



HPG Working Paper

# The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

## Responsibility-sharing and self-reliance in East Africa

Nicholas Crawford and Sorcha O'Callaghan

September 2019

**HPG**  
Humanitarian  
Policy Group





## About the authors

Nicholas Crawford and Sorcha O’Callaghan are Research Associates with the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Joanna de Berry, Senior Social Development Specialist, the World Bank; Evan Easton-Calabria, Principal Investigator, ‘Responses to crisis migration in Uganda and Ethiopia: researching the role of local actors in secondary cities’, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford; and Aude Galli, Coordinator, Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat – all of whom provided perceptive comments and suggestions on the draft paper.

Thanks also to Kerrie Holloway and Christina Lowe at HPG/ODI who helped with the research and writing on the four country papers that form the basis for this synthesis paper, and to Farah Manji, who co-authored the Kenya country paper. Alemu Asfaw and Freddie Carver, authors of the Ethiopia country paper, provided insightful comments and suggestions, as did Wendy Fenton at ODI/HPG. Finally, we’re grateful to Katie Forsythe at ODI for her expert editing.

This paper is part of a larger set of research commissioned by the IKEA Foundation on the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and opportunities for self-reliance among refugees in East Africa. We would like to thank the Foundation, especially Annemieke Tsike-Sossah, and Beth Gertz of Seven Hills Advisors, for their support on the project.

**This research was undertaken with the support of the IKEA Foundation.**

## IKEA Foundation



This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Readers are encouraged to reproduce material for their own publications, as long as they are not being sold commercially. ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. For online use, we ask readers to link to the original resource on the ODI website. The views presented in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI or our partners.

---

# Contents

---

	<b>Acronyms</b>	v
<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction: global solidarity and self-interest in relation to refugees</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The GCR: founded on a set of imperfect assumptions</b>	<b>3</b>
	2.1 ‘Easing pressure’: compensating countries to host refugees	3
	2.2 Self-reliance: easing the path for refugees from assistance to productivity	3
<b>3</b>	<b>Easing the pressure on host countries: as yet unfulfilled promises</b>	<b>4</b>
	3.1 Little sign of ‘additionality’ from donors	4
	3.2 Faltering shifts towards cost-effective national systems	5
	3.3 Insufficient attention to institutional reform	6
<b>4</b>	<b>Is self-reliance obtainable for refugees in remote, neglected hosting areas?</b>	<b>8</b>
	4.1 Achieving self-reliance in remote, impoverished settings	8
	4.2 Attracting the private sector and creating refugee ‘entrepreneurs’	9
	4.3 Constrained rights and other barriers to achieving self-reliance	9
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusion: a vision at risk?</b>	<b>12</b>
	5.1 ‘Easing the pressure’ on refugee-hosting countries	12
	5.2 Promoting refugee ‘self-reliance’	12
	<b>References</b>	<b>14</b>

---

---

# Boxes

---

## Boxes

Box 1: What are the CRRF and the Global Compact on Refugees?

2

---

# Acronyms

<b>ARRA</b>	Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs
<b>CRRF</b>	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GCR</b>	Global Compact on Refugees
<b>HSNP</b>	Hunger Safety Net Programme
<b>IDA</b>	International Development Association
<b>MINEMA</b>	Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>OPM</b>	Office of the Prime Minister
<b>PSNP</b>	Productive Safety Net Programme
<b>RAS</b>	Refugee Affairs Secretariat
<b>UNGA</b>	United Nations General Assembly
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme

---

# 1 Introduction: global solidarity and self-interest in relation to refugees

Heralded as a ‘milestone of global solidarity’ (UNHCR, 2018),<sup>1</sup> the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR)<sup>2</sup> that later encompassed it, evolved in part from the politics of the so-called ‘European refugee crisis’ of 2015. The agreements feature the return of refugees to their countries of origin and resettlement in third countries, but the sustained, local integration of refugees in host countries – in their regions of origin and far from destinations in the Global North – was a central motivation behind this solidarity.<sup>3</sup>

The GCR articulates an important transformation in traditional refugee-hosting models. It builds upon widespread recognition of the inadequacy of costly and open-ended ‘care and maintenance’ approaches to refugee management, which address only the basic assistance and protection needs of refugees, neglecting opportunities for greater social and economic development. Under the Compact, signatory countries recognise the need to ‘ease the burden’ on host nations, while also acknowledging the potential economic benefits of hosting refugees. The Compact promotes refugee self-reliance by emphasising the importance of economic development and job growth in refugee-hosting areas, as well as allowing refugees to access national services, such as health and education. In addition, the Compact envisages that

assistance to refugees will shift from the provision of basic assistance by aid agencies through parallel systems, to national authorities including refugees in their national systems of service provision.

This hoped-for transformation, though, is underpinned by a set of bargains and assumptions that are proving to be only partially valid. As the costs and complexities of achieving the goals of the GCR become evident, to both donor and host countries, it is difficult to maintain confidence that the GCR will catalyse meaningful change for refugees. Three years after the adoption of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, a review of developments in four countries that rolled out the CRRF approach – Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda – reveals that progress on ‘easing the burden’ and opening up paths to refugee self-reliance has been limited or, in some cases, is even sliding back. This paper draws on four country papers (in Ethiopia (Asfaw Nigusie and Carver, 2019), Kenya (Crawford and O’Callaghan, 2019), Rwanda (Crawford et al., 2019) and Uganda (Crawford et al., 2019b)), developed for the IKEA Foundation, to provide a stock-take on progress under the GCR in East Africa. It considers how unrealistic assumptions underpinning the Compact are butting up against reality in these host countries and suggests measures that would improve the prospects for responsibility-sharing and refugee self-reliance.

