

The GLOCEPS

— Daily Influential Brief —

Research and Analysis in Defence and Security

Protracted refugee situations in Africa: Evaluating ongoing solutions to the crisis

Dr. John Mwangi

Environmental degradation continues to impact negatively on sustainable development with some of the consequences being the silent but painful subsidence of a number of cities worldwide. Our Research Fellow for Development, Michael Owuor, explores the possibility of land subsidence in Nairobi City within the context of uncontrolled excavation activities.

Dr. K.O. Asembo, Editor-in-Chief



Tens of thousands fled the DRC during fighting between rebels and government troops. EFE/Dai Kurowowa

Source: <https://theconversation.com/study-shows-why-african-refugees-stay-put-despite-end-to-conflict-at-home-113131>

Introduction

As the global community marks the World Refugee Day on June 20th 2021, time is ripe to review solutions to remedy the protracted refugee situation in Africa. The refugee crisis in the continent appears to be growing, necessitating policy conversations on how to collectively share the burden. This crisis is compounded by a variety of factors including state collapse, conflict, political violence, and natural disasters. An

ongoing conflict in Northern Mozambique in the Calbo Delgado region by armed groups has created a humanitarian crisis resulting in the displacement of thousands from their homes. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Global Trends Report for 2019, the refugee population in East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes stood at 4,388, 700.





The context

This paper builds on the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) framework as affirmed by the UN General Assembly on 17th December 2018. The GCR framework, while not legally binding, seeks to protect and support refugees, including their host countries and communities. It rallies the UN member states for international cooperation for the plight of refugees. The GCR calls for predictable and equitable burden sharing and responsibility across the UN member states

and relevant stakeholders. The objectives of the global compact are to ease pressures on host countries, increase refugee self-reliance, expand access to third country solutions and support conditions in countries of origin for return to safety and dignity. This paper evaluates the three durable solutions for refugees and appraises gaps that would be relevant for policy makers, governments, international organizations and relevant stakeholders.

Taking stock of protracted refugee situations

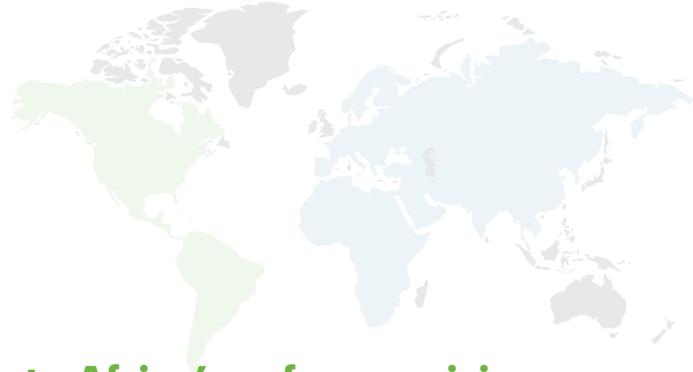
A contemporary reality is that a significant refugee population remains in limbo without any durable solutions in sight. This phenomenon is conceptualized as Protracted Refugee Situations (PRS). They are debated in policy and scholarship as contexts where at least 25,000 refugees of a similar nationality have lived in a host country for at least 5 consecutive years without durable solutions. Globally, the total numbers of individuals in protracted refugee situations stood at 15.7 million according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees UNHCR Global Trends Report for 2019. These numbers are spread in 32 countries and 51 protracted refugee situations involving thousands of Somali and South Sudanese refugees in Kenya, among others.

Kenya, in particular, has entered into an agreement with the UNHCR in early 2021 to find durable solutions for approximately 430,000 refugees in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps. This shall culminate with the closure of the two camps by June 2022. A roadmap agreed by the Kenyan government and the UNHCR references the Global Compact on

Refugees (GCR) that acknowledges that refugee camps do not fit in the matrix of durable solutions for forced displacement. These solutions include third country resettlement, repatriation and local integration. Refugees living in limbo means that in the absence of any of the solutions, their human rights and freedoms remain at stake. While there would be no one size fits all approach to remedy this situation, all too often national security considerations have come to matter.

Security analysts have argued in the case of Kenya and other jurisdictions that a section of refugees present security risks anchored around threats of violent extremism, logistic planning for terrorism, human trafficking and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. South Africa remains a favourite destination due to her large economy. Yet, recent migrants including Somalis have been subjected to xenophobic attacks that are primarily fuelled by economics and political discourses. While these are significant threats, there is need for better policies and scholarly conversations on overcoming protracted refugee situations.





