

Local Government and the Integration of Refugees: Experiences from Bangladesh, Kenya and Germany

Eva Dick and Einhard Schmidt-Kallert

*Group Interview with Hamidul Hoque Chowdhury, Ullrich Sierau and Patrick Lokewan Nabwel
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In the last decade, the world has seen an enormous increase in the number of refugees worldwide. Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and Europe had to come to terms with bigger numbers of displaced persons than ever since World War II. Central government decisions in the receiving countries played a key role. Angela Merkel's decision, in 2015, to open the German borders when several hundred thousand refugees, eventually even two million, got stuck along the Balkan route, the decision by Columbia to accept Venezuelan refugees, and the decision by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, in 2017, to allow Rohingya refugees into the country were remarkable responses and have fed back into new migratory patterns. Likewise, the Polish government's refusal to accept any refugees or President Erdoğan's *laissez-faire* attitude towards the Syrian refugees crossing the border to Turkey have also made an impact on the lives of people and on national and regional policy-making.

But at the end of the day, all refugees, all displaced persons, end up in a particular city or district. From the perspective of the affected people, what matters at the time of arrival are the responses and the relief measures provided by the local government and civil society and, more generally, the attitudes of the local population vis-à-vis the newcomers. This is where they find or do not find a decent shelter, schooling for their children, work and healthcare – and (hopefully) a sense of shared humanity.

Despite this commonality, each refugee movement is different, and the setting in each receiving country varies. Obviously, some countries and some cities have more resources to cater for refugees than others. And local government structures and competencies differ from one country to another. For example, Germany boasts of a history of local government autonomy of more than 200 years, while a country like Kenya initiated the process of decentralisation just ten years ago.

Seeking to gain a better understanding of both similarities and differences, we, **Eva Dick** and **Einhard Schmidt-Kallert**, interviewed decision-makers at the local government level in different parts of the world who have first-hand experience in dealing with the integration of large refugee flows within short and longer periods.¹ The persons who participated in the interviews were:

Mr. Hamidul Hoque Chowdhury,² elected Chairman of the Sub-district Council (Upazila Parishad) of Ukhiya in Bangladesh. According to the latest census data, the sub-district officially has a population of 207,000 inhabitants, but it is estimated to have increased to about 300,000 by now. The Ukhiya sub-district is the location of Rohingya refugee camps for about one million people. The distance to Cox's Bazar, the district capital, with a population of 169,000 people in the last census, is about 40 kilometres.

Mr. Ullrich Sierau,³ who served as the elected Lord Mayor of the City of Dortmund in Germany's Ruhr region for eleven years, from 2009 to 2020. Dortmund has a population of about 600,000, many of whom once came as migrants to the city. Sierau was at the helm of the local government at the time of the massive influx of refugees in 2015.

Mr. Patrick Lokewan Nabwel,⁴ who has, since 2019, been the Deputy Head of Operations of the German-funded GIZ project Supporting refugees and host communities in Kenya. His duty station is Kakuma in Turkana County in northern Kenya. The town is located next to Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement. The original capacity of the camp was 58,000 individuals but due to a massive influx from South Sudan since 2014, the current number of registered refugees and asylum seekers stands at 200,000.

Eva Dick and Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:
Related to your position, what is your connection with refugees and their (local) integration?

Ullrich Sierau (Germany):

Before answering your question, let me start on a personal note. I would like to mention that when I was a small child, I also had the experience of being a refugee. I was born in 1956 in East Germany, and two years later my family decided to flee to the west of the country. The feeling of arriving at a place where you were not born, where the family had no roots, where you have to find your bearings, was always part of my early childhood. And what's more, my mother and my grandmother hailed from Stettin, a city which became part of Poland after WW II. So she had, twice in her life, the experience of being a refugee and of being displaced.... Definitely, this

1
While the interviews were carried out separately, they are presented here as a group conversation. All interviewees agreed to this procedure, and to the interviewers taking some degree of liberty in the presentation of both questions and responses.

2
Online interview conducted on 30 June 2021, with the support of Mr. Sohail Rana, who facilitated and translated this interview.

3
Online interview conducted on 5 January 2021.

4
Guideline-based written interview in December 2020.

family history had an influence when, in later years I had to take decisions as mayor...