---

1 See [www.globalcrrf.org](http://www.globalcrrf.org)

2 This paper uses GCR to describe the process and principles articulated in the New York Declaration, the CRRF and the Global Compact on Refugees. When describing the application of the CRRF in specific countries, the paper refers to ‘CRRF’.

3 See for example the remarks of the European Council President in 2016 in relation to the Leaders’ Summit at which the New York Declaration was agreed: ‘You have to know that today the European Union has a clear objective to restore order on its external borders ... there will be no repeat of the year 2015’ (Koran, 2016).

## Box 1: What are the CRRF and the Global Compact on Refugees?

In September 2016 the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, reaffirming the importance of international refugee rights and committing to strengthen protection and support for people on the move. The Declaration called upon the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to apply the CRRF in specific situations that featured large-scale movements of refugees in order to:

1. Ease pressure on host countries.
2. Enhance refugee self-reliance.

3. Expand access to third-country solutions.
4. Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

Two years later, the UNGA affirmed the GCR as a non-binding global framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility sharing in recognition that solutions to refugee situations require international cooperation. The CRRF is incorporated into the Global Compact and the two frameworks share the same four objectives. The CRRF has been rolled out in 15 countries in Africa, Asia and South America thus far.

---

# 2 The GCR: founded on a set of imperfect assumptions

## 2.1 ‘Easing pressure’: compensating countries to host refugees

At the heart of the GCR is the aim of easing pressure on countries that welcome and host refugees. Otherwise known as ‘responsibility-sharing’, this seeks to address the fact that responsibility for refugee hosting largely results from geographical proximity: some 80% of refugees live in countries neighbouring their countries of origin. What UNHCR terms ‘developed nations’ welcome just 16% of the world’s refugees (UNHCR, 2018).

Ensuring funding for refugees in situ and accepting refugees through resettlement are both components of the GCR’s ‘responsibility-sharing’ objective. Global solidarity in relation to refugees does not, however, extend to greater refugee hosting. With the rise of anti-migrant sentiment in the Global North, resettlement opportunities for refugees have decreased since 2016.<sup>4</sup> The exhortation of ‘easing the pressure’ under the GCR largely comes down to a simple bargain between refugee-hosting states and donor countries: ‘you host, we fund’.

The financial commitments envisaged under the GCR, though, are also fragile. Despite a longstanding gap between refugee needs and the financial contributions provided by donor governments, the GCR does not contain a mechanism to ensure additional or more predictable development funding. Instead, donor contributions to refugee funding remain voluntary under the GCR, with the hope that predicted cost-efficiencies from new approaches will help to address the chronic shortfall in refugee support (Zetter, 2014; Betts et al., 2016). This rests on two shaky assumptions: first, that development funding will be available in sufficient measure to incentivise hosting governments to allow greater socio-economic inclusion of refugees and to bear the potential political risks of doing so; and second, that the provision of services to

refugees through national systems will prove not just suitable but also more cost-efficient and sustainable over the long term. Neither of these is borne out so far in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

## 2.2 Self-reliance: easing the path for refugees from assistance to productivity

There is growing evidence of the economic benefit of refugees to the societies that host them (Sanghi et al., 2016, Zetter 2014). The GCR builds upon this and promotes the objective of refugee self-reliance through a ‘whole of society’ approach involving a wider set of government, development, humanitarian and private sector actors than has traditionally been the case.

This objective of self-reliance, however, rests on a set of flawed assumptions. The first is that there is a realistic path to self-reliance for large numbers of people in the remote, often under-developed, border areas where refugees are usually hosted and where local residents are already struggling to build sustainable livelihoods. Second is the expectation that the new, whole of society approach will overcome these difficulties. In each of the four case studies, however, the presence and vitality of the private sector in refugee-hosting areas is nascent and often engaged in unsustainable models propped up by external funding. Third is the assumption that refugees are able to realise the basic rights needed to pursue sustainable livelihoods, such as mobility and the right to work. Progress on this front in all four countries is uncertain – sometimes from a legal perspective and sometimes because refugees are unable to take full advantage of their rights. Lastly, this objective fails to acknowledge the physical or psycho-social debilities that many refugees have carried with them into exile and their implications for self-reliance.

---

<sup>4</sup> For example, the US agreed to take in a maximum of 45,000 refugees in 2018, down from 110,000 in 2017. In the end it admitted far fewer. For 2019, the US quota is just 30,000 (Romero, 2019).



---

# 3 Easing the pressure on host countries: as yet unfulfilled promises

Despite the centrality of development funding to the approaches envisaged by the GCR, there is no mechanism in place in any of the countries studied to track overall funding for refugees, although new indicators for the GCR aim to address this, at least partially.<sup>5</sup> Many government officials interviewed across the four countries are sceptical that the GCR will usher in the shifts in scale, predictability and type of donor funding required to transform refugee management. This is due in part to a lack of clear evidence of additional funding resulting from the GCR, combined with long-term chronic under-funding of refugee needs.

All four of the study countries – and refugees themselves – face a familiar scenario: insufficient and uncertain humanitarian funding to cover basic needs and unmet assurances that longer-term development funding will begin to complement humanitarian aid in ways that transform the macro-economic environment and, in so doing, introduce new economic opportunities for refugees and their hosts. Although each country has taken steps towards refugee inclusion, major progress has been hampered. Governments and their UN partners are uncertain that donors will make good on their commitments and are therefore hesitant to dismantle proven, if inadequate, humanitarian systems for supporting refugees. Governments also face capacity constraints, in line ministries and local government structures, that would be expected to absorb new responsibilities for refugees under more inclusive models.

