



*A group of young Somali girls at the Ifo 2 Refugee Camp in Dadaab, Kenya, which is supported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).*



# Policy & Practice Brief

Knowledge for durable peace

## When refugees cannot return home: A conflict conundrum in Africa's Great Lakes region

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## Executive summary

The large number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Great Lakes region poses immense challenges to peacebuilding processes within the countries affected, as well as in that entire conflict system. An influx of refugees impacts peace and security, citizenship considerations, as well as cross-border and ethnic conflicts, among others. A case in point, conflict is often triggered by competition for land and economic resources, and is exacerbated by the growing number of refugees in Africa's Great Lakes region. The presence of refugees contributes to significant security issue for several countries in the region. There have been reports of some refugees joining armed groups or terrorist organisations, occupying large territories to exploit mineral resources, attacking local communities to expropriate land, and acting as cheap labour, to the detriment of locals. These factors advance the perception among original inhabitants that crime, impunity and weapons trafficking, among other scourges, increase with the settlement of foreigners in their communities and countries.<sup>2</sup> On the other side of the debate are considerations that refugees bring important skills and knowledge into host countries, participate in entrepreneurship and development projects that contribute to local economies, and boost local markets due to increased demand for products and services.

There are questions that are central to understanding the dilemma that is the ongoing refugee crisis in the Great Lakes region. How can the challenge of huge refugee numbers in the region be addressed? How best can long-term, sustainable and holistic political and humanitarian solutions be implemented to deal with the negative impacts of the refugee crisis? Why has the flood of refugees been such a long-term recurrent issue in the Great Lakes region, compared to other parts of the continent? This Policy & Practice Brief (PPB) analyses why refugees have been hesitant to return to their domiciles, even when there have been indications that relative peace had returned to their countries of origin. It also examines the impacts of refugee flows on peace and security, as well as on land and socio-economic control and access. It concludes by proffering recommendations on what can be done, from a regional perspective, to decrease the number of refugees, while simultaneously resolving the root causes of the various conflicts that the refugees have fled in the first place.

## Introduction

The Great Lakes region of Africa has been engulfed in violent intra-state conflicts and proxy inter-state hostilities for several decades. The Rwandan genocide, numerous armed conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the civil war in Burundi are a few examples of the challenges to peace and security that the region has experienced, with millions of people killed and displaced. The region has also been affected by numerous disasters, among them humanitarian crises (resulting from the 2002 Nyiragongo volcano eruption and the Ebola outbreak in the late 2000s), food insecurity, socio-economic decline, and the destruction of infrastructure.

The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) defines a refugee as someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.<sup>3</sup> According to the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (now African

Union) Convention, a refugee is any person who, reasonably fearing persecution on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinions, is outside the country of which he has the nationality but cannot, or will not, because of this fear, claim its protection.<sup>4</sup> The 2009 Kampala Convention defined IDPs as persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the above definitions, this PPB will limit itself to discussing the effects of the movement of refugees and IDPs in the Great Lakes region, and will not necessarily touch on the impacts of the presence of economic migrants.<sup>6</sup> Scholars have identified the Great Lakes region as consisting of as few as six states (usually Burundi, the DRC, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda)<sup>7</sup> to as many as twelve (the above six plus Angola, Central African Republic, Congo Brazzaville, Sudan, South Sudan

and Zambia), on the basis of the membership of the ICGLR.<sup>8</sup> For purposes of this brief, the region referred to is limited to the six states listed above, based on the African great lakes which surround it: Lake Kivu, Lake Edward, Lake Tanganyika, Lake Albert and Lake Victoria. These countries form the core of the Great Lakes region.<sup>9</sup>