Hamidul Chowdhury (Bangladesh):

Let me tell you how it all started. This Rohingya population, they are coming from the Arakan region of Myanmar and are mostly Muslim. Based on this religious factor, they have been going through some oppression by the Myanmar government since long ago. That's what has been called ethnic cleansing. So the ethnic cleansing was happening over a long period of time, but it came to a peak in August 2017, when the Rohingyas were forcibly displaced from their own country, Myanmar. Myanmar has borders with a number of other countries, namely China, India, Thailand and Laos. But none of them allowed these people into their country. That's why they came to Bangladesh to ask for shelter. And that was the time when our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina allowed them to enter our country. They started immediately to live with the local population where they had entered Bangladesh. In fact, the host communities were the first ones who opened their doors and gave them shelter. On the one hand, they did this because our [central] government supported these people; but on the other hand, they just did it because the refugees needed help and they needed shelter. So in line with government directives, the host communities played a vital role to share their shelters and roofs to help the refugees in Bangladesh. So that's it in a nutshell: the history, how it all started.

Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:

This reminds me of the media pictures of thousands of volunteers welcoming the incoming refugees at the peak of the so-called refugee crisis in Germany in 2015...

Ullrich Sierau (Dortmund):

Dortmund is a city with a long history of many waves of in-migration. I think this history helped us in mobilising a lot of solidarity in 2015. Local people went to the main railway station in the middle of the night to deliver clothing and foodstuffs to be distributed to the newly arriving refugees. The people did all this on their own initiative. We, as the city administration, helped with the organisation and distribution. A youth and leisure centre, the Dietrich-Keuning-Haus, was transformed into a temporary relief centre for the refugees. They were given blankets, beds, charging stations for their mobile phones. Without this civil society commitment, without all the volunteers, we as City of Dortmund would not have been able to organise what needed to be done.

Incidentally, the solidarity of the locals was more than a temporary thing. For, some of the support networks for the refugees, which spontaneously emerged in those days, have survived up to the present day. In the neighbourhoods and in our sub-districts.

But there is something else I would like to mention here. One of the closest aides of Angela Merkel, Minister Altmaier, literally said in a public meeting here in Dortmund: 'The refugee crisis caught us unaware; otherwise we would have acted differently.' How is this possible? I really fail to understand why the government of a country of 80 million people, which is part of the G8, claims they were caught unaware. Maybe they should have bought a

TV set for the Chancellor's office! And they should have read the internal secret service reports. They should have known what is happening in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan! And what was brewing up in North Africa. And in West Africa! One could have prepared aid programmes to help the people in their countries of origin. One could have concluded a European pact to deal with the refugees. I believe our federal government completely failed to do its homework during the refugee crisis!

Eva Dick:

Mr. Nabwel, your project in Kakuma has been working closely with the local government of Turkana West since its inception. But when you came on board in 2016, most of the refugees had already arrived. What was your role?

Patrick Nabwel (Kenya)

We are strengthening the ability of young refugees and local youth to seize future opportunities by information and communication technology-based approaches. The youth are trained in ICT and life skills, and through radio programmes given information on opportunities.

The project reaches to the most vulnerable (young mothers, people living with disabilities and those who have not been to school) through non-formal education programmes. We provide podcasts in different languages to suit the various communities in the sub-county.

Through one of our components, called conflict resolution, and activities such as the formation of peace dialogue forums and the use of youth as mediators, we have and continue to see the refugees' relationship becoming better than before. Their capacities to resolve conflicts non-violently have been strengthened.

Eva Dick and Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:

What are the legal, political, financial competencies of your local government unit with regard to refugees and their integration in the host country?

Patrick Nabwel (Kenya):

Kenya is currently working on a new refugee bill that provides for more socio-economic integration of refugees (the Refugee Bill 2019). It is, however, still being debated in parliament and is yet to be passed to law.

Under the devolved governance structure, counties are responsible for their own planning. Counties develop five-year integrated development plans. In Turkana County, for instance, the current integrated plan (2018-2022) explicitly mentions the presence of the refugee population. At the county level, this part of the population is being considered in planning and service delivery.

Hamidul Chowdhury (Bangladesh):

As local government, we depend very much on central government decisions and policies. We had a similar influx of Rohingya refugees in 1972, then in 1992 – in fact, several times. But each time they came, then they went back and they were repatriated again, formally. But this time, I mean after 2017, not a single Rohingya has been repatriated to their country, although our two governments, Myanmar government and Bangladesh government, had a bilateral contract of repatriation. But this time, this was not implemented. And in addition, in

theory the UN played an important role to facilitate and speed up repatriation. But up to now, the UN organisations have not had any influence on the repatriation of the Rohingya.