## 3.1 Little sign of ‘additionality’ from donors

One of the most positive implications of the CRRF in each of these countries is the consensus that refugee assistance is no longer simply a humanitarian concern. Although the CRRF is the latest of a number of policy processes to have inspired this way of thinking, there is now widespread acknowledgement of the importance of refugee inclusion in national systems and of the need to increase economic development in refugee-hosting areas. There are also signs – especially in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda – that donors are using the CRRF as a guiding framework for their refugee support. However, while donors have signed up to the CRRF principles, predictable funding paths for the CRRF are still not clear.

Humanitarian budgets for refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda are under threat despite solidarity messages from the New York Declaration and the specific ‘goal of closing all funding gaps’.<sup>6</sup> For example, as of June 2019, the Uganda Integrated Refugee Response Plan for 2019 – including all the major UN agencies and NGO programmes – had received just 20% of its needs (UNHCR, 2019d). UNHCR operations in the four countries remain precarious and perennially underfunded. Over the past five years in Kenya, for example, donors covered just 40–54% of UNHCR’s overall needs (O’Callaghan, 2019). In Rwanda, World Food Programme (WFP) shortfalls in 2017 and 2018 prompted protests in one camp that led to the killing of at least 12 refugees by Rwandan security forces (Amnesty

---

5 The importance of tracking funds has been highlighted but the continued challenges in gathering data have also been acknowledged. The relevant indicators are described as ‘conceptually clear. However, either no internationally established methodology or standard is available, or data is not regularly produced by national or international institutions’ (UNHCR, 2019c: 6).

6 New York Declaration Commitments (<https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/declaration>), include ‘Improve the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance to those countries most affected, including through innovative multilateral financial solutions, with the goal of closing all funding gaps’.

International, 2019). As of June 2019, WFP had received funding to cover its cash-based food assistance for only an additional two months (Crawford et al., 2019a). Across all four countries, humanitarian actors raised concerns that donors may use the CRRF process as an excuse to reduce their overall funding commitments, despite development funding not yet being available.

The degree of development assistance in the four countries reviewed is likewise highly questionable, though the funding picture is more nuanced.<sup>7</sup> For the most part, bilateral donors appear to be providing only modest new development assistance to refugees and host communities in the wake of the CRRF apart from some redirection of existing funding. In Uganda, response plans for education and health have not yet attracted anything close to the scale of funding required (Crawford et al., 2019b). Despite this, additional expensive plans – such as a Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan – are being developed, prompting one donor to remark about Uganda: ‘all of it is needed, but not all of it can be funded – so where’s the strategy?’<sup>8</sup>

In Kenya, longer-term funding and approaches have privileged refugees in Kakuma, to the detriment of greater numbers of refugees in other parts of the country. Except for modest European Union (EU) and Dutch contributions, there is little sign of ‘additionality’ from bilateral donors as a result of the CRRF. For Ethiopia, the overall bilateral development funding around CRRF principles is likewise modest and highly fragmented, aimed at a wide variety of sectors, partners and geographic areas. Finally, Rwanda has seen almost no shift in bilateral funding towards CRRF objectives.

The notable exception to this picture of development funding in the region is the new World Bank financing available to governments for refugees and refugee-hosting districts, intended to ease the burden of hosting refugees. These are large commitments. The World Bank in Uganda projects an overall envelope of about \$500 million over the next five to seven years, while in Ethiopia the figure is around \$600

million. As a result of its CRRF commitments, Rwanda has accessed a combined grant/loan of \$60 million. Finally, though Kenya is not currently pursuing funding through the IDA18 sub-window,<sup>9</sup> it is receiving support from the World Bank Group in the form of an International Finance Corporation-managed \$26 million challenge fund.

Although development funding is not intended to substitute either humanitarian funding or response, the fact that it pales in comparison to annual humanitarian budgets is revealing in terms of the commitment to ‘responsibility-sharing’ articulated in the GCR.<sup>10</sup> Given that World Bank IDA18 funding is mostly derived from contributions from member governments, donors are indirectly meeting some of their responsibilities in this way. While World Bank financing is important, it will never address ongoing humanitarian needs or fully finance the transition towards nationally led refugee responses as envisioned in the CRRF. In some cases, it is also not clear to what degree refugees or host communities will benefit from the World Bank funding. Most of the \$550 million Ethiopia Jobs Compact, for example, will be provided in the form of ‘programme for results’ mechanisms, where policy achievements by the Ethiopian government are ‘rewarded’ with financial transfers. While there are important targets relating to refugees – notably the provision of 30,000 work permits within six years – many of the targets relate to wider reforms around national employment creation and regulation. This raises questions regarding the degree to which this World Bank funding will result in meaningful change for refugees.

## 3.2 Faltering shifts towards cost-effective national systems

National governments have taken steps, to varying degrees, to include refugees in national systems. Uganda is the most advanced: refugees are set to be included in its National Development Plans

---

7 Again, the financing picture is muddled in the absence of any funds-tracking system for CRRF-related commitments. Humanitarian budget shortfalls are relatively easy to track, but development funding is often less transparent. It is also difficult to know whether donor development commitments are a response to CRRF needs or, for example, a repurposing of prior commitments.

8 The Uganda Education Plan was launched in September 2018, costed at \$389 million over three years; the Health Plan in January 2019, costed at over \$500 million over five years; and the draft Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan, costed at \$648 million over five years.

