

WITHOUT PROSPECTS?

REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN EASTERN AFRICA

Angelika Mendes

The year 2012 brought more refugee crises than almost all years in the recent past. During the first nine months of the year, more than 700,000 refugees crossed international borders.¹ The crises of the previous year – including the drought in the Horn of Africa and fighting in Libya – and the millions of refugees who have been in exile for years mean a critical point has been reached. The ability of the international community to come up with solutions to these crises in solidarity with the countries affected, and to provide responses to the personal suffering associated with them put to the test. The right to asylum retains its central importance. The fact that many countries generously host refugees is a sign that should not be underestimated in view of the related social, political and economic challenges.

Eastern Africa is a region of the world that has provoked some of the largest flows of refugees for decades, whilst also hosting them. A dramatic point has also been reached there, as shown by the recent regulation imposed by the Kenyan government requiring all refugees previously living in the capital Nairobi to move to camps in the north-west and east of the country.² The capacities of host countries are limited, and refugees are quickly declared scapegoats for increasing insecurity or other unbearable conditions. The other countries which this article refers to – Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan – also host tens of thousands of refugees under circumstances which are far from ideal.



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- 1 | *UNHCR Global Appeal 2013. Staying resilient in a world in crisis*, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Dec 2012, <http://unhcr.org/ga13/index.xml> (accessed 30 Jan 2013).
- 2 | AFP, "Kenya orders all refugees back to camps", 18 Dec 2012.

Over the past 30 years, the number of forcibly displaced persons has almost tripled worldwide, from 16 to 42.5 million. Global and social trends lead to the assumption that this number will continue to grow in the next decade. The causes of displacement are varied and complex. Wars, armed conflicts, human rights infringements, repressive regimes as well as unbearable economic, social or political conditions, natural disasters and, above all, the international competition for mineral and energy resources force people to leave their homes. Often, the same reasons prevent a return and make reconstruction more difficult.

Even now, millions of people are fleeing due to natural disasters and other effects of climate change, which will only reveal their full effect in the future.

Both refugees and humanitarian organisations are currently exposed to great insecurity, because governments and armed groups are increasingly curtailing the freedom for humanitarian action. The growing gap between rich and poor will bring enormous challenges with it. Already now, millions of people are fleeing due to natural disasters and other effects of climate change, which will only reveal their full effect in the future. Population growth and increasing urbanisation are imposing additional pressure on existing systems.

WHO ARE THE REFUGEES? – VARIOUS DEFINITIONS

The definition of a refugee has been set down in the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951. It defines a refugee as "A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." In addition, the Convention states that refugees must be granted freedom of religion and movement as well as economic and social rights such as secure access to the job market, medical care and education. The principle of non-refoulement, i.e. that no-one may be forced to return to his home country while it may pose a threat to his life is a further right guaranteed under the Convention.

The Geneva Convention on Refugees is the first universal agreement to enter into force that is exclusively and comprehensively devoted to refugees and defines their fundamental rights. Signed by 146 countries, it remains the foundation for refugee work and provides the legal framework within which states can design their refugee policy. In 1967, the Convention was supplemented by an additional protocol removing geographical and time limitations. In 1969 and 1984, the OAU Refugee Convention (today: African Union) and the Latin American Cartagena Declaration were the first regional treaties introducing a local approach to dealing with the refugee question.

Catholic social teaching defines the term refugee more broadly, and speaks of “de facto” refugees, encompassing victims of armed conflicts, humanitarian disasters or the violation of human rights. Internally displaced persons and those forced to flee because of erroneous economic policy or natural disasters are also considered refugees according to this definition.

The term “de facto” refugee includes victims of armed conflicts, humanitarian disasters or the violation of human rights.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) flee their homes for the same reasons as refugees, although they remain within the borders of their home country. Often, they are even more vulnerable than refugees, because they are not protected by international agreements and laws, and remain under the protection of their government, even though it may be the cause of their flight. For Africa, this gap was closed when the Kampala Convention came into force on 6 December 2012. The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa is the first legally binding agreement in the world specifically dealing with the situation of IDPs. Given that there are four times as many IDPs as refugees in Africa this is an important step. Africa is thus setting new standards in shaping legal frameworks which contribute to the protection and assistance of IDPs. The convention is comprehensive and recognises manifold causes for displacement, ranging from armed conflict to natural disasters, the effects of climate change and even megatrends such as population growth and urbanisation. If implemented well, it can become a valuable instrument for governments both in preventing displacement and in finding appropriate solutions for

currently displaced persons. However, it depends on the will of these governments as to whether and when it will be implemented. While the mandates of most aid agencies do not include IDPs, there has been a lively discussion about a new global approach recently in order to improve assistance to IDPs – a very welcome step.

REFUGEES IN FIGURES

42.5 million people were displaced by violence in 2011. 80 per cent of all refugees and displaced persons flee to neighbouring countries.