The UN organisations played two main roles in this Rohingya-refugees issue. One was to make sure that the refugees live with dignity and live a quality life while they are staying here in Bangladesh. And at the same time, they should take some steps to make the Myanmar government agree to take back those forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals.

As a matter of fact, those people are now living here with the help of the Bangladesh government and the United Nations; both are helping those people to live a good life here in Bangladesh. But the repatriation is still not happening.

So this is an issue the central government as well as the local government in Bangladesh are really concerned about. There is a fear from local government perspective, how long this will go on. It is a protracted crisis; now we are thinking more about how we can overcome the crisis over a longer period of time.

So as the local government here in Ukhiya, we are making sure that host communities and the Rohingya live in peaceful coexistence. We have to ensure the safety and security of the Rohingya living inside the camps. This is not easy at all, because there are more than a million Rohingya living in Ukhiya and Teknaf; to be precise, 1.1 million people, living in a very small, packed area surrounded by host communities. Compared with the Rohingya, the host community people are not that many. If the peaceful coexistence between these two communities is not maintained, it could get out of control, conflicts might flare. So that is what the local government at this moment is mostly doing: to make sure that those two groups of people live together without any collision, without any clash. So that's our major role, from a local government perspective.

Ullrich Sierau (Germany):

This reminds me of an international conference on the situation of refugees, which I attended about two years ago. A Dutch colleague said, 'What you are doing in Dortmund for the refugees is really a great job!' Yes, of course, we have been doing a lot. But one has to see this in perspective. In my opinion, the Bangladeshis are the real local heroes. A poor country, and then they are faced with an influx of 1.1 million refugees! When we see this, compared with our GDP in Germany we should have increased our commitment threefold.... And when I think of the situation in the north of Kenya, this is very similar....

Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:

But what exactly did you do as local government; how were you prepared for the massive influx in 2015, Mr. Sierau?

Ullrich Sierau (Germany):

We were well-prepared a long time before the so-called refugee crisis started. Since 2012, we had had a growing number of refugees in the city because we had one of the reception centres for refugees within our city boundaries. We had a clear view of the problem because we realised that the number of new refugees was growing

every month. So we pleaded to the state government to set up more reception centres within North Rhine-Westphalia. But they didn't react. Well, then we somehow started warming up for the big influx since 2013. In early 2015, we formed a task force; on the one hand for the reception centre, but also for those new arrivals who were assigned to our city. I am talking about refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and North and West Africa. So what did we do? We talked with the housing industry. We said, we need temporary shelters. And we bought air halls. We converted schools into shelters. But from the start, we said, we want to have smaller units. That was different from some other big cities, who favoured large centres. And in each case we formed a team of voluntary helpers assisting the new arrivals. These volunteers came from church parishes and other civil society organisations, but they were always accompanied by our social services, our youth or our education department. For example, when younger children needed a place in a kindergarten, this was facilitated by the Youth Department. In the case of children of school-going age, our education department helped establish special classes for children with little knowledge of German. And we invited the children to join sports clubs. Yes, sport can be an engine of integration, but you have to consider the preferences of migrants who come from a different cultural context. Football, yes, but also track and field, swimming. Or hockey, for example, for those who came from Afghanistan.

After the initial period, we made sure that as many refugees as possible could move out of the emergency shelters into proper flats. Again, we collaborated with the real estate industry to make sure that many people were given normal tenancy agreements. So many things were done, either by our departments or by volunteers. German language classes, special tuition for school children, translation services for medical consultations and in hospitals.

Eva Dick:

In quantitative terms, what was the number of refugees in Dortmund who needed special assistance?

Ullrich Sierau (Germany):

Right now we have more than 9,000 recognised refugees in Dortmund. In addition to 9,000 immigrants from EU countries in the Balkans, namely Rumania and Bulgaria. That means a total of 20,000 people in need of special attention and support. This is an enormous achievement for a city like Dortmund: housing, healthcare, schooling, employment and integration in a wider sense. We had to do all this, but these additional tasks were also a burden on our budget. Eventually, we had to postpone investments in the road infrastructure, in schools, in the water supply and the sewage network; many investments that were long overdue!

Eva Dick and Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:

What are the sources of funding for refugee integration at the local level?

