



POLICY BRIEF

Promises and challenges of Ethiopia's refugee policy reform

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Ethiopia's implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework is central to expanding refugees' socio-economic opportunities. This is a major policy change. For decades, the country's policy required most refugees to live in camps with limited access to education and employment. Host communities and the government stand to benefit from the policy shift. But this will not be without its challenges.

Key findings

- ▶ The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) will expand socio-economic opportunities for refugees including wage-earning employment, local integration for those in protracted situations and better access to education and life outside of refugee camps.
- ▶ The multifaceted nature of the CRRF poses a serious coordination challenge between and among stakeholders. A National CRRF Steering Committee has been established to drive the process.
- ▶ Host community consultations have not been conducted at the expected level, besides national consultations, regional launches and mass media broadcasts. Serious and candid consultations needed to be held with relevant communities before implementation of the CRRF.
- ▶ Industrial parks might not substantially contribute to making refugees and host communities self-sufficient, unless critical issues such as low wages and favourable working conditions are addressed.
- ▶ In Gambella and Somali regional states, there are sensitivities over long-staying refugees, though at different levels. In Gambella, multiple layers of tension exist, involving different ethnic groups, environmental pressure and historical tensions. In the Somali regional state of Ethiopia, understanding clan dynamics is a critical prerequisite to successful implementation of the CRRF.

Recommendations

- ▶ Strong host community and public outreach programmes should be designed to explain the benefits and challenges of the CRRF. The public needs to clearly understand the link between the presence of refugees and the benefits they bring with them, including the much-needed funding to implement common socio-economic amenities. At the same time, challenges associated with hosting refugees should be explained and properly spelled out.
- ▶ The job creation component of the CRRF should be accompanied by a plan that enables refugees and host communities to earn enough to cover their basic needs. Ethiopia needs to adopt a minimum wage policy to meet the increasing cost of living for both host and refugee communities.
- ▶ The industrial parks and irrigation schemes can only employ a limited number of refugees and host community members. Providing start-up capital, and possibly start-up kits for those with technical and vocational training such as carpentry, metal work and electricity, should be considered.
- ▶ The CRRF's implementation should follow a conflict-sensitive approach, considering three key areas: understanding the context of implementation; existing factors that affect implementation; and intentional/unintentional impacts on existing tensions. This helps develop a deeper understanding of the two-way interaction between expanding refugee's socio-economic opportunities and the impact on host communities and local administrations. It also helps forecast the result of the intervention and plan how to maximise benefits, while minimising damage.

Introduction

Ethiopia is the second largest refugee hosting country in Africa, sheltering more than 900 000 refugees, mainly from South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea.¹ Drivers of forced displacement range from conflict in South Sudan to economic deprivation and open-ended military service in Eritrea, in addition to conflict and conflict-induced food insecurity in Somalia.

Ethiopia grants *prima facie*² recognition to most asylum seekers from neighbouring countries. Others have to undergo individual refugee status determination³ by the Ethiopian government. The country's 2004 National Refugee Proclamation is based on the United Nations 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 Refugee Convention of the Organisation of African Unity.

However, Ethiopia has made qualified reservations to some of the articles of the 1951 Convention, which limit the right of refugees to education and access to wage-earning employment. Thus, Ethiopia's refugee policy requires refugees to live in camps, except those who qualify for the Out of Camp Policy (OCP).

This situation is changing as Ethiopia explores options to include refugees in its national development plans, based on the pledges it made in September 2016 at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees and Migrants in New York.⁴ The pledges include providing work permits to qualifying refugees; facilitating local integration for those in protracted situations; earmarking a percentage of jobs in industrial parks; and giving refugees access to irrigable land.

These pledges will be implemented through the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which can offer great benefits to refugees, host communities and the government. But it also presents significant challenges.

Comprehensive Refugees Response Framework

The CRRF was born out of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, adopted in New York in September 2016. The declaration is considered a milestone in global solidarity to improve protection of people on the move, refugees and migrants. The declaration sets out the key elements of the CRRF.