9 IDA18 is the International Development Association’s 18th replenishment of funds; the sub-window for refugees and host communities provides \$2 billion of dedicated funding to help low-income countries hosting large numbers of refugees.

10 For example, the roughly \$750 million in post-CRRF development commitments our research uncovered in Ethiopia (of which \$550 million is loans and grants for the Job Compact alone) will average about \$150 million/year in expenditures once the projects are fully up and running. UNHCR alone spent \$146 million in 2018 and overall humanitarian needs for refugees in 2018 were \$618.4 million.

from 2020, and refugees have long benefitted from services such as health and education on a par with nationals. In Rwanda, refugees are obtaining national identity cards, urban refugees will have access to national health systems and refugee children will be integrated into primary and secondary education systems. In Kenya, a new Education Policy aims to integrate refugee children into the national system and refugees are recognised in county development plans. Ethiopia has largely focused on improving quality and access to separate services for refugees, rather than on allowing them to access national services on a par with residents.

Nevertheless, in the three countries where concrete steps have been made to integrate refugees into national systems, the overall picture of financing around the CRRF points to an unreadiness on the part of donors to face up to some of the real costs of responsibility-sharing. Donors continue to call for greater levels of refugee inclusion, but show little appetite to help build up, or sustainably finance, the national systems that are thought to be more cost-effective than humanitarian support.

Both donors and aid agencies are hesitant to entrust refugee management to national governments, which are doing their part in hosting refugees. In Uganda and Kenya, for example, donors have reiterated their reluctance – based on corruption concerns – to channel resources through the government, particularly in the form of budget support. In Uganda, distrust is keenly felt by government officials who cite the lack of funding via the national government as undermining the spirit of donor commitments to the CRRF. In both Kenya and Rwanda, national governments are concerned that they will ultimately be saddled with the long-term cost of refugee education since international partners are not providing sufficient guarantees for long-term support. In Kenya, this has resulted in delays to the release of a national education policy concerning refugee inclusion. Refugees do not benefit from government-led social protection systems in any of the four countries studied – which should certainly be part of the longer-term goal to dismantle and replace costly international interventions – although discussions are more advanced on this issue in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Finally, in the short term, inclusion of refugees in national systems is likely to be more expensive: as capacity and skills are built into national systems, the same costly humanitarian parallel systems will continue to be needed.

### 3.3 Insufficient attention to institutional reform

The reluctance of donors to commit to longer-term, predictable financing of national systems – albeit for sometimes valid accountability reasons – also points to a major gap in the conceptual thinking around the CRRF. The need for a major public sector reform process to facilitate a shift in refugee management away from dedicated government refugee agencies towards a more decentralised approach involving a range of relevant line ministries and sub-national authorities has not been addressed. In each of the countries studied, this is happening slowly at best and usually with no concerted strategy that considers the associated political economy. The refugee agencies in each country – the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in Uganda, the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) in Ethiopia, the Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) in Rwanda and the Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS) in Kenya – are often reluctant to decentralise refugee management, perhaps due to concerns that refugee protection may not be prioritised under such a model, but also because of vested interests in maintaining the status quo. In most cases, they also lack the capacity and political influence to exert cross-governmental change.

Finally, little attention has been paid to the capacity of national systems generally and local government in particular to absorb additional responsibilities. In all four countries studied, the capacity of district and local governments to manage refugee issues is cited by stakeholders as crucial to CRRF success – especially in relation to economic inclusion. In Uganda, for example, district governments are beset with problems: poor planning and management capacity; poor technical capacity and lack of staff in service delivery functions; inability to attract or retain staff in remote areas; and difficulty in resisting political pressure from local politicians. Yet no credible public sector or public administration reform strategy is underway that might help coordinate the issue of growing decentralised authority and capacity-building needs. For instance, in Ethiopia, delivery of services to refugees continues to rest with ARRA, with little to no formal role yet elaborated for how regional or woreda governments, that have responsibility for service delivery in the areas around camps, will be more intimately involved in the allocation and planning of resources.

These challenges around institutional inertia, capacity and self-interest also extend to international aid organisations, raising questions about the ability of the sector to transform. UNHCR continues, albeit reluctantly in some cases, to play a lead role in coordination and self-reliance programming, despite the logic of the CRRF and the protractedness of

refugee crises suggesting the need for greater leadership by development agencies. Many of the traditional humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engaged in refugee response face similar limitations in terms of their experience with development approaches. And the development agencies, for their part, lack the resources or mandate to take on a greater role.



---

# 4 Is self-reliance obtainable for refugees in remote, neglected hosting areas?

There are positive trends in relation to refugee self-reliance in Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda and, in some cases, improvements in the legal framework that support this. The CRRF dialogue in each country has furthered acceptance of the potential economic benefits of hosting refugees and spurred activity around refugee self-reliance. That said, it is difficult to match this rhetoric with the actual prospects for refugee self-reliance in these settings. To some extent, this mismatch may be a legitimate strategy aimed at creating momentum and interest among the multitude of diverse actors needed to support economic development. But the absence in all four countries of an evidence-based, costed analysis of what is realistically required (and no plan of how to fund such actions) for hundreds of thousands of refugees with diverse skills, capacities and experiences to achieve self-reliance is problematic.

## 4.1 Achieving self-reliance in remote, impoverished settings

Strategies for achieving self-reliance in the four countries reviewed place a heavy emphasis on agricultural livelihoods – whether for production or agro-based businesses and jobs. These strategies may be consistent with encouraging refugees to stay in poor, politically marginal camp areas close to the borders of their home countries (and far from host cities), but they are unlikely to help many achieve self-reliance.