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Although there had been numerous violent conflicts before, the Great Lakes region attracted international attention during, and in the immediate aftermath of the Rwandan genocide (April – July 1994). Fearing retribution, more than two million people, including Hutu civilian militias accused of participating in the genocide, fled to neighbouring countries, especially the DRC. For several years, some of these refugees used the humanitarian largesse of the international community to rearm, recruit and continue the war in Rwanda. They also became involved in what some scholars have described as a second genocide against eastern DRC’s sizable Tutsi population.<sup>10</sup> The Hutu militias’ plans to regain control of power were an incentive, for Rwanda, to attack their rear bases in the DRC. The conflict paved the way for a new Congolese rebel group, Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire/*Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaire (AFDL)*, to topple former President Mobutu Sese Seko, culminating in the two Congo wars of 1996 and 1998. In November 1996, 640 000 refugees left their camps in the DRC<sup>11</sup> and returned to Rwanda following attacks on their dwellings by the Rwanda Defence Force. However, more than 200 000 refugees remained in Goma, as many others moved westward deeper into the DRC.<sup>12</sup> The *Interahamwe*, a youth militia group involved

in the Rwandan genocide, fled into Congolese forests and, together with former soldiers of the Armed Forces of Rwanda, founded the Army for the Liberation of Rwanda/*Armée pour la Libération du Rwanda (ALiR)*, which would later become the Democratic Liberation Forces of Rwanda/*Forces Démocratiques Pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR)*.

During the same period (1993–2009), armed conflict broke out in neighbouring Burundi. The civil war was triggered by the assassination of Melchior Ndadaye, the country’s first democratically elected Hutu president. The war resulted in the death of thousands of Burundians – Hutu and Tutsi alike. Relative peace had returned to most of the country by 2005, when one of the former rebel groups, the National Council for the Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy/*Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie–Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD–FDD)*, became the ruling party. The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burundi (Arusha Agreement), signed in 2000 by most of the parties in the conflict, paved the way for an end to the civil war. Thousands of refugees who had fled to neighbouring countries after the assassination of President Ndadaye returned. The current Burundian political crisis that erupted as a result of disputes about presidential term limits has sent thousands of refugees to the DRC, Rwanda and Tanzania. Owing to persisting instability, most refugees remain reluctant to return home as they fear the return to a state of sustained armed conflict.<sup>13</sup>

In the broader region, Kenya hosts the world’s largest refugee camp, populated by more than 330 000 Somali refugees in Dadaab.<sup>14</sup> A further 42 000 additional Somalis and 270 000 South Sudanese have also sought refuge in the Kakuma camp to escape civil wars in their countries.<sup>15</sup>

The table below shows that the countries of the Great Lakes region are interlinked by the refugee crisis and will always be affected when conflicts flare up.

**Table 1: 2015 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees sub regional operations profile**

Countries	Refugees from	Refugees in	IDPs
Burundi	210 000	52 936	78 948
DRC	516 770	159 440	2 658 000
Kenya	8 556	580 460	0
Rwanda	79 411	85 020	0
Uganda	7 191	560 170	0
Tanzania	857	296 000	0

Source: UNHCR<sup>16</sup>

Countries in the Great Lakes region are not only concerned about the specific number of refugees; other concerns include refugees' impact on the environment, healthcare and cultural identity of host nations. However, as stipulated in the 2006 International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region, focus should be more on democracy, humanitarian and social welfare, economic development and security considerations;<sup>17</sup> the focus of this brief.

## Peace and security

Security remains a major concern for countries hosting refugee camps, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, there are instances where camps have been used by armed groups as rear bases to recruit combatants and attack national forces or other armed groups in their home countries, as well as in the region. Rwanda and Uganda sought to control border areas between their own countries and Zaïre (now the DRC) and establish a buffer zone to prevent rebellions from penetrating.<sup>18</sup> Both countries called for enhanced security in the camps as they were used by Hutu extremists to regroup and recruit combatants to destabilise Rwanda. For many years, the Rwandan government had raised its concerns to regional organisations and the United Nations (UN) about the presence of FDLR combatants based in the neighbouring Congolese province of North Kivu, and demanded that the rebels be moved away from the borders. The issue of refugees' location has remained central to peace and security agendas in the region, as illustrated by the 2014 relocation of several FDLR combatants to Kisangani, thousands of kilometres away from the borders, under the supervision of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).<sup>19</sup>

### *The issue of refugees' location has remained central to peace and security agendas in the region*

In the Burundian political crisis, a number of high-ranking officials who held dissenting opinions about the incumbent president's decision to run for a third term in 2015 went into exile in Rwanda.<sup>20</sup> When political luminaries seek asylum in neighbouring countries, it is often impossible to completely dispel the notion that unless the structural issues they raised are resolved or seen to be resolved, there is a high likelihood that they will remain politically

active even though they are refugees. Such activeness may involve, among others, support to or sympathy for an armed group whose ideals are in sync with those of such leaders.