The CRRF in Ethiopia

In February 2017, Ethiopia became one of the few countries in the world⁵ to pilot the CRRF, with a subsequent nationwide launch of the framework in November 2017.⁶ The CRRF serves as a means to implement the nine pledges and envisions bringing durable solutions to refugees and support host communities by combining humanitarian aid and development.

The pledges are grouped into six thematic areas: education, social and basic services, out of camp policy, documentation, work and livelihoods, and local integration.⁷

> 900 000

NUMBER OF REFUGEES
HOSTED IN ETHIOPIA

Revision of the 2004 Refugee Proclamation

The ongoing revision of Ethiopia's 2004 Refugee Proclamation is central to the implementation of the CRRF. The revised law is expected to grant refugees a wide range of rights, many of them articulated in the pledges such as the right to work (K1, CWP).⁸ This will be a big step in overcoming legal hurdles to refugees' right to work, freedom of movement and opportunities to be self-reliant. It is expected to be accompanied by implementation regulations and directives.

Links between CRRF and Growth and Transformation Plan II

Creating a strong nexus between humanitarian aid and development is central to the CRRF process.⁹ To achieve this, the country is working towards linking the CRRF with its Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II) (K1). The GTP II provides Ethiopia's development road map that aims to transform the country into an industrialised, middle-income nation by 2025.

Creating a strong nexus between humanitarian aid and development is central to the CRRF process

The drive to improve the lives of host communities through multilateral stakeholder engagement is the starting point for the linkages between the CRRF and GTP II (K1). As part of the effort to establish these linkages, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation (MoFEC) has been brought on board as part of the CRRF governance structure.

Implementation of the CRRF

A National Comprehensive Refugee Response Strategy has been drafted to guide the implementation of the CRRF in Ethiopia.¹⁰ Among other things, this aims to ensure refugees become self-reliant through their socio-economic integration in the country. Gradually phasing out the camp-based assistance model is also part of the strategy.

In the context of Ethiopia, the socio-economic integration¹¹ of refugees refers to offering work permits to facilitate refugees' self-reliance through wage-earning or self-employment opportunities, and through increased access to education and health services. It also includes issuing temporary residence permits. However, it excludes naturalisation and political participation.

Benefits of socio-economic integration of refugees

Aspects of the CRRF implementation related to the socio-economic integration of refugees present clear benefits to refugees themselves, host communities and the government.

Documentation

Providing civil documentation to refugees is one of Ethiopia's pledges. Registration of refugees' life events including birth, marriage, divorce and death, started in October 2017. This will lead to refugees benefiting from



ETHIOPIA PLEDGES TO
GIVE REFUGEES CIVIL
DOCUMENTATION

a wide range of rights, such as having identity cards, bank accounts and driving licences. The process will also address the protection challenges of some urban refugees who are already working informally.¹²

In 2017, Ethiopia also initiated the Biometric Information Management System (BIMS), a country-wide refugee registration infrastructure.¹³

Provision of work permits

Providing work permits to refugees is one of the major policy shifts related to refugee protection in Ethiopia. This will help refugees benefit from more wage-earning opportunities, such as employment in industrial parks or irrigated agriculture. It will also encourage refugees to start businesses, which could create job opportunities for other refugees and Ethiopians (K4; K5).¹⁴

Expanding the Out-of-Camp Policy

Extending the existing Out of Camp Policy (OCP), which currently only benefits Eritrean refugees, to include 10% of all refugees in the country, is another of Ethiopia's pledges. Its implementation is expected to promote the freedom of movement of refugees and provide access to better opportunities to ultimately help refugees become self-reliant (K5).

Expanding education opportunities

Expanding education opportunities was one of Ethiopia's pledges.¹⁵ Between 2017-2018, pre-school, primary, secondary and tertiary enrolments increased by 29%, 37%, 102%, and 43% respectively.¹⁶

The plan to have combined schools will also benefit the host community members

Education is one of the key mechanisms to achieve socio-economic integration of refugees as children of both communities go to the same schools, in most cases, interact on a daily basis. Such interaction is not limited to the students but extends to their families as well. As most of the refugee schools have better infrastructure, the plan to have combined schools will also benefit the host community members.¹⁷

Industrial parks

Ethiopia is finalising preparations to start construction of industrial parks worth US\$500 million,¹⁸ benefitting refugees and host communities through funding from the European Investment Bank and UK Department for International Development (DFID). Sites for the parks have been identified (K1) and refugees' skills profiles assessment was conducted. Once completed, the parks are expected to create up to 100 000 jobs, of which 30% will be available for refugees.