Hamidul Chowdhury (Bangladesh):

We have the JRP, the Joint Response Plan, initiated by UN agencies. Around 25% of the Joint Response

Plan.... I mean, this year for example, the JRP was for around one billion US dollars, slightly less, and around 25% of this money is actually misused by the INGOs (International Nongovernmental Organisations) and UN agencies! That is an issue which infuriates the local host community. These NGOs are bringing money for doing good, but they are not doing what they are expected to do. So, that's what is causing aversions of the local host community, not really against the Rohingya, but against NGOs and against UN agencies. And indirectly, the effect of this aversion affects the refugees as well, because the NGOs and UN agencies are working directly with refugees.

Eva Dick:

May I just ask back very briefly, what kind of misuse is done by the international agencies or the INGOs?

Hamidul Chowdhury (Bangladesh):

25% of the JRP was supposed to be used for the development and improvement of the local host communities. Because, you see, now the refugees are living in a place which was a forest previously, which had to be cut down completely. Now it is barren land. So, there are impacts on the environment, and there are impacts on the local economy, there are impacts on the local host community people. So, these 25% of JRP money was supposed to be used for the improvement of the environment and the socio-economic improvement of the local host community people. Now, you see, what are these INGOs doing? They are holding lots of seminars, meetings, you know, workshops in different luxurious hotels, and they are charging all of their hotel costs as administrative costs and then they claim to have spent all this money for the local communities! So if the money was supposed to be for the improvement and the development for the communities, you cannot show money spent on seminars and workshops and luxurious accommodation in your accounts instead! They are just doing it, even without informing the local government officials. There is no transparency for that kind of expenditure, how they are spending that 25%, for what kind of improvement, there is no transparency between the local government and the INGOs and the UN agencies.

Eva Dick:

And in Kenya, from where do you get the money for your activities?

Patrick Nabwel (Kenya):

In 2015, UNHCR launched the Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan in Turkana West (KISEDPP) to make sure that development efforts benefit both the host communities and the refugees. It essentially works as a fund-raising tool. So we want to make sure that refugees and local communities benefit from both local and national services such as healthcare, agricultural extension services and education.

Einhart Schmidt-Kallert:

Coming back to the situation in Dortmund. Mr. Sierau, you mentioned that you had to postpone investments in infrastructure in order to be able cater to the needs of refugees....

Ullrich Sierau (Germany):

For many years, we had to pay for the integration of migrants from Eastern and South Eastern Europe from our budget. The amount was growing every year. In 2014, the amount we had in our budget for the integration of immigrants was already a two-digit figure, something between 12 and 13 million euros. This stayed in the budget, every year. And then, in 2015, we needed an additional amount of 30 to 40 million for the integration of all the new arrivals. It is not so easy to give the exact amount. But currently we are talking about a sum of 50 to 70 million euros annually.

Of course, one could also argue: currently we as the City of Dortmund have an annual budget of 2.5 billion euros. Then 50 to 70 million are not really much. And that is exactly the money we do not have to pay for regular repairs and the rehabilitation of schools, kindergartens, etc. In other words: at the local government level, we do not receive sufficient allocations, which would be needed for a coherent local, regional, national and European policy in this field.

Eva Dick and Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:

At international level, refugee policies have received increasing attention since 2015. How has this influenced policies and measures at the local level?

Patrick Nabwel (Kenya)

Kenya subscribes to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, the so-called CRRF, which was launched by UNHCR. And, as I have mentioned, the Turkana County government jointly with UNHCR have developed the Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan (KISEDPP), which promotes the integration of refugees and host communities within the Kalobeyei settlement.

At the regional level, Kenya subscribes to the Djibouti Declaration on education for refugees, returnees and host communities (2017) that is now being incorporated into the national education policy to allow integration of refugees into the national education system.

Ullrich Sierau (Germany):

As local government, we have to see the global context. And we can learn from previous experiences. Just think of the Italian immigration since the 1960s. And the Greek, Spanish, Turkish and North African immigration to West Germany in those years. The migrants stayed with us for twenty or thirty years, they saved money, they sent remittances back home – and eventually they returned to their home countries and their hometowns. With the skills they had acquired in Germany, many of them were able to set up a business in their hometowns. This is the kind of inter-generational contract we need again today, which needs to be organised at European level. It's already happening, but informally. Unfortunately, as a city, at the local level, we cannot fully accompany this inter-generational contract. But as local government, and I am not only speaking for Dortmund but for many cities in Europe, we are prepared to facilitate this process!

Eva Dick and Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:

Let's now turn to another issue: in your experience, what is the attitude of the local government

and administration towards refugees? How does it compare with the attitude at central state level?

