

Policy Briefing

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Return and (Re)Integration in Fragile Contexts: The Experiences of Somali Returnees

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Executive summary

Given the increasing number of people returning to Somalia and the political, social and economic consequences thereof, the reintegration of these Somali refugees, rejected asylum seekers, deportees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) becomes an important policy issue. This policy briefing presents policy recommendations based on the results of a pilot study conducted in Kismayo, Somalia. The results illustrate the effects of climate change on the conditions of return, which subsequently pose reintegration challenges to returnees in Somalia. These findings raise vital policy issues in addressing the challenges of displacement and forced migration in the Horn of Africa. Climate change may undermine sustainable reintegration by reducing access to, and the quality of, natural resources that are vital to sustain livelihoods.

Introduction

The return of migrants and refugees to their country of origin has become a major political issue worldwide. A pilot study conducted in Kismayo, Somalia and Nairobi, Kenya was designed to gain insights into the context, and to assess the feasibility and validity of the data collection instruments informing the main study. Although the findings are not representative of the whole sample, the results provide significant insights into the reintegration experiences of Somali returnees.

The pilot study was conducted in July 2019 and entailed qualitative primary data collection through semi-structured interviews, expert interviews and review of policy documents. In total, 20 interviews were conducted with returnees (from Kenya, Djibouti, Yemen and Libya) and key informants from the government and international organisations. The questionnaire covered three migration phases: experience before migration, experience in host country and post-return experience focusing on return decision and current challenges to reintegration. In addition, the questionnaire collected data on demographic and contextual aspects. The findings point to some critical factors that affect the sustainable reintegration of returnees. These include environmental factors, lack of livelihood opportunities, lack of access to clean water and sanitation and insecurity.

Background

In recent times, the number of migrants returning to the Horn of Africa region has steadily increased, thus presenting policy challenges for international cooperation. Moreover, the increase in asylum claims in Europe in 2015 has placed greater emphasis on the return of rejected asylum seekers and irregular migrants to their country of origin. This was demonstrated in policy discussions between African and European leaders during the Valletta Summit on Migration in November 2015. The outcome of the summit was an action plan with the return, readmission and reintegration of migrants – one of five key areas of cooperation.

In an attempt to support migrants facing restrictive immigration policies, the EU and other Western donors are using official development assistance to fund return and reintegration activities, with the aim of helping returning migrants to try to overcome the challenges they face upon return in Somalia. For example, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa implements the EUR 50 million RE-INTEG project, whose specific objective is to support the sustainable (re)integration of refugees, returnees and IDPs in Somalia by creating economic and employment opportunities.¹ RE-INTEG also supports the government of

¹ European Commission, “RE-INTEG: Enhancing Somalia’s Responsiveness to the Management and Reintegration of Mixed Migration Flows”, https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/horn-africa/somalia/re-integ-enhancing-somalias-responsiveness-management-and-reintegration_en.

Somalia and local authorities in the development and implementation of policies and strategies for IDPs, refugees and returnees.

No overall definition for sustainable return exists, but it generally denotes a longer-term, contextual approach, and a broader understanding of return to include political, social and economic dimensions. According to the International Organization for Migration, reintegration is defined as the process of re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a person into a group, such as a migrant into the society of his/her country of origin.² Since refugees return in different conditions and to different contexts, it is important to distinguish between various dimensions of reintegration. Most studies address mainly three dimensions – economic, social and political.³ Other dimensions include the cultural, legal or psychosocial.

When returning to their country of origin after a protracted displacement, refugees may be confronted with an environment that is completely new or different in many ways. The process of reintegration is influenced not only by the situation in the country of origin but also by the experience before migration, experience during migration, and the return experience itself, as well as socio-economic and contextual factors (including the environment and structural capacities).

Returns to Somalia

Return migration to Somalia has increased in recent years. Between 2014 and 2019 over 85 000 Somalis were returned from Kenya to Somalia through the 2013 Tripartite Agreement between the UN Refugee Agency and the governments of Kenya and Somalia.⁴ Others include deportees and rejected asylum seekers from EU member states, the US, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, as well as individuals returning of their own volition. The majority of returnees from Kenya, over 60%, head to Kismayo. It is the third-largest city in Somalia and the administration centre of the semi-autonomous Jubaland state. The city is located on the coast of the Indian Ocean near the mouth of the Juba River. Kismayo is also experiencing an influx of IDPs, most of whom have been displaced from their villages owing to constant attacks by al-Shabaab or drought. They go to the IDP resettlement camps in urban areas for protection. In response to the influx, the Jubaland administration has allocated land for permanent resettlements in Kismayo that host refugees, IDPs and local community members in need of humanitarian aid.

2 International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on Migration*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: IOM), 2011.

3 Khalid Koser and Katie Kuschminder, *Comparative Research on the Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration of Migrants* (Geneva: IOM), 2015.