Benefits to host communities

'Host community' refers to nationals of the country of asylum who reside in close proximity to refugees.¹⁹ The CRRF's holistic approach of simultaneously benefitting host communities and refugees is one of its most important features.

It recognises the burden that hosting refugees may place on host communities. This is particularly relevant in Ethiopia, since the majority of the host communities themselves live in extreme poverty. The CRRF is also expected to create employment opportunities for host communities through the industrial parks and irrigated agriculture.

Benefits to the government

Implementation of the CRRF will bring different benefits to the government. First, it will expand access to international finance. For example, the World Bank pledged US\$202 million under its Economic Opportunities Program to support Ethiopia's efforts to provide economic opportunities for refugees and Ethiopians.²⁰

Similarly, the European Union (EU) is expected to provide €20 million²¹ and DFID £80 million.²² Such development support will enable the government to build better physical infrastructure that benefits refugees and host communities (K1).

Second, it could contribute towards Ethiopia's drive to reset its image. Its refugees' response mechanism contribute to the country's growing reputation as a regional leader (K2).²³ UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi has described the country's refugee protection regime as 'a shining example of African hospitality'.²⁴

Implementation of the CRRF can also contribute towards enhancing Ethiopia's political negotiating power,

especially with European partners. The European Commission in 2016 included Ethiopia among 16 'priority' countries.²⁵ The reason for its inclusion can be Ethiopia's being one of the few stable countries in the troubled Horn of Africa region, with a population of 100 million and at the epicentre of movements of people within and out of Africa. It is a transit and destination country for mixed flows of refugees and migrants and is a source of migrants itself. Against this background, the country's planned socio-economic integration of refugees is in line with EU's goal of keeping refugees in countries of first asylum.²⁶

It could also potentially enhance the country's negotiating power in the Horn of Africa region. Refugees who have experienced Ethiopian hospitality may become ambassadors for the country when they eventually return home or find a new home elsewhere (CWP).

Implementation challenges

The implementation of the CRRF, especially those aspects related to the socio-economic integration of refugees, may face various challenges, even if all the required financial and technical support is provided.

Creating jobs and low wages

The industrial parks might not substantially contribute to making refugees and host community members self-reliant because of very low wages. In the Bole Lemi and Hawassa industrial parks, for example, Ethiopian workers are paid 900 birr (US\$32)²⁷ per month, an income that barely covers their basic needs. Such low wages are especially unattractive for refugees, since they receive more in the form of humanitarian aid.

Selecting who will qualify to be hired under the 70% Ethiopians quota will also constitute a significant problem in a context of surplus labour. Similarly, the criterion for selecting 3.3% of refugees (30 000 out of 900 000) to be employed in the parks will present a similar challenge.

Conflict sensitivities: the case of Gambella

The Gambella regional state in Ethiopia hosts some of the camps where refugees who qualify for local integration live. However, the presence of refugees in this region is sensitive, due to multiple layers of tension involving Anuak and Nuer ethnic groups, highlanders and lowlanders, and refugees and host communities.

Access to land, environmental degradation, including deforestation and destruction of wildlife, demographic pressure and historical tensions between the ethnic groups, particularly the Anuak and the Nuer, are some of the challenges.²⁸

Among the Anuak population, there is a 'siege mentality',²⁹ a feeling of being undermined as a minority ethnic group³⁰ in relation to the Nuer, due to the numerical imbalance between both groups, which many attribute to the inflow of ethnic-Nuer refugees. The refugee population by 2017 had become larger than the local population of Gambella.³¹ Acknowledging this challenge, the government and UNHCR in May 2017 began to relocate newly arrived South Sudanese refugees to the neighbouring Benishangul-Gumuz region.³²

Lack of strong public outreach

Key informant interviews indicate that host community consultations have not yet been conducted at the expected level. Some host community representatives were invited to take part in the national consultations and regional CRRF launches. Relevant messages were also broadcast through the mass media (K1).