Patrick Nabwel (Kenya):

It's interesting: the attitude of the county government official towards the refugees has changed over time. There was a time when refugees were regarded as burden, but now they are not. I tell you why! The over 2000 medium and large businesses in Kakuma generate a lot of revenue to the Turkana County government, coming second highest after Lodwar town; this is what has brought the change of heart, with refugees now seen as contributing to the local economy. As for the national level: the implementation of KISEDIP is much more appreciated at the local level than at the national level, I guess because it was crafted at the local level and became a bottom-up approach.

The central government, to date, is still in favour of the encampment policy, an attitude that still holds. Most likely until the revised refugee bill has been enacted as a law.

Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:

Let's turn to the situation in Bangladesh again. Mr. Chairman, you said that initially the host communities were ready to give shelter to those poor refugees. The government of Bangladesh, and the United Nations, came in later. But now, for the last four years, they have been living side by side, the Rohingya in the camps and the local communities. Would you say that the attitude of the local communities, of the local people, has changed over time?

Hamidul Chowdhury (Bangladesh):

The attitude of the local people has not changed drastically. But there are two reasons why there are conflicts arising. One is that the Rohingya want to go back. So that's one issue that is affecting them mentally and which is making them definitely rude and, remember, they, more than a million people, are living in a very small place. So, generally it is happening that they are turning rude among themselves and at the same time they are sometimes rude towards the host communities as well. That's one issue.

The second issue is: all the humanitarian agencies, all the national, all the international NGOs are coming here and they are supporting Rohingyas. The host community people, on the other hand, were the first responders when the Rohingya needed immediate support. In the process, they lost some of their land, they saw how their environment was damaged, and now, they are experiencing ever-increasing living expenses in this area. But, right now they are not receiving enough support from the NGOs. So that's one issue which is making the local host community people a bit, you know, adverse towards the refugees.

I am not saying the host community people are hostile towards Rohingyas as it is. They are still, I mean, friendly. But they have mentioned these issues to the local government. So that's a big, you know, psychological issue between the refugees and the host community people. And, frankly speaking, another reason for this change of attitude is the fact that some Rohingya

people are also involved in drug business. So there is a drug tablet called Yaba which is produced in Myanmar and trafficked into Bangladesh mostly through Rohingyas. So that's another aspect which is creating a clash between these two communities.

Eva Dick and Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:
What opportunities do you see in the presence of refugees in your area?

Hamidul Chowdhury (Bangladesh):

The benefits were mostly about the improvement of the economic situation in the host communities.

Previously, the people in this area were mainly living on subsistence agriculture. But right now, business opportunities have improved for the people in the host communities. Crisis breeds opportunities! Communities, who previously were not doing any business, are now doing business. Now they are getting used to doing business, and some of them have been able to be self-reliant. Not really rich, but solvent. So that is the good effect of the influx of refugees. Our people had never thought about an economic boom, but now they are seeing it. Also, local public service infrastructures (e.g., hospitals/health facilities, schools, roads, etc.) in the host communities have been improved by the government and aid agencies because of this crisis.

Patrick Nabwel (Kenya)

In our case, ICT infrastructural development has been a major boost to the sub-county and has helped digitalise both the local and the refugee community. What is more: the various organisations working in the sub-county have presented an opportunity to the local population through training and employment opportunities.

And I should like to add: influences from the various cultures have led to adoption of different means of living and income-generating activities.

Ullrich Sierau (Germany)

Among those who came as refugees, we had some engineers. In collaboration with a local NGO and our own Dortmund North Programme, we developed re-training programmes for them. Subsequently, some civil engineers found jobs with local building contractors. The same applied to some craftsmen.

There is a large number of professional and hometown associations in Dortmund – for example, there's an association of Syrian doctors, which has existed since the 1970s, when Syrians came to Germany to study medicine. These associations are doing a great job in the integration process.

As mentioned, the key topics are housing, health-care, education and of course integration into the labour market. Obviously, training and re-training are key. Roughly, one can say, within the first five years, 50% find a job, will be integrated. But then the question arises: what is happening with the other 50%? We are still working to find solutions for them, normally in close collaboration with the Labour Department. In many cases, this integration into the labour market is a long-term task; you really have to accompany the individuals over many months, even years... and there are challenges as well...

Eva Dick:
Yes, let's talk about the challenges as well....