4 UN Refugee Agency, "Figures at a Glance", <https://www.unhcr.org/ke/figures-at-a-glance>.

Factors affecting sustainable reintegration in Somalia

- There is a lack of meaningful employment opportunities for returnees with formal education or vocational training. Returnees from the Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya have fared better than other refugees, having gained skills during their exile, but they all face struggles in accessing economic opportunities.
- Returnees interviewed said insecurity inhibited their ability to move freely within the camp. Women-headed households with children were also vulnerable to sexual violence when moving in and out of the camps in search of livelihood opportunities.
- There is a lack of access to clean and safe drinking water. The available water is saline and not suitable for drinking and returnees have to dig deep into their pockets to buy clean drinking water.
- The climate in southern Somalia is hot and semi-arid, with extremely hot weather in Kismayo. This also affects livelihood opportunities, especially for women. Women respondents working in the construction industry cited harsh working conditions as a result of exposure to high temperatures.
- Returnees face environmental pollution owing to a lack of proper waste management systems, often leading to water pollution and the outbreak of waterborne diseases.
- The new Kismayo settlement is located in sloppy and sandy terrain. The returnees interviewed said the housing provided was not sizeable enough for their extended families.

Droughts and floods pose the most severe hazards to the country, limiting the accessibility of basic services and the creation of livelihoods. In addition, water scarcity drives up water prices and increases the likelihood of conflict and outbreak of waterborne diseases, thus hampering the returnees' reintegration. Joint efforts by the Somali government and international agencies are needed to prevent further displacement and strengthen access to basic services and livelihood opportunities.

Opportunities for addressing arising protection gaps

The links between climate change and human mobility have been recognised and addressed in many global processes held in recent years. For instance, the Global Compact

for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM)⁵ articulates a comprehensive response to address the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation. The GCM notes that in the event of climate change and environmental degradation, climate change adaptation measures need to be prioritised in the country of origin to minimise the drivers of migration. Although the GCM only gives recommendations, it provides an opportunity for national governments to address climate change conditions in migration policies.

The Global Compact on Refugees⁶ (GCR) also addresses displacement in the context of climate change and environmental degradation. The GCR is made up of two substantive parts: the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) – a country-level framework and plan of action primarily aimed at refugee self-reliance and local integration – and a broader Programme of Action, which outlines principles for responsibility-sharing and areas in need of support. In Somalia, the CRRF is implemented through a regional approach – the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions adopted on 25 March 2017 by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's member states (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda). It was initially designed to address the lack of solutions available in terms of the displacement of Somali refugees, but has now been expanded to include all refugees in the region with annual follow-up stocktaking meetings to discuss progress.⁷ One of its objectives is to create an enabling environment for the safe, sustainable and voluntary return and reintegration of Somali refugees. To operationalise the CRRF, Somalia launched the National Action Plan on Durable Solutions for Somali Returnees and IDPs in March 2018, which remains the main framework for the implementation of the GCR in the country.⁸

Recommendations

- Programmes that promote the sustainable reintegration of returnees should consider mainstreaming environmental dimensions during the design phase. For instance, programmes seeking to improve their entrepreneurial capacities can focus on providing self-employment or market opportunities with an emphasis on green jobs⁹ such as waste collection and recycling. The diaspora community should also be encouraged to transfer technology and skills to support climate-resilient local economies.

5 Global Compact for Migration, "Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration", July 13, 2018, https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180713_agreed_outcome_global_compact_for_migration.pdf.

6 UNHCR, "Global Compact on Refugees", <https://www.unhcr.org/excom/unhcrannual/5ba3a5d44/report-united-nations-high-commissioner-refugees-part-ii-global-compact.html>.

7 Intergovernmental Authority on Development, "Communiqué of the Second Inter-Ministerial Stocktaking Meeting on the Nairobi Declaration and Action Plan", <https://igad.int/press-release/2237-communique-of-the-second-inter-ministerial-stocktaking-meeting-on-the-nairobi-declaration-and-action-plan>.

8 UNHCR, "The Global Compact on Refugees: Somalia", November 2019, <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/somalia>.

9 According to the International Labour Organization, jobs are green when they help reduce negative environmental impact and ultimately lead to environmentally, economically and socially sustainable enterprises and economies.

- Programmes should ensure a broad approach to climate adaptation. Climate adaptation should be mainstreamed in government-led efforts to address displacement, including the developmental priorities of durable solutions for the displaced, as highlighted in the new National Development Plan (2020-2024) and the National Policy on Refugee-Returnees and IDPs.
- Programmes should ensure climate-sensitive peacebuilding. Efforts by the international community to mitigate conflicts and ensure regional peace and security need to become more climate-sensitive. In addition, peacebuilding actors should not only focus on the causes of the conflict but also incorporate insights from conflict analysis to inform climate adaptation.

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Cover image

Aerial view of Kismayo, a port city in southern Somalia, taken on 4 October 2012. (Flickr/AMISOM Public Information)

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