However, beyond these activities, serious and candid consultations need to be held with the relevant communities before all aspects of the CRRF is implemented. Outreach programmes need to target areas outside of refugee-hosting locations and extend to communities around the industrial parks.

Lack of strong coordination mechanisms

The CRRF is multifaceted by its nature and requires a strong coordination mechanism between different stakeholders at all levels – federal, regional and local. This very new experience brings coordination challenges between the various stakeholders (K1; K2; CWP).

The Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) has been the driving force behind the CRRF process. However, operating under the auspices of the National Intelligence and Security Service, ARRA was mandated to 'lead emergency refugee responses and manage refugees and returnees' affairs.³³

Dealing with development issues and actors is a very new experience for ARRA. Its interaction with government line ministries has not been extensive, either. Now, establishing a multifaceted coordination mechanism with multiple

stakeholders is an absolute requirement to lead the CRRF process. Recently, the National CRRF Steering Committee was established to drive the process forward. This is a good move towards developing the required coordination mechanism.

The public needs to understand the link between the presence of refugees in a given location and the benefits they bring with them

Conclusion and recommendations

The CRRF marks a major shift in the protection of refugees in Ethiopia. Not only will it enhance refugees' access to socio-economic opportunities, but Ethiopians who have generously hosted refugees for years will benefit as well. However, the implementation stage should consider a plethora of challenges, varying from ethnic and resource-related tensions to low wages in the industrial parks.

Accordingly, the government of Ethiopia and all stakeholders involved in facilitating the CRRF's implementation, especially the socio-economic integration of refugees, should consider the following points.

Applying a conflict-sensitive approach

Ethiopia's socio-economic integration of refugees should follow a conflict-sensitive approach, based on conflict analysis.³⁴ In the context of the CRRF, conflict analysis should consider three key aspects:

- Having a good knowledge about the context where the CRRF programme is to be implemented;
- Understanding existing factors (e.g. refugee–host community relations, gender, access to resources) that affect the implementation of the CRRF; and
- Having a good knowledge about CRRF's intentional or unintentional impact on existing tensions.

A deeper understanding of these three aspects will help the CRRF process acquire a clear picture of the two-way interaction between expanding refugees' socio-economic opportunities and its impact on host communities and local administration. It will also help forecast the result of the intervention. Moreover, it could maximise potential benefits, while minimising potential damage. Such an approach should be applied in the design and implementation of all the pledges.

Need for strong public engagement

Implementation of the CRRF requires strong engagement from host community members and the public. Before implementing the projects, the public needs to have a clear understanding of the link between the presence of refugees in a given location and the benefits they bring with them, including the much-needed funding to implement joint projects that benefit both refugees and host communities.



OUTREACH WITH HOST COMMUNITIES IS NEEDED

At the same time, the host community should understand that hosting refugees comes with responsibilities, such as sharing limited resources and making compromises to accommodate differences. Community opinion leaders, including elders and young people, could be involved in leading public discussions on the issues (K5).

Earning sufficient income

The job creation component of the CRRF should be accompanied by a plan to enable refugees and host communities to earn a living in an acceptable manner. Earning a sufficient income that allows one to cover at least the basic necessities is critical.

Ethiopia needs to adopt a minimum wage policy that takes into account the increasing cost of living in the country. The CRRF could serve as a catalyst for change, even for the general working public, as the country's economic growth has yet to translate into improved living standards.

The CRRF could serve as a catalyst for change, even for the general working public

Expanding provisions of start-up capital

The industrial parks and irrigation schemes can only employ a limited number of refugees and host community members. The vast majority of them will have to start their journey to self-reliance through self-employment and small businesses, which require start-up capital.