Since 2007, the number of refugees has constantly exceeded 42 million. 42.5 million were forcibly displaced people in 2011, of whom 15.2 million were refugees.³ Although this is a high figure, it was lower than in 2010, when the number of people affected was higher than at any time since the mid-1990s.⁴ Contrary to the widely held belief that Europe and the USA host most refugees, 80 per cent of all refugees and internally displaced persons flee to neighbouring countries. Pakistan hosts the largest number of forcibly displaced (1.6 million) followed by Iran, Kenya and Chad. Among the industrialised nations, Germany hosts the largest number of refugees (2011: 571,700). Since 2008, South Africa has been the world's largest recipient of individual asylum applications. One in six refugees worldwide comes from Afghanistan, followed by refugees from Iraq, Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 60 per cent of refugees live in camps. Worldwide, however, half live in cities and only one third in camps. 49 per cent of all refugees and displaced persons are women and girls, with 46 per cent being children under 18 years.⁵ About 70 per cent are Muslims. In 2011, 3.2 million internally displaced persons returned home – the highest number in more than ten years. On the other hand, only about 532,000 refugees were able to return to their home countries – the lowest number in the past decade.

3 | "Forcibly displaced persons" includes refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, IDPs.

4 | *A Year of crises. UNHCR Global Trends 2011*, UNHCR, Jun 2012, <http://unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendocPDFViewer.html?docid=4fd6f87f9&query=UNHCR%20Global%20Trends%20Report%202011> (accessed 30 Jan 2013).

5 | Ibid.



Temporary shelters in a transit centre outside Dollo Ado on the Somalia-Ethiopia border. About 15,000 refugees lived here in August 2011 until they were transferred to a camp. | Source: © Angelika Mendes.

In addition, refugee situations are no longer of a temporary nature. UNHCR estimates that refugees spend an average of 17 years in exile. Many Ethiopian and Sudanese refugees who live in Kakuma refugee camp in the northwest of Kenya have been there for 18 years, including many who were born in the camp.

CHALLENGES IN THE HOST COUNTRIES

Refugees face a multitude of challenges once they arrive in the host country. They experience discrimination and xenophobia, lack social networks and do not know the local language. Discrimination and hostility to foreigners form just as much part of this as lack of social contact and ignorance. Many countries restrict the freedom of movement of refugees just as much as their access to the job market and education. However, it is education in particular that has proven to be an effective tool in overcoming trauma, because it nourishes hope, offers prospects for a better future and, above all, has a subsequent positive effect

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on income, quality of life and reconstruction. At present, only 76 per cent of all refugee children worldwide attend a primary school and 36 per cent a secondary school.⁶ Less than one per cent has access to higher education. The situation for refugees in cities and for girls is even worse. The quality of education is also significantly below the conventional level.

It is above all in long-lasting crisis situations that refugees become dependent on aid organisations. People who have lived in a refugee camp for 15 years and received free food rations, education, medical care and psycho-social support often have difficulties when they finally return home and have to reassume responsibility for themselves.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR THE REFUGEE CRISIS

Given the extent and number of refugee crises in the world, there seems to be no satisfactory solution. In refugee policy, people usually refer to three possible durable solutions for resolving refugee situations. The first and preferred solution is repatriation. It means the voluntary return to the home country as soon as it is regarded as safe and offers the necessary livelihoods for returnees.

The second possibility is integration in the host country. This requires the consent of the respective government, and requires a legal process which will lead to granting refugees more rights. At the same time, an economic, social and cultural integration process must take place. Tanzania made a historic decision in April 2010 when the government granted Tanzanian citizenship to 162,000 refugees who had fled Burundi in 1972 due to the civil war. "This is the most generous gesture that has ever been shown towards refugees", said the representative of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) in Tanzania, Damas Missanga SJ, at the time.

6 | Sarah Dryden-Peterson, *Refugee Education. A Global Review*, UNHCR, Nov 2011, <http://unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opencvPDFViewer.html?docid=4fe317589> (accessed 30 Jan 2013).

The third option is resettlement to a third country. This is the only possible alternative for people who face persecution even in the country in which they have sought protection, or else cannot remain in their country of asylum in the long term for other reasons. Of all 192 member states of the United Nations, 26 countries now accept refugees for resettlement. A number of states have been considered traditional resettlement states, including the Scandinavian countries, Australia, the USA, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and, since 2007, also Germany. 61,231 refugees were resettled in 2011. Despite the fact, that the number of countries participating in resettlement programmes increased from 14 to 26 between 2005 and 2012, the number of available places continues to stand at approx. 80,000 per year.⁷ The USA, Canada and Australia provide 90 per cent of all resettlement places, while 16 European countries together only account for eight per cent. The refugees who benefited most from resettlement programmes in all these countries came from Myanmar, Iraq and Somalia.

REFUGEES AND DISPLACED PERSONS IN EASTERN AFRICA

Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan and Ethiopia, the countries of eastern Africa which this article is about, together comprise an area which is about twice as large as Western and Southern Europe together.⁸ The region is characterised by cultural diversity and is complex with regard to the causes of conflict. With neighbours such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Chad and Eritrea, it is surrounded by hot spots and failed states which produce significant flows of refugees.

Although it is difficult to find reliable figures, it is estimated that all five countries host about 1,476,000 refugees and 2.6 million internally displaced persons. Sudan,

7 | Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, Standing Committee, 54th meeting, progress report on resettlement, UNHCR, 5 Jun 2012.

8 | This includes the following countries: Spain, Portugal, Andorra, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, San Marino, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria.

with 1.7 million, is the country with the highest number of internally displaced persons, whereas Kenya hosts the largest