Refugee-hosting areas across the four countries are generally among the countries' poorest districts, where the host population often struggle with limited access to basic social services, poor livelihood opportunities and low agricultural production (see for example World Bank, 2018). Poor education levels, few jobs and subsistence-style agriculture production are common and, together with unforgiving agro-climatic conditions, weak market linkages mean that prospects

for sustainable livelihoods for both refugees and their poorer host neighbours are slim. Availability of productive land and sensitivity around land ownership also complicate prospects for sustainable agricultural livelihoods for refugees. Finally, there is little acknowledgement of trends towards urbanisation or the youthful demographic make-up of refugee populations – both of which suggest a large component of refugees are likely, in time, to move to urban areas.

Most worryingly, the emphasis on rural livelihoods in CRRF approaches is not supported by the experiences of refugees, many of whom have been seeking incomes in marginal refugee-hosting areas over many years. Evidence suggests that under Uganda's current refugee approach, refugees do not become more resilient with time (Development Pathways, 2018). This has led to commentators calling for 'a more honest conversation about the Ugandan model' (IRRI, 2018) and greater recognition that self-reliance policies may not lead to self-reliance outcomes (Betts et al., 2019). Long-term refugees in the rural areas of Ethiopia, Rwanda and Kenya – who have had at least some degree of access to wage employment or land for cultivating – also continue to rely heavily on humanitarian aid.

Despite the questionable emphasis on achieving self-reliance in marginal rural areas, and evidence from Uganda and Kenya in particular that refugees in urban areas tend to achieve the greatest levels of self-reliance, urban-based refugees are neglected. Officially, 16% of Kenya's refugees are based in Nairobi and there are an estimated 100,000 urban refugees in Kampala, but there is no strategy to support them. In Rwanda, the lack of assistance in urban areas has helped push more than half of urban refugees back to camps over the past three years (MIDIMAR and UNHCR, 2016; MINEMA, 2019). The irony is that urban refugees who do thrive, for example in Kampala or Addis, often create jobs as well as support family members that remain in settlements or camps (Asfaw Nigusie

and Carver, 2019). The focus on rural livelihoods does not align with the skills and backgrounds of those refugees who have been displaced from urban environments, or of specific refugee groups – for instance, most Somali clans – which have no background or interest in agricultural livelihoods.

## 4.2 Attracting the private sector and creating refugee ‘entrepreneurs’

A lynchpin of refugee self-reliance strategies in the four countries reviewed is faith in the emergence of a vibrant private sector in a position to drive economies in refugee-hosting areas. This includes expectations that private sector actors from the Global North will engage in refugee-hosting areas, which would be almost entirely new. A strong corollary of this illusory, vital private sector is the self-starting refugee entrepreneur who can grow his or her business and ‘graduate’ from humanitarian assistance. This wholly economic perspective flies in the face of evidence and the reality on the ground (Easton-Calabria et al., 2017).

Each of the countries reviewed have experienced promising macro-economic trends that support the argument for private sector-led growth and job creation. However, in the remote areas where refugees live the reality is very different. Here, the private sector is under-developed or unconvinced about the business case for engaging in refugee and host communities. Refugees also usually lack access to the finance necessary for entrepreneurship (Easton-Calabria and Omata, 2016). As a result, refugee entrepreneurs are rarely able to access the larger markets needed to achieve self-reliance, let alone create additional jobs. Without serious consideration of private sector capacity and interest, and what incentives could attract long-term investment, the expectation for the private sector to create jobs and reliable incomes for hundreds of thousands of rural-based refugees is unrealistic.

As one refugee expert in Rwanda noted, there is ‘a massive disconnect between the actual size [and] dynamism of the private sector in refugee hosting districts, which is near non-existent, and the narratives and plans for jobs and businesses’. In Ethiopia, the legacy of the country’s commitment to ‘developmental state’ ideology has constrained private sector development to varying degrees, particularly in the regions where most refugees are located (Clapham, 2017; Asfaw Nigusie and Carver, 2019). Uganda’s draft Livelihoods and Jobs

Response Plan (2019) looks to the private sector to drive growth and create jobs in refugee-hosting districts, but apart from engagement by the World Bank, no attention has yet been paid to creating incentives for larger scale private sector engagement (such as infrastructure investment), ways to encourage private investment, plans to improve the business climate or subsidies for companies that offer financial inclusion or better connectivity to remote communities.

Unsurprisingly in these contexts, small-scale business and entrepreneurial initiatives provide important additional income for refugees, but they do not negate the need for continued humanitarian support. Even when loan repayments for business start-ups or expansions are high and borrowing businesses manage to stay afloat (e.g. one social enterprise in Rwanda works in all the camps and reports that 88% of the businesses it lends to remain viable after three years), only a small percentage of beneficiaries could actually survive without humanitarian assistance.<sup>11</sup>

The business environment for refugees in Kenya is more positive, with an estimated 2,000 businesses in Kakuma camp and around 5,000 in Dadaab; however, many of these remain underdeveloped. A positive outcome of the focus on refugee self-reliance is the more concerted market-based engagement by development actors. However, it remains to be seen whether interventions – such as the \$26 million IFC Kakuma Challenge Fund – can stimulate economic development to the point that refugee businesses are sustainable. Currently, few refugees have been able to diversify their incomes to the extent that they could meet a significant proportion of their basic needs from their own resources. In Kalobeyei, established as a settlement in Turkana County specifically to promote self-reliance, refugees do not fare much better than their counterparts in camps – their prospects remain hampered by a lack of economic opportunities, underdeveloped markets, limited access to basic services (including water and electricity), the inability to engage in agriculture and a lack of capital (Betts, et al., 2018).