Therefore, expansion of provisions of start-up capital and possibly start-up kits for people with technical and vocational training such as carpentry, metal work and electricity should be considered. Similar ongoing programmes include in Dolo-Ado, Shire and Melkedida refugee camps.

Whole-of-government approach

Implementation of the CRRF should follow a whole-of-government approach, under which all government departments concerned should include the CRRF among their key deliverables and establish close working links with the National CRRF Steering Committee.

Signing memoranda of understanding between the National CRRF Steering Committee and different government entities should be considered. This needs to be accompanied by an implementation roadmap. Continuous evaluation of the process to better manage progress is also important.

Continued psycho-social support

The CRRF should also consider continuing psycho-social support³⁵ programmes currently offered in camps until such support is no longer needed. This enhances refugees' readiness to adapt to the living conditions of the host society.

Expanding third-country resettlement

Ethiopia should push to expand opportunities for third-country resettlement. In the spirit of international solidarity and burden sharing, the Western world should increase its resettlement quotas and come up with innovative ways to provide legal pathways to resettlement.

Scattered efforts have been realised, such as an innovative Italian 'humanitarian corridor' programme, officially launched in 2017, which aims to relocate 500 refugees from Ethiopia to Italy by the end of 2018.³⁶ Since the 1970s, Canada has also run a programme, whereby Canadians voluntarily sponsor refugees, in addition to government sponsorships, which is usually referred as resettlement programme.³⁷ This programme benefits including refugees from the Horn of Africa. This is a good development that non-governmental organisations and governments need to emulate.

Notes

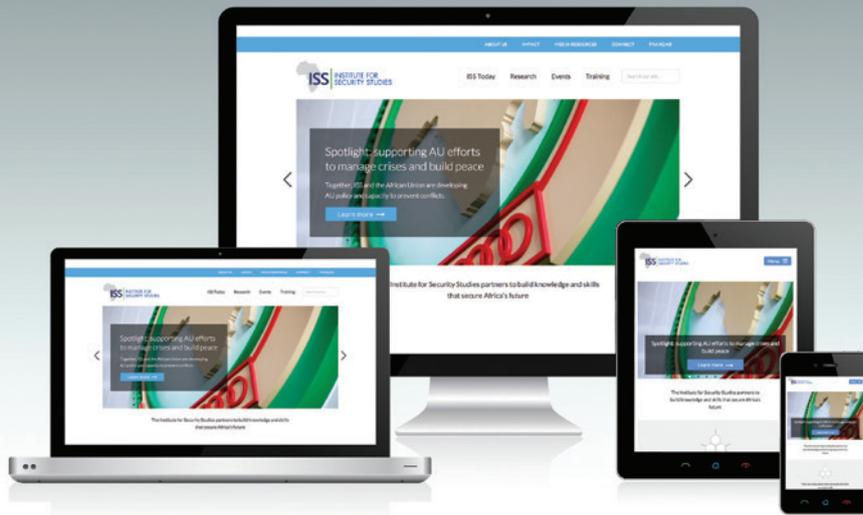
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- 2 'A prima facie approach means the recognition by a State or UNHCR of refugee status on the basis of readily apparent, objective circumstances in the country of origin or, in the case of stateless asylum seekers, their country of former habitual residence. A prima facie approach acknowledges that those fleeing these circumstances are at risk of harm that brings them within the applicable refugee definition. Although a prima facie approach may be applied within individual refugee status determination procedures (see Part III. D in these Guidelines), it is more often used in group situations, for example where individual status determination is impractical, impossible or unnecessary in large-scale situations.'; <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/guidelines-international-protection-no-11-prima-facie-recognition-refugee-status>.
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- 12 For example, some Syrian refugees in Addis Ababa are involved in bakeries and finishing or decorating of houses and other buildings; some Yemenis are also working as drivers (Key Informant 5, Refugee).
- 13 BIMS will allow refugees to record essential information on their educational and professional skills as well as family members. The BIMS will facilitate refugees' access to opportunities related to the CRRF such as the right to live outside of the camps, be locally integrated, and work in industrial parks. This can also help in family reunification or other forms of resettlement to third country.
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