Secondly, refugee sites may be used by terrorist organisations to recruit members to attack host countries. In recent years, the Kenyan government has accused al-Shabaab of launching attacks in the country. Officials claimed that al-Shabaab plans its acts of terror, among them the 2015 Garissa University and 2013 Westgate Mall attacks, out of Dadaab. They urge that the camp must be shut down.<sup>21</sup> The Government of Kenya has in the past threatened to relocate or close the camp.<sup>22</sup> Although 5 000 refugees have returned to Somalia from Dadaab in the past year, security and socio-economic conditions in many parts of Somalia are not right for large-scale returns.<sup>23</sup>

Thirdly, insecurity can occur within the camp itself. Even though the Lusenda refugee camp in the DRC is far from the border, as per UNHCR policies, exiles still report that they are not safe. In July 2015, a Burundian man in the camp was taken into custody by the Congolese police after a woman recognised him as an *Imbonerakure* group member from her community back in Burundi.<sup>24</sup> The group is a youth political wing of the ruling party which is alleged to have committed violent crimes and stands accused of threatening political opponents in Burundi.<sup>25</sup> After being questioned, he explained that he had been forced to join the group and now wanted asylum in the DRC. Refugees also report that the camp may be infiltrated by members of both Burundi security forces and the opposition, placing them in a position where they cannot speak freely for or against either party due to fear of retaliation.<sup>26</sup>

It is a challenge for camp leaders and humanitarian organisations to differentiate refugees from rebels, terrorists or infiltrators in refugee camps. Within communities or camps, rebels, militias and terrorists live like ordinary refugees, posing serious security threats for the region in terms of weapons smuggling and trafficking, as well as trans-border crimes. To protect themselves from attacks by armed groups, local communities have tended to create vigilante groups which they fund either through the collection of toll road fees at night, or the exploitation of mineral resources.<sup>27</sup> At the Lusenda camp, in July 2015 a group of refugees was paid to constitute a security team tasked with protecting the camp from intruders and preventing other refugees from leaving the camp without official authorisations.<sup>28</sup>

Sustainable peace and security can be achieved through effective resolution of conflicts in the region. Trying to resolve the issue of the influx of refugees without dealing with the various political and socio-economic factors that caused the conflicts in the first place is bound to result in failure. The consolidation of peace is linked to democracy, economic development, respect for human rights, good governance and an independent justice system. Without these, additional conflicts will lead to more people seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Once wars are resolved, refugees are more likely to return to their countries without fearing persecution; their only concern will be about potentially finding their land(s) occupied. This brings us to the next pertinent issue of land disputes, which is critical in the analysis of conflicts in the Great Lakes region.

## Land disputes

In many societies, especially conflict-affected ones; land is an important socio-economic asset, since access to it is often linked to wealth and survival. As a result land, due to its significance, is frequently an underlying cause of widespread violence, as well as a critical element in peacebuilding and economic reconstruction in post-conflict situations.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, if access to, control and usage of land is not well-managed, it can undermine the consolidation of peace in the region.

Although most refugees in host countries, whether in camps or foster families, need land to grow their crops, they are supported with food and shelter by the UNHCR, in partnership with the World Food Programme and other humanitarian organisations. In host countries, land conflicts between refugees and local communities are rare.

While refugees can settle on land without the necessary authorisations from local leaders, they can also be granted land by the host country. In both cases, conflict based on identity can occur if refugees expropriate land, or are granted more arable land, than locals. A local Congolese man, unhappy about refugees leaving the camp to be with foster families, explained that 'Refugees should not be granted our land because they have their own in their country. We have owned these lands for decades; our ancestors lived and died in these lands, and nobody would ever take them away from us.'<sup>30</sup>

It is a more serious matter when refugees return home to find that their land is occupied by another 'owner'. When the new landowner does not want to

give back the land after 'owning' it for several years, this can lead to conflict which can destabilise a whole village or community in a post-conflict state.<sup>31</sup> Some countries in the region have institutions and policies in place related to land conflict management. Land restitution or compensation to refugees and IDPs who return home has to be implemented to promote peace and reconciliation.