## 4.3 Constrained rights and other barriers to achieving self-reliance

### 4.3.1 Right to work but persistence of practical constraints

There have been positive developments in terms of refugee rights in the four countries since the

11 Interview, Kigali May 2019.

New York Declaration in 2016. Perhaps the most significant development is Ethiopia's new Refugee Proclamation, approved in February 2019, that in principle provides a far more liberal regime governing refugees' freedom of movement and right to work, although its interpretation is yet to be fully tested. Rwanda has strengthened documentation for refugees, improving their access to work and financial services. Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia are all signatories to the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led Kampala Declaration in March 2019, committing themselves to reviewing and amending policies and legislation around freedom of movement and access to labour markets (IGAD, 2019).

Despite commitments on the right to work, refugees in the four case study countries continue to face both legal and practical hurdles. Ethiopia has been the least advanced in providing refugees with legal pathways to becoming economic actors in the formal economy, although it is hoped that the new legal framework will alter this (Samuel Hall, 2016; Asfaw Nigusie and Carver, 2019). In Kenya, although refugees have the right to work, practical barriers such as limited freedom of movement, issues with obtaining work permits and restrictions on working above a certain pay grade frustrate this (Samuel Hall, 2018). The situation is similar in Uganda and Rwanda. There is legal ambiguity around work permits in Uganda (Ruauadel and Morrison-Métois, 2017) and limited awareness and respect in urban areas for refugees' right to work and free movement (Monteith et al., 2017). Rwanda is currently taking steps to clarify longstanding uncertainties among both refugees and Rwandans over refugees' right to work, primarily through issuing new national ID cards and accompanying information campaigns.

#### **4.3.2 Freedom of movement but real mobility deterred**

Whether in name or in practice, most refugees in the four study countries continue to live under refugee encampment regimes that are incompatible with the aim of self-reliance (see, for example, IRRI, 2018). Even when freedom of movement is possible, the near-complete tying of humanitarian assistance to camp (or settlement) residency discourages mobility, maintains refugee reliance on humanitarian assistance and even draws urban-based refugees back to camp life. In Rwanda, substantial numbers of urban refugees have sought out camp residency for this reason, notwithstanding the paucity of

economic opportunities in those remote areas. In Uganda, some refugees jointly reside in urban areas, returning to settlements for assistance, or keep part of their family in settlements to remain eligible for aid (O'Callaghan, 2018). Ethiopia and Kenya are even more restrictive and have official restrictions on movement. In Ethiopia, the new Refugee Proclamation provides refugees with freedom of movement, but also indicates that the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) 'may arrange places or areas within which refugee and asylum-seekers may live', leaving space for the country's encampment policy to continue, depending on how the law is interpreted.

#### **4.3.3 Psychosocial and other factors inhibiting self-reliance receive little attention**

As well as bringing a capacity to be the engines of their own economic independence, refugees sometimes also bear psychological and physical burdens that come with exile. These tend to receive little attention under the CRRF approach and may contribute to unrealistic expectations around 'graduating' refugees from humanitarian assistance. In every society a minority requires continued, near-comprehensive social assistance – a percentage that can only be larger amongst refugee populations. The implications for long-term needs and how those might be absorbed into national systems – whether humanitarian or social protection transfers – also receive scant attention in strategies that aim to transform how donors and host countries manage long-term refugee crises.

Despite recognition that self-reliance has social as well as economic dimensions,<sup>12</sup> much less attention has been paid to social or protection issues that may affect refugees' ability to be economically independent. Studies in Kenya, for example, point out that the removal of barriers to self-reliance, including the right to work and freedom of movement, may unlock opportunities for some refugees, particularly the educated and those with entrepreneurial capabilities. But a significant number will remain marginalised as they lack the capacity to engage in employment or economic activities due to special needs and vulnerabilities (Odero and Roop, 2018). Women are particularly disadvantaged. A recent study in Kakuma shows that women are less likely to be entrepreneurs than men and their businesses are more likely to be informal and attract less investment (Betts et al., 2018). UNHCR in Rwanda recognises that some refugees – such as survivors of sexual and gender-

---

12 Self-reliance is defined by UNHCR (2005) as 'the social and economic ability of an individual, a household, or a community to meet essential needs (including protection, food, water, shelter, personal safety, health and education) in a sustainable manner and with dignity'.

based violence – will require greater support and indefinite social protection transfers to achieve self-reliance (UNHCR, 2019a). Even in the best case scenarios, a more realistic estimate of the longer-term costs of refugee self-reliance is needed, which takes into account the different contextual environments, skills, experiences and capacities of refugees and the pace and likelihood of graduation from humanitarian assistance.

Part of this assessment must be the role of social protection schemes for a proportion of refugees that

are unlikely to achieve self-reliance. While there is active consideration of shifting refugees to national health systems across the four study countries, much less attention has been given to how to integrate cash-based responses for refugees into national social protection schemes. Some thinking has started in Kenya and Ethiopia around the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) and the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), respectively, but the question of how to integrate refugees into existing national social protection schemes has received significantly less attention than refugee livelihood projects.



