further coordinate in detail and comprehensively the tasks of each stakeholder of refugee management. The blueprint involves many stakeholders and government agencies such as Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Social Service [24]. However, it has not been signed and under formulation and may not be implemented as the Presidential Decree has come into force since December 2016. The MoU and blueprint demonstrate a proactive approach led by local government to build a straightforward and centralized coordination mechanism with all stakeholders working in the field.

Alongside South Sulawesi Red Cross and the Association of Hotel and Restaurant in Indonesia (PHRI), UNHCR agreed to provide refugees in Makassar with capacity building programs such as cooking class, English course, farming, IT, carpentry, and forklift training [19]. These programs were introduced to increase refugees' potential as resources who would benefit the local economy. Particularly because Makassar's economy relies upon the service sector (24%), processing industry (20.3%), and trade (18.2%) [25]. This paper suggests that there was strategic intertwined between civil society's inclusive consciousness and the need for local business to benefit from a potentially lower waged labor force.

The Municipal Government also organized some events to show their commitment to enhance refugees' livelihood and further integrate refugees into the local community. On 19 November 2016, it organized the International Seminar on Refugees and Asylum Seekers and launched a general working framework to manage refugees in Makassar. This event was initiated by the IOM and Makassar district office and took place in the Mayor's house [26]. In the same year, Makassar International Multicultural Day (IMD) was held in Losari beach. Refugees participated in the event through singing and performing arts in collaboration with the locals.

Makassar becomes a top destination for refugees since it is known amongst refugees that the local communities and immigration officers in Makassar are friendlier than in other cities [27]. Refugees also think that Makassar is relatively safer and more laid back than other cities. Refugees often become victims of arbitrary treatment of immigration officers, police, or municipal government. Thus, news about Makassar appeals refugees already placed in other cities to seek for settlement in the city. Incoming movement is detected mostly through local budget carriers such as Lion Air and Citilink [19]. While flight ticket purchase requires valid identification card, this case demonstrates a fraudulent practice in the domestic transportation system.

The level of tolerance and hospitable reception of local community in Makassar has been praised not only by the refugees but also by international organizations. During the International Seminar on Refugees and Asylum Seekers in 2016, Mark Getchell, the Country Director of IOM, stated in his remark that the local community of Makassar had built a bridge to outreach the refugees so they can have a proper life in Makassar [28]. Based on the testimonials from some refugees, in general, Makassar people generously accept them and level of discrimination toward foreigners are relatively low. Some stated that there is more freedom in Makassar in comparison to other cities in Indonesia. Refugees are sometimes given works by the locals as mechanics, carpenters, or cook [29].

Amid uncertainty about their future, some level of freedom of movement becomes a socio-economic imperative adherent to the livelihood of refugees in Indonesia. In many cases, transit migrants have to spend years waiting to be resettled to the Third Country. While on the wait, there are limited activities for them to do, particularly if they are housed in detention centers or camps. Freedom of movement allows refugees to interact and integrate with the host communities. In a way, it helps them maintaining their psychological health and recuperating from boredom. Interaction with the host community is also proven to be an effective mechanism in building tolerance, cultural understanding, and diminishing stereotype on refugees. Presumably, social inclusion would be established from that starting point. To support this objective, UNHCR also regularly conducts socialization and public seminar in universities in Makassar to introduce the importance of cross-cultural tolerance toward the transit migrants to the local community. Aside from that, refugees are regularly provided with knowledge about local customs and culture through pamphlets so they can avoid a clash with the locals [19].

Although deemed as a breakthrough considering the existing national refugee policy, initiatives by Makassar City Government still maintain the nationalistic priority and can only be considered as an 'upgraded' humanitarian gesture. The restriction on formal employment has not been lifted, and as demonstrated in some cases, refugees can work only in informal sectors, based on the generosity of the local community [30]. The Government has not gone too far in integrating the refugees into the city development plan, and the prospect to open the access to the formal job market is still unlikely. A survey conducted to Makassar, residents shows that 11.4% respondents voted for job employment as one of the most pressing social concerns alongside traffic jam (19%), flood (16.7%), waste management (11.9%), and the criminal gang (8.3%) [31]. For the local government to accommodate the needs of refugees would be a problematic decision since it potentially disrupts the social status quo maintained by the existing national refugee policy. Although one can argue that competition in formal job market based on everyone's qualification would create a healthier socio-economic equilibrium and improved productivity in the long run, in contrast to providing refugees with direct humanitarian assistance. Such direct approach also has proved to be both financially unsustainable and politically counter-productive. It has drawn negative attention to refugees living in an equally deprived and under-served host

population since local communities unavoidably recognize that refugees receive monthly allowance, foods, and health service without doing any works [7].

Government's commitment and constructive perspective on refugees are pre-requisite to ensure the livelihood of these displaced people in the transit country. In Makassar's case, the top-down approach, mainly led by the Mayor of the city, enables other stakeholders as such local communities and international organizations to take considerably altruistic initiatives to support refugees' livelihoods, such as providing training related to the service sector, access to education, temporary residence permit, and city-based monitoring mechanism. Refugees are perceived as part of the city, and the locals are encouraged to tolerate their existence. On top of that, local communities in Makassar are hospitable to the non-locals. To remodel this condition, other cities need to be supported by both pre-requisites: government's positive view and local community's receptivity of refugees. Despite the effectiveness of this formula remains untested, it illustrates a shift from the conventional perspective on refugees and commitment to improving the livelihoods of these transit migrants through urban refugee policy formulated in a long-term view.

5. Conclusions

Makassar city has moved a step forward by initiating a relatively more integrative urban refugee policy than the existing national framework. Together with the openness of the locals in receiving refugees and supporting the local government's initiatives, the city's approach has improved the livelihoods of urban refugees reside in Makassar. The top-down and the bottom-up factors reciprocate in making Makassar a favorable place to live as the city is considered refugees-friendly. This paper, however, does not try to rationalize the top-down and the bottom-up factors. It also does not measure the effectiveness and long-term impacts of Makassar's refugee policies to the city's socio-economic state, as the initiatives are still in their initial stages. This paper fills the gap in the existing -urban settlement *vis a vis* encampment-literatures by providing a case study of a mixture refugees settlement method in Indonesia. An inference that could be generated is that the friendliness of the city towards refugees would attract more to come, as long as there is a gap between Makassar's and other cities' approaches to manage urban refugees.

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