While in Burundi and the DRC land issues have triggered conflicts in rural communities, Rwanda had put in place legislation (part of the Arusha Agreement) for refugees to repossess their properties upon their return.<sup>32</sup> The current crises in Burundi, CAR, eastern DRC and South Sudan have resulted in the displacement of thousands of men, women and children within their home countries, and larger numbers of refugees into neighbouring countries. If not managed effectively, these crises have the potential to seriously undermine regional stability.

## Regional stability

When refugees escape conflict in their own countries, their presence is often a burden for the host country, mainly because they compete with locals for resources such as land, jobs and food, among others. High numbers of refugees create socio-economic challenges and conflicts in host countries which may affect bilateral and multilateral cooperation and relations between nations. However, some countries gain from hosting refugees because of the economic and humanitarian aid they receive from international financial institutions, or the UN, in terms of infrastructure development or jobs created through aid provision.<sup>33</sup>

## *High numbers of refugees create socio-economic challenges and conflicts in host countries which may affect bilateral and multi-lateral cooperation and relations between nations*

In some instances, countries can be excluded from regional organisations or trade agreements with international partners. Due to the political crisis, Burundi is currently under threat of exclusion from the African Growth and Opportunity Act,<sup>34</sup> and the European Union has imposed targeted sanctions.<sup>35</sup> The United States government is in the process of reviewing Burundi's eligibility to the group in matters of human rights, following elections held in

that country in July 2015. The German government also suspended any cooperation with the Burundian regime, although assistance programmes that serve the population were scheduled to continue through collaboration with non-state organisations.<sup>36</sup> One could speculate that if the crisis deepens further, donor countries could freeze their direct investment. This would inevitably have a negative impact on the country's economy, and the region as a whole.

When the economy declines in a host country, it may force some citizens to move to a different country to satisfy their needs. When refugees have children in host countries, issues of citizenship, which have the potential to create more conflicts in future, arise. In 2016, Kenya threatened to expel thousands of Somali refugees to curb terrorism on its territory.<sup>37</sup> Expelling the Somalis from a country they call home to return to a land some left a decade or more ago could have exacerbated refugee suffering and destabilised the region, particularly if the exiles refused to return, especially since some of them regarded Somalia as a 'new land'. Furthermore, returning to Somalia while the country is still in turmoil could push refugees to join terrorist groups or flee again to other neighbouring countries. In another case, Tanzania granted citizenship to more than 160 000 Burundian refugees,<sup>38</sup> most of whom had fled their country during the 1972 massacres and the civil war. There are three potential solutions to the refugee crises in the Great Lakes region that governments can apply: repatriation, local integration and resettlement.

Like Tanzania, which granted naturalisation certificates to approximately 162 000 former Burundian refugees, countries in the region should be encouraged to grant citizenships to refugees born on their territories and to those who have had refugee status for several years.<sup>39</sup> While an option, granting refugees citizenship does not completely resolve the problem.

A resettlement programme could also be adopted by rich or stable African countries to receive high numbers of refugees by granting them permanent residency. For instance, the UNHCR is currently implementing a regional resettlement strategy for Congolese refugees who cannot return to the eastern part of the DRC.<sup>40</sup> It should also be noted that granting citizenship and permanent residencies may lead to increased numbers of 'bogus refugees'. The latter still remains a bottleneck with regard to resettlement in a third country, especially in the West. Even when the security situation has improved, some refugees refuse to participate in voluntary

repatriation programmes, in the hopes that they will be resettled in countries in the global North. It must be noted here that it is hard to identify a 'bogus refugee' in a camp; they could be economic migrants in pursuit of a better life and social benefits, and not refugees.<sup>41</sup> Solutions to the issue of refugees may be influenced by local politics and democracy in both host and countries of origin.

