

Forced Migrants in Israel and Their Impact on the Urban Structure of Southern Neighborhoods of Tel Aviv

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Abstract : Migration, the driving force behind increased urbanization, has made cities much more diverse places to live in. Nearly one-fifth of all migrants live in the world's 20 largest cities. In many of these global cities, migrants constitute over a third of the population. Many of contemporary migrants are in fact 'forced migrants,' pushed from their countries of origin due to political or ethnic violence and persecution or natural disasters. During the past decade, massive numbers of labor migrants and asylum seekers have migrated from African countries to Israel via Egypt. Their motives for leaving their countries of origin include ongoing and bloody wars in the African continent as well as corruption, severe conditions of poverty and hunger, and economic and political disintegration. Most of the African migrants came to Israel from Eritrea and Sudan as they saw Israel the closest natural geographic asylum to Africa; soon they found their way to the metropolitan Tel-Aviv area. There they concentrated in poor neighborhoods located in the southern part of the city, where they live under conditions of crowding, poverty, and poor sanitation. Today around 45,000 African migrants reside in these neighborhoods, and yet there is no legal option for expelling them due to dangers they might face upon returning to their native lands. Migration of such magnitude to the weakened neighborhoods of south Tel-Aviv can lead to the destruction of physical, social and human infrastructures. The character of the neighborhoods is changing, and the local population is the main victim. These local residents must bear the brunt of the failure of both authorities and the government to handle the illegal inhabitants. The extremely crowded living conditions place a heavy burden on the dilapidated infrastructures in the weakened areas where the refugees live and increase the distress of the veteran residents of the neighborhoods. Some problems are economic and some stem from damage to the services the residents are entitled to, others from a drastic decline in their standard of living. Even the public parks no longer serve the purpose for which they were originally established—the well-being of the public and the neighborhood residents; they have become the main gathering place for the infiltrators and a center of crime and violence. Based on secondary data analysis (for example: The Israel's Population, Immigration and Border Authority, the hotline for refugees and migrants), the objective of this presentation is to discuss the effects of forced migration to Tel Aviv on the following tensions: between the local population and the immigrants; between the local population and the state authorities, and between human rights groups vis-a-vis nationalist local organizations. We will also describe the changes which have taken place in the urban infrastructure of the city of Tel Aviv, and discuss the efficacy of various Israeli strategic trajectories when handling human problems arising in the marginal urban regions where the forced migrant population is concentrated.

Keywords : African asylum seekers, forced migrants, marginal urban regions, urban infrastructure

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