---

# 5 Conclusion: a vision at risk?

The GCR offers an opportunity to adopt more progressive, longer-term approaches to refugee hosting. This is not new: efforts to introduce developmental approaches to protracted refugee situations long predate the GCR and the roll-out of the CRRF. However, with the US abandoning its leadership role on refugees, EU member states continuing efforts to contain refugees beyond its shores, and Middle Eastern countries beginning to push Syrian refugees home, the risk is that this window to change refugee assistance could close in the current climate. With global refugee numbers at a record high (UNHCR, 2019b) and refugee situations extending for decades, the stakes could not be higher. The CRRF and GCR promised tangible changes and the beginning of a transformation in how refugee hosting is managed, but without predictable and long-term development funding that is aligned to clear plans for refugee self-reliance, momentum is liable to fade.

## 5.1 ‘Easing the pressure’ on refugee-hosting countries

By not providing adequate long-term funding and failing to entrust implementation to national actors, donors and aid agencies risk undermining the transformative objectives of the GCR. Hosting governments need confirmation of predictable, long-term funding to take the risky and politically unpopular step of integrating refugees into national systems. The lack of transparent financial tracking systems at country level means it is currently impossible to determine long-term financing allocations. More broadly, easing the pressure on refugee-hosting countries must go beyond financial incentives: larger, third-country resettlement must play a more central role.

### Recommendations around ‘easing the pressure’

- Donors need to increase their funding for truly developmental approaches to refugees and/or find more creative ways to channel money through national systems (e.g. trust funds).
- Donors should re-commit to predictable and sufficient humanitarian funding in the medium

term while CRRF-style solutions to refugee management are being introduced.

- Public sector and institutional reform must be a larger part of donor support to host governments to facilitate moves towards integrating refugee support into national systems – with an emphasis on strengthening the capacity of district and local governments to take responsibility for refugee management.
- Host governments need to accelerate efforts to shift refugee management away from centralised emergency/refugee management offices towards line ministries and district government.

## 5.2 Promoting refugee ‘self-reliance’

In promoting self-reliance in the locations where refugees are currently hosted, the CRRF is perpetuating current systems of encampment and settlement. Discouragement of mobility – legally or in practice – creates fundamental impediments to self-reliance. In addition, the CRRF self-reliance strategies are built around partially invalid assumptions about job and growth prospects in host areas, including around the presence and motives of private sector actors. Little effort is being expended on the potential for refugee livelihoods in urban centres, where over the longer term many refugees are likely to seek and find jobs. Finally, the importance of humanitarian transfers or social protection transfers within refugee self-reliance strategies has been underestimated given the likelihood that many refugees will not be self-reliant in the near future.

### Recommendations around ‘self-reliance’

- Countries rolling out the CRRF or aiming to put the principles of the GCR into action should establish a context-specific understanding of, and strategy towards, self-reliance for the refugee population in that country. This should go beyond consideration of the economic potential of refugees to consider political, social and cultural dimensions that affect the achievement of self-reliance. It should take into account the capacities,

skills and vulnerabilities of different refugee groups, as well as the wider political and social barriers to self-reliance in different contexts.

- CRRF approaches need to include political economy analysis which will involve: (1) a critical analysis of refugee encampment or settlement models, the political drivers that keep them in place and the legal and practical constraints to mobility and employment that refugees face; (2) a more honest assessment of the economic development prospects for refugees in remote, under-served and impoverished refugee-hosting areas; and (3) an acknowledgement of the need to continue providing humanitarian assistance or social protection transfers to a proportion of refugees in the medium and longer term. Some refugees will require these transfers to support

them until they become self-reliant; others may require assistance indefinitely.

- Ongoing advocacy is needed to ensure positive developments for refugees related to freedom of movement and the right to work are realised in practice.
- UNHCR and other assistance providers should work with governments to ensure that humanitarian assistance is not promoting camp or settlement residence. Greater mobility should be facilitated by ensuring that refugees are also eligible for assistance if they choose city life.
- Donors and hosting governments need to invest greater energy in exploring options – through national social transfer programmes – to provide long-term support to refugees for whom self-reliance is impossible.