## Local politics and democracy

The respect of constitutions by governments would protect the rights of their citizens and strengthen democracy in the region. Regular or periodic free and fair elections have become part of democratic processes, which contribute to the building of strong institutions. Thousands of men and women, who feared insecurity as a result of the political crisis, left Burundi in 2015 to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Another political crisis could come from Rwanda and the DRC, whose leaders are trying to amend their constitutions to allow them a bid at a third term as president. Whether or not the amendments are approved by their respective lower and upper houses, they will have an effect on the political stability and refugee crisis in the region, because citizens would likely fear more violence.

Because of violence, one country may openly criticise another's local politics or internal affairs on the basis of the number of citizens that have fled its territory to settle in another as refugees. The Rwandan government criticized Burundian officials, not for the third term presidential bid, but for lack of public service delivery which, according to Rwandan President Paul Kagame, led to popular uprising.<sup>42</sup> His aides have also accused the Burundian government of supporting FDLR rebels.<sup>43</sup> Burundian top officials further accused Rwanda of tacitly aiding their enemies; former ruling party members who have sought refuge in Rwanda.<sup>44</sup> The alleged support of enemies, if true, contravenes the convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa which stipulates that 'Signatory states undertake to prohibit refugees residing in their respective territories from attacking any state member of the AU, by any activity likely to cause tension between member states, and in particular by use of arms, through the press, or by radio.'<sup>45</sup> Both governments have denied the accusations.

The Burundi electoral crisis and the FDLR issue have affected relationships between member countries of the East African Community. In 2013, Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete called on Rwanda to

hold talks with the FDLR; the call was rejected and subsequently caused tensions between the two countries. The crisis intensified the same year when Tanzania expelled thousands of refugees back to Rwanda.<sup>46</sup>

The impact of refugees' presence is not only on peace and security, economy and land issues. Long after refugees leave host countries, the effect is also felt on the environment. Limited access to clean water compels refugees to fetch water or wash their clothes in rivers. Refugees also utilise more wood for their cooking; which contributes to deforestation. In the camps, there is a greater risk of outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea, and even malnutrition among children. This PPB advances some recommendations aimed at contributing to solutions to the refugee crisis in the Great Lakes region.

## Recommendations for alleviating the impact of the refugee crisis

### ***Governments in the region must:***

- Enhance the capacities of national refugee commissions to effectively manage refugee crises where they occur. Refugee commissions should also ideally share data and information with other refugee bureaus in the region to assist in the administration of refugees inside and outside camps.
- Promote democracy and economic development to deter violent conflicts; the latter are caused when people cannot meet their basic human needs, which need to be fulfilled if conflict is to be avoided. More investments should thus be directed to socio-economic sectors through improved funding for education, healthcare and infrastructure development.
- Ensure that rule of law institutions are and remain independent and impartial to ensure that citizens are not denied justice.
- Implement, or support the implementation of programmes that provide employment opportunities for refugees who make the decision to integrate locally. These opportunities must be supported with vocational training and job opportunities for citizens to avoid tensions and conflicts between migrants and nationals. In this way, refugees can have opportunities to contribute to local economies without being accused of 'stealing jobs from locals'.

- Encourage refugees to return home after conflicts are resolved, with the assurance that they will not be persecuted. The rationale behind this is to put in place laws that prevent maltreatment of returnees who committed less violent crimes or offences. Those found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity should be prosecuted and given fair trials, whether in their home or host countries.
- Ensure equal access to resources. When all groups are represented in local and national institutions under a democratic system, the risks of conflict arising are minimised.
- Institute measures to minimise refugees' engagement in unlawful activities aimed at destabilising their home countries. Refugees' actions and activities should be monitored to prevent cross-border attacks. Furthermore, rebel groups or armed political movements should not be allowed to operate in host countries.
- Provide protection and free schooling for refugee children to prevent their recruitment into armed groups as child soldiers. Encourage the adoption of unaccompanied children by locals in host countries if family reunification has been unsuccessful.
- Enforce the ICGLR Protocol on the Property Rights of Returning Persons, which calls for the protection and recovery of the property of returnees.