Ullrich Sierau (Germany):

Many of the refugees, especially those who came from Africa, are indebted to gangs of people smugglers who brought them here. These people smugglers are now extorting money from their former clients, sometimes forcing them into drug dealing to pay back their debts. So we have to work closely with the police, finding ways and means of cutting the ties with the gangs of people smugglers. Helping the refugees to start an apprenticeship, to start a new life. You can imagine, the integration process is still an enormous task ahead of us, something which will not work overnight; it will keep us busy for decades to come!

Hamidul Chowdhury (Bangladesh):

Talking about challenges: due to the influx of refugees, more than one million Rohingya are living on 8000 acres of land. Out of this area, 6000 acres of land were a designated forest reserve. And the area is still expanding. Just compare this with the only 300,000 people in the host communities nearby! So there is a fear, officials are concerned, if this conflict between the Rohingya refugees and the host communities really happens, if there are clashes, just imagine: there are only 300,000 locals in the host communities compared with one million refugees! Who are living in a congested area of just 6000 or 8000 acres of land!

Recently, our government decided to shift part of the Rohingya to an island, but there is space for 100,000 persons only, so even if this happens, more than 900,000 will remain living here. There is still the fear of an outbreak of violence. We are very much concerned about this safety/security issue!

Patrick Nabwel (Kenya):

Kakuma Refugee Camp was originally built for 58,000 people. But for the last five years or so, there have been 200,000 people in the camp. Thus, overcrowding is the key challenge. This has led to depleting of natural resources (land, water and trees) and conflicts over the use of these resources.

Or in other words: our challenge is the over-stretching of the available resources to meet the demands of the huge numbers.

A specific challenge are the school dropouts due to overcrowding in classes and opportunities to offer cheap labour.

Also, insecurity exacerbated by the proliferation of small firearms ostensibly brought into the camp from the war-torn neighbouring country, i.e., South Sudan.

Eva Dick and Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:
How has the COVID-19 crisis affected the refugees and the host communities?

Hamidul Chowdhury (Bangladesh):

We are facing a lot of challenges in convincing the Rohingya to utilise the help measures, i.e., wearing masks and social distancing. In the camps, it is very rare to see a Rohingya who is wearing a mask or maintaining social distancing. Because it is technically impossible. Just imagine: a million people are living on 6000 acres of land,

so it is very difficult to maintain social distancing. At the same time, they are not very much willing to wear masks; they believe in God, thinking this will not affect me. This is an issue, which is pretty dangerous stuff.

Moreover, there is something else which poses a challenge. There are currently 200 NGOs working here in Cox's Bazar, round about 50,000 NGO workers, and they are coming from different parts of the country, some of which are heavily affected by COVID. The local people here do not travel to Chittagong or Dhaka, so the local people believe COVID came through NGO workers. That's another challenge, another reason, why the host communities do not like the NGO workers. The NGO workers are having their meal in a local restaurant, and that's how they have spread the disease to the local communities.

Patrick Nabwel (Kenya):

Yes, there has been a felt impact. The current restrictive measures put in place to curb COVID-19 have limited the freedom of movement of refugees outside Kakuma and the Kalobeyei settlement. Before the advent of the pandemic, refugees would move to, say, for example, Lake Turkana to purchase fish for sale in the camp and at the settlement.

Einhard Schmidt-Kallert:

The number of refugees in the Dortmund population is much smaller than in the overcrowded camps in Turkana West or near Cox's Bazar. And yet, are refugees and migrants in Dortmund badly affected by the pandemic?

Ullrich Sierau (Germany):

The answer is very simple. All you need to do is take a quick look at the map of Dortmund. We have twelve boroughs, and you immediately see a strong correlation between the share of migrants and refugees in the population and the incidence of COVID. Nordstadt, Mengede and Eving are high-incidence areas, and these boroughs happen to accommodate the highest number of refugees and migrants. We realised this at an early stage. And we took action. We got in touch with the mosque associations and with all kinds of multipliers within the various immigrant communities, and we particularly warned them to be careful during Ramadan, to avoid infections. This worked well up to the Eid holidays. Unfortunately, during Eid one lady infected an entire family clan. As a super-spreader!

After the summer holidays in 2020, the situation went out of control. Many migrants had travelled to their home countries, for example Bosnia, attended wedding ceremonies back home and spread the disease after their return to Germany. That was one reason why the infection rate went up dramatically after the end of the holiday season – all over Germany.

Note: We wish to thank Mr. Sohel Rana for facilitating and translating the contributions by Mr. Hamidul Chowdhury from Bangla to English.