Durable solutions to Africa's refugee crisis

These solutions are debated within three main prescriptions that have been offered to overcome a protracted refugee crisis.



Dadaab Refugee camp

Source: <https://www.dw.com/en/kenya-to-close-2-refugee-camps-next-year/a-57382561>

Resettlement

While third country resettlement remains critical to finding solutions to the refugee crisis more burden sharing by the global community is needed. Resettlement to high income countries has not rapidly kept with the growing refugee burden. At the height of Covid 19 pandemic, refugee resettlement processes have slowed leaving refugees in a quagmire. This has been complicated further by security concerns and shifts in government policies of host countries. For instance, during the Trump administration in the US, a ban on refugees and migration from Muslim majority countries had a negative effect on resettlement.

Related challenges of resettlement have included layers of bureaucracies, multiple and overlapping processes. Transparency and partial knowledge around certain sections of resettlement processes has also impacted the resettlement on the continent. Refugees have to navi-

gate between government departments, the UNHCR and foreign embassies to facilitate their resettlement.

In the spirit of GCR, there is need to fast track resettlement to ensure human dignity of refugees. High income countries ought to take in more refugees as a proactive strategy. This would help offset the heavy burden that host African states and others in Global South shoulder. Whereas aid is provided to the hosting states, this is not enough and as such resettlement should prioritize greater sharing of the burden and collective responsibility than provided. Globally, only a select countries take up this burden. There is an ever growing need in light of burden sharing for more states to take up refugees' resettlement. Furthermore, in the present, resettlement has only targeted below one percent of the global refugee population.





Repatriation

While repatriation to one's home country remains feasible in a post-conflict phase, longer term state stabilization interventions would be required. A key consideration in this respect is to examine the root causes of conflict that led to displacement. Indigenous methods of conflict resolution could be tapped in African contexts as part of sustainable peace building processes. This could be supported by dialogue among conflict parties as a bridge to peace. While multiple stakeholders may offer support for relocation, skills transfer among others, there is need

to reflect on the circumstances that would be ripe prior to repatriation. However, repatriation needs to be voluntary and in a context where it is safe to return. These would be in situations that returnees would be free from physical or psychosocial harm and, in specific contexts, the required support for livelihoods and development upon return, as anticipated in the GCR. The international community and relevant stakeholders require strategic partnerships in financial resources and technical expertise around issues on repatriation.



Description: Somalia women at Kakuma Refugee Camp
Source: rippleeffectimages.org





Local integration

Host states have been increasingly called upon to find a range of initiatives and policy options to help integrate refugees in the community. These options could include naturalization and residency, including skills transfer and livelihoods provision. While this proposal touches on sovereignty of states, this remains a viable option for protracted refugee situations. Tanzania for example has made modest progress with naturalization of refugees including of Somali Bantus who sought safety in the 1990s. Tanzania in the same period also offered citizenship for up to 170,000 Burundian refugees that had resided in Tanzania since 1972.

States taking up this option need to engage in integration processes such as language and vocational skills training. Integration would also need to counter negative perceptions around refugees who in many contexts are framed in negative light. Refugees in multiple contexts are framed as security risks and have been associat-

ed with threats of terrorism, small arms and light weapons proliferation. In the case of Somali refugees in Kenya, these perceptions and constructions of their identity are linked to pre-colonial and post-colonial histories that include the secessionist Shifita war of 1963-1967.

The memories and apprehensions of the Kenyan state on the Somali identity has continued to shape refugees' policies. In contexts such as Kenya and South Africa, refugees have transformed this negative narrative to engage in productive business ventures in host countries. These businesses are in part aided by remittances and transnational connections. These positive narrative signals the potentials that local integration can offer. Refugee integration across the continent has to navigate bureaucratic policies, the political climate, security considerations, and external pressures around normative commitments for refugee protection.



Source: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/what-does-the-climate-refugees-judgment-mean-for-africans>





Prospects

As a strategy to overcome the protracted refugee situation in Africa, there is need for sustained conversations on how to collectively share the refugee burden across varied stakeholders. One of the critical intervention points required is that high income countries should shoulder more burden especially on refugee hosting. Nevertheless, the UNHCR Global Trends 2019 Report indicate that high income countries only hosted 17 percent of this burden while low income countries hosted approximately 20 percent per annum. In line with some of the suggestions contained in the Global Compact for Refugees (GCR), the global community should innovate and find solutions to overcome conflict. This search for solutions will need to account for related factors that drive the refugee movement such as climate change, environmental degradation, and natural disasters.