### ***The African Union and International Conference on the Great Lakes Region should:***

- With the assistance of the Regional Centre on Small Arms, strengthen disarmament and demobilisation programmes, among other interventions, to control the flow and proliferation of small arms into refugee camps.
- Promote the inclusion of refugee issues in mediation and work on the peaceful resolution of conflicts between and within member states. Mediators need to explore ways of creating safe channels of communication with refugees; a post-conflict country's peacebuilding projects will be undermined if displacement issues are not adequately addressed.
- Enforce the implementation of a comprehensive and inclusive strategy with national governments

to deal with the influx of refugees through border management policies; this should not be left to the UNHCR alone.

- Together with national refugee commissions, monitor armed groups and national armies to counter recruitment of child soldiers, and any recruitment for that matter, in refugee camps.

***The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and International Organization for Migration should:***

- Continue to encourage voluntary repatriation of refugees who want to return, but hesitate or are forced by their fellow countrymen to remain in host countries; the case of the FDLR in the DRC is a case in point. Also encourage local integration in countries that are willing to grant permanent residency or citizenship status to refugees who fear persecution if they return to their countries of birth.
- Build capacity of local peacebuilders through training and workshops to deal with refugee crises effectively.

***Donor agencies and the countries that support them should:***

- Expand the programmes to resettle refugees who fear persecution if they choose to return home. This can be achieved by increasing the number of refugees to be resettled in third countries.

***Civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations and local peacebuilding actors should:***

- Equip refugees with entrepreneurship skills and knowledge to start their own businesses so they are not overly reliant on international organisations and governments. They should also ensure that these businesses are profitable through monitoring and evaluating operations and offering support.
- Encourage reconciliation between refugees resettling back in their homes and on their lands, and the local community members who stayed behind during conflict. This should be supported by monitoring of the communities or regions where conflicts may erupt through the development and use of conflict early warning mechanisms.

- Inform refugees about their rights and responsibilities so they can avoid breaking laws in host countries, and abstain from political and illegal activities in refugee camps.

## **Conclusion**

While the influx of refugees threatens regional stability, it is important to note that although the mass movement of people outside their countries as a result of war is a humanitarian problem, a political solution, achieved through dialogue between countries, is one of the tools that can resolve crises, and pave the way to consolidating the achievement and maintenance of sustainable peace in the four countries currently experiencing conflict, and the Great Lakes region as a whole.

The successful consolidation of peace also depends on conflict resolution, respect of human rights, security, protection of private property and ensuring access to scarce resources, without which the number of refugees will keep rising, leading to the further destabilisation of an already unstable region. As well as impacting peace and security, prolonged instability will negatively affect the economy of the region. Governments of countries in the Great Lakes region, together with their local and international partners, should come up with a comprehensive strategy to deal with the increasing number of refugees, which undermines peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding is a long process, which often lasts several years before a country can return to a pre-conflict state. The refugee crisis in the Great Lakes region cannot be resolved overnight; it requires that the root causes of the conflicts be isolated and addressed. The region can respond to the crisis through ensuring greater cooperation between countries and enhancing collaboration with the UN, AU, CSOs, NGOs, donor countries and regional economic communities. The refugee crisis can also be resolved through voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration of exiles. For some refugees – former combatants for instance – a permanent solution has to be found. When a country hosts fighters of a neighbouring country on its territory, the chances that another conflict may erupt increase. In this event, prolonged humanitarian assistance carries the risk that former fighters-turned-refugees will be more likely to divert funding and resources to attacking their home countries.

The majority of refugees who fear injustice and persecution hold off on returning home. They should not be forced to travel back home unless



there are guarantees that all elements that caused their departures in the first place have been addressed. Post-conflict countries in the region should encourage their citizens to return home after the conflict has ended, and include them in dialogue and reconciliation processes.

Refugees should be given opportunities to rebuild their lives, whether it is in their host, home or third countries. Their presence should not only be a burden for host countries; if given opportunities refugees can contribute to the development of local economies through their skills and knowledge. But, if they spend several years in camps without opportunities to contribute to improving their living conditions, they may resort to violence, cross-border crimes and/or join rebel or terrorist groups. This can undermine the consolidation of peace in the region.

## Endnotes

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