

Towards solutions for protracted refugee situations: The role of resettlement

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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