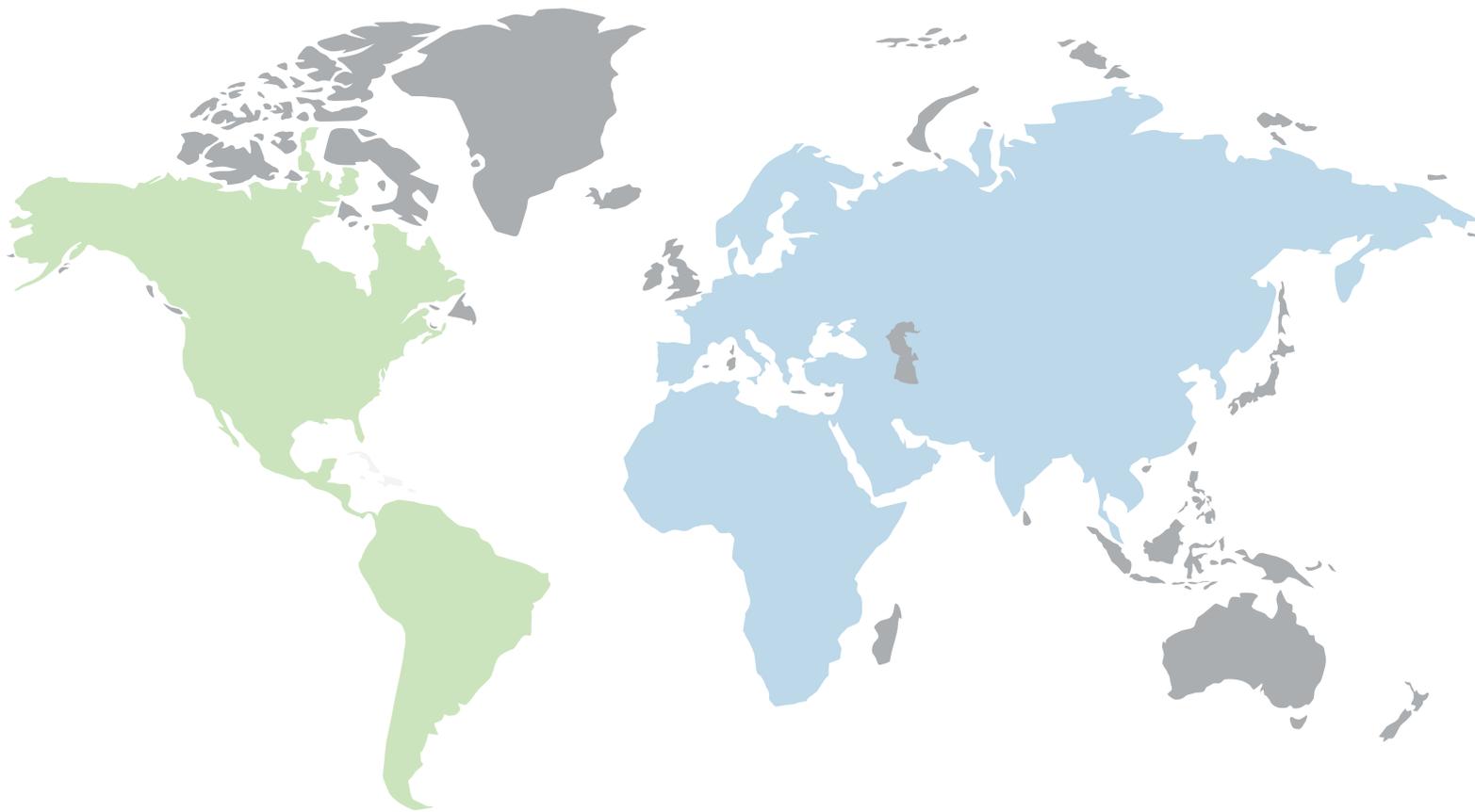
*A child drinks from the tap of a UNHCR water tank at a refugee camps | Photo: Imago/ZUMA Press/G.Cloarec
Source: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/15140/where-do-african-refugees-go>*

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