---

# References

- Amnesty International (2019) *Rwanda: investigate killings of refugees* (<https://reliefweb.int/report/rwanda/rwanda-investigate-killings-refugees>)
- Asfaw Nigusie, A. and Carver, F. (2019) *The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: progress in Ethiopia*. London: ODI
- Betts A., Costello C. and Zaun N. (2017) *A fair share: refugees and responsibility sharing*. Stockholm: Delmi
- Betts, A., Geervliet, R., MacPherson, C., Omata, N., Rodgers, C. and Sterck, O. (2018) *Self-Reliance in Kalobeyei? Socio-economic outcomes for refugees in north-west Kenya*. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre
- Betts, A., Chaara, I., Omata, N. and Sterck, O. (2019) *Refugee economies in Uganda: What difference does the self-reliance model make?* Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre
- Clapham, C. (2017) 'The Ethiopian developmental state' *Third World Quarterly* DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2017.1328982
- Crawford, N., Holloway, K. and Lowe, C. (2019a) *The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: progress in Rwanda*. London: ODI
- Crawford, N., O'Callaghan S., Holloway, K. and Lowe, C. (2019b) *The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: progress in Uganda*. London: ODI
- Development Pathways (2018) *Analysis of refugee vulnerability in Uganda and recommendations for improved targeting of food assistance* (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/65880>)
- Easton-Calabria, E and Omata, N. (2016) *Micro-finance in refugee contexts*. RSC Working Paper. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre
- Easton-Calabria, E., Krause, U., Field, J., Tiwari, A., Mookherjee, Y., Wake, C., ... and Leeson, K. (2017) 'Refugee self-reliance: moving beyond the marketplace'. RSC Research in Brief 7, October
- IGAD – Intergovernmental Authority on Development (2019) *Kampala Declaration on jobs, livelihoods and self-reliance for refugees and host communities in the IGAD region* (<https://igad.int/attachments/article/2090/ENGLISH%20DECLARATION%20SIGNED.pdf>)
- IRRI – International Refugee Rights Initiative (2018) *Uganda's refugee policies: the history, the politics, the way forward* (<http://refugee-rights.org/uganda-refugee-policies-the-history-the-politics-the-way-forward>)
- Koran, L. (2016) 'Obama: Refugee crisis is test of our humanity'. CNN, 20 September (<https://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/20/politics/obama-refugees-summit/index.html>)
- MIDIMAR and UNHCR – Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2016) *Economic inclusion of refugees in Rwanda*. Kigali: MIDIMAR and UNHCR ([www.unhcr.org/rw/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/02/Economic-Inclusion-of-Refugees-in-Rwanda-Final-Version.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/rw/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/02/Economic-Inclusion-of-Refugees-in-Rwanda-Final-Version.pdf))
- MINEMA – Ministry in Charge of Emergency Management (2019) *Strategic plan for refugee inclusion (2019–2024)*. Kigali: Government of Rwanda ([http://minema.gov.rw/fileadmin/user\\_upload/STRATEGIC\\_PLAN\\_FOR\\_REFUGEE\\_INCLUSION\\_2019-2024.pdf](http://minema.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/STRATEGIC_PLAN_FOR_REFUGEE_INCLUSION_2019-2024.pdf))
- Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2019) *Draft jobs and livelihoods integrated response plan for refugee hosting districts in Uganda*. Kampala: Government of Uganda
- Monteith, W., Lwasa, S., Nsangi, G., Sseviiri, H. and Byarugaba, D. (2017) *Upholding the rights of urban refugees in Uganda*. IIED Briefing. London: IIED
- O'Callaghan, S. (2018) *Are integrated services a step towards integration in Uganda?* Nairobi: ReDSS
- O'Callaghan, S., Manji, F., Holloway, K. and Lowe, C. (2019) *The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework: progress in Kenya*. London: ODI

Odero, V. and Roop, S. (2018) *Dreams deterred: opportunities to promote self-reliance for Somali refugee youth in Kenya*. Nairobi: International Rescue Committee

Romero, L. (2019) 'The UN's latest report on refugees has one tiny bit of good news'. Quartz, 19 June (<https://qz.com/1647910/the-latest-unhcr-refugee-report-has-a-tiny-bit-of-good-news/>)

Ruadel, H. and Morrison-Métois, S. (2017) Responding to refugee crises: lessons from evaluations in Ethiopia and Uganda as countries of destination. OECD Development Co-operation Working Papers 38. Paris: OECD Publishing

Sanghi, A., Onder, H. and Vemuru, V. (2016) *Yes in my backyard? The economics of refugees and their social dynamics in Kakuma, Kenya*. Washington DC: World Bank Group

Samuel Hall (2016) *Review of durable solutions initiatives in East and Horn of Africa: good practices, challenges and opportunities in the search of durable solutions*. Commissioned by ReDSS, DRC. <http://samuelhall.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ReDSS-SH-Report-Final.pdf>

Samuel Hall (2018) *Mid-term review of the EU Trust Fund Regional Development and Protection Programme in Kenya: support to the development of Kalobeyei. Final report, December*. Nairobi: Samuel Hall

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2005) *Handbook for self-reliance*. Geneva: UNHCR ([www.unhcr.org/44bf3d212.html](http://www.unhcr.org/44bf3d212.html))

UNHCR (2018) 'Global trends: forced displacement in 2018' ([www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/](http://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2018/))

UNHCR (2019a) *Rwanda country Refugee Response Plan 2019–2020*. Kigali: UNHCR (<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/69632.pdf>)

UNHCR (2019b) *Global trends, forced displacement 2018*. Geneva: UNHCR

UNHCR (2019c) *Global Compact on Refugees indicator framework* ([www.unhcr.org/5cf907854.pdf](http://www.unhcr.org/5cf907854.pdf))

UNHCR (2019d) *Performance snapshot: Uganda refugee response plan (RRP) 2019–2020*. (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/71035>)

World Bank (2018) *Social assessment report: Kenya Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project (KDRDIP) additional financing*

Zetter, R. (2014) *Reframing displacement crises as development opportunities*. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre ([www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/pn-reframing-displacement-crisis-2014.pdf](http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/files-1/pn-reframing-displacement-crisis-2014.pdf))



# HPG

## Humanitarian Policy Group

---

The Humanitarian Policy Group is one of the world's leading teams of independent researchers and communications professionals working on humanitarian issues. It is dedicated to improving humanitarian policy and practice through a combination of high-quality analysis, dialogue and debate.

---

Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce materials from this publication but, as copyright holders, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. This and other HPG reports are available from [www.odi.org/hpg](http://www.odi.org/hpg).

This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

Humanitarian Policy Group  
Overseas Development Institute  
203 Blackfriars Road  
London SE1 8NJ  
United Kingdom

Tel.: +44 (0) 20 7922 0300  
Fax.: +44 (0) 20 7922 0399  
Email: [hpgadmin@odi.org](mailto:hpgadmin@odi.org)  
Website: [odi.org/hpg](http://odi.org/hpg)

Cover photo: Making bricks at Bidi Bidi refugee settlement in Uganda. © Fundacja PCPM

