

Chapter 9

Refugee Camps: Reconsiderations for a New Age

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ABSTRACT

This chapter seeks to explore the key considerations that should be employed by camp coordinators and designers to mitigate the fundamental issues being faced by camps today and provide a safer and more durable living environment for refugees. It also aims to provide alternative camp design and material solutions and provide insight into the use of new technologies to aid these considerations. Specifically, this chapter will be exploring GIS technologies and their use in field operations. The need to rethink refugee camps is vital given the continuously increasing influx of refugees worldwide. However, within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study becomes even more critical for the safety of refugees, camp workers, and host countries alike. This chapter will delve deeper into the topics of camp design and layout, camp shelter and materials, and employing technologies such as GIS in the process of re-designing camps.

INTRODUCTION

Global conflict and climate change are causing the displacement of millions of people every year. “As of 2020, there are roughly 80 million people displaced from their homes” (UNHCR, 2020). Given recent political, health and environmental trends, these figures will see an inevitable rise. Coastal populations in the Global South have started to feel the effects of climate change and have had to leave their homes as a result. Climate refugees can already be seen in Bangladesh and India (Chowdhary, 2020). These numbers are predicted to rise exponentially with increases in severe weather conditions (Kaczan & Orgill-Meyer, 2019). Similarly, rising right-wing politics and growing extremism will continue to displace millions of people, as has been seen most recently in Iran and Myanmar (NRC, 2021; Regen-

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Refugee Camps

Figure 1. Syrian refugees pictured in a Jordanian camp in 2016 (Al Jazeera, 2016).



cia, 2021). Our current solutions for migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are ‘temporary’ refugee camps set up in various host countries across the world that are supposed to be a safe haven for refugees until they can seek asylum elsewhere. While they attempt to help refugees and asylum seekers, today’s refugee camps are the site of heinous human rights violations. With many camps unable to provide residents with basic human necessities, such as food and water, refugee camps are failing to act as a safe space for migrants. Instead, they have become an extension of the crisis that many refugees are escaping from. Furthermore, although camps are envisaged as temporary accommodation, the nature of modern-day conflicts and natural crises often means that these camps continue to grow for years, with some lasting as long as 67 years, like the Palestinian camp in Zarqa in Jordan (Chamma & Mendoza, 2016). However, even while adopting the permanence of a modern-day city, the sentiments within and around these camps remain transitional. This is reflected in the quality of the camp. A vicious cycle is formed whereby the camp lives on under the guise of a temporary settlement and fails to meet the basic needs of those it is supposed to protect.

The poor conditions of refugee camps have had a profoundly deep and negative impact on the mental and physical well-being of those that reside within them (Byler, Gelaw & Khoshnood, 2015). These conditions have been exacerbated by the current COVID-19 global pandemic (IRC, 2020). With little access to proper sanitation facilities and overcrowded facilities, refugee camps risk becoming an incubation site for COVID-19 outbreaks. The poor conditions of today’s camps and their impact on the lives of refugees are perhaps best exemplified by the Moria Refugee Camp on the island of Lesbos in Greece. A camp that has been likened to hell by its residents, Moria has earned a reputation as the worst camp in the world (Grant, 2020). The poor camp conditions were confirmed after the 9 September 2020 fire in the camp. At the time of the fire, the camp was home to roughly 19,000 migrants, even though it was originally designed for a total of 3,000. Since the fire, 13,000 people have been further displaced from this campsite and are living in worse conditions. The areas designed and designated as safe spaces for vulnerable people are becoming sites that they fear and resent as much as the places they are fleeing (Kingsley, 2020).

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