Towards solutions for protracted refugee situations: The role of resettlement

Annual Tripartite Consultations on Resettlement
Geneva
29 June 2007

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The issue

- Since the early 1990s: focus on refugee emergencies, delivering humanitarian assistance and encouraging repatriation
- Some 2/3 of today’s refugees are trapped in protracted refugee situations
- Majority of these situations are found in some of the poorest and most unstable regions of the Global South
Challenge of PRSs

- Refugees trapped in these situations face a wide range of protection challenges.
- Host states in Africa and Asia view prolonged presence of refugees as a burden and a security concern.
- Finding solutions to these situations has proven elusive for humanitarian actors.
- A growing number of situations are becoming increasingly protracted.
The PRS Project

- Provide policy-relevant analysis of the problem of protracted refugee situations
- Develop a more effective policy framework for addressing the problem
- Integrate the issue of protracted refugee situations into debates on peacebuilding, development and human rights
- Concentrate on particular protracted refugee situations in Africa and Asia
Protracted refugee situations: A starting definition

- UNHCR (2004): A protracted refugee situation is “one in which refugees find themselves in a long-standing and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years of exile.”
- Major protracted refugee situations: 25,000+ refugees, in existence for 5+ years, with no prospect of a solution
Towards a broader definition

- Include so-called ‘residual caseloads’ (ie. Rohingyas in Bangladesh)
- Include urban refugee populations, typically excluded from UNHCR statistics
- Understand changing dynamics within protracted refugee situations
- Understand political roots of protracted refugee situations
Trends
(from UNHCR statistics)

- 1993: 27 protracted refugee situations: 7.9 million refugees (48% of global total)
- 2004: 33 protracted refugee situations: 5.7 million refugees (64% of global total)
- As the global refugee population decreases, the significance of protracted refugee situations increases
- Average duration of refugee situations: From 9 years in 1993 to 17 years in 2003
Consequences: Human Rights

- Most host states require refugees to live in isolated and insecure camps
- High levels of crime, insecurity and violence in many camps
- Denial of rights, including freedom of movement and access to employment
- Leads to dependency on dwindling international assistance, especially food
- Pressures compound the vulnerability of particular groups, especially refugee women and children
Consequences: Political and security

- PRSs give rise to a range of political and security concerns for host states, countries of origin and regional actors
- *Direct security concerns*: Presence of armed elements, small arms proliferation, and spill-over of conflict
- *Indirect security concerns*: Tensions between refugees and local population, rise in crime and insecurity
- Concerns exacerbate regional insecurity and re-enforce encampment policies
Causes

- Linked to changing nature of conflict since the end of the Cold War: the problem of failed and fragile states and failures to consolidate peace
- UNHCR (2004): PRSs “stem from political impasses. They are not inevitable, but rather the result of political action and inaction, both in the country of origin and the country of asylum.”
- Combined effect of prevailing conditions in country of origin, policy responses of host countries (especially encampment), and lack of external engagement.
Lessons from past and present cases

- **No one solution**: Comprehensive solutions must be tailored to individual situations.
- Develop the strategic and complementary nature of the three durable solutions to enhance their impact.
- **Successful engagement must be**:
  - Comprehensive
  - Co-operative
  - Collaborative
Elements of a solution

- A solution means more than ending encampment
- Possible to begin work on solutions prior to change in the country of origin
- Shift from a ‘care and maintenance’ approach to a ‘solutions oriented approach’
- **Short term**: Identify and address specific challenges and impasses
- **Medium term**: Consider three durable solutions (repatriation, local integration and resettlement)
- **Long term**: Engage with peace and security, development and humanitarian actors to formulate and implement comprehensive solutions
Addressing the impasses

- **Resettlement**
  - Three functions of resettlement
  - Strategic use of resettlement
  - Complementary nature of durable solutions

- **Targeted Development Assistance**
  - Engagement inside and outside camps
  - Building on development benefits of refugees

- **Diplomatic Engagement**
  - Links to broader bilateral and multilateral issues
  - Engagement of wider UN system
    (DPA, PBSO, DPKO, UNDP, ILO, FAO, and IFIs)
Enhancing resettlement to support solutions for PRSs

- Develop stronger links between resettlement and other solutions and tools
- Situate resettlement within broader political and regional context
- More coordinated and cooperative resettlement planning and practice
- Increase resettlement resources
- Invest in preconditions for solutions
Current opportunities

- Shifting opportunities in key PRSs:
  - Changing views on resettlement in Asia
  - Openings for local integration in West Africa and Southern Africa

- Cases:
  - Bhutanese in Nepal
  - Burmese in Thailand, Bangladesh, Malaysia and India
  - Afghans in Pakistan and Iran
  - Angolans in Zambia
  - Burundians in Tanzania and DRC
  - Sudanese in Kenya and Uganda
  - Sierra Leoneans and Liberians in West Africa
  - Somalis in Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen
Conclusion

- New response required to the growing challenge of protracted refugee situations
- Solutions start with identifying and addressing impasses that cause PRSs
- Resettlement is one tool among many to unblock protracted refugee situations
- Resettlement best used as part of broader comprehensive and cooperative strategy
- Need to engage other actors within UN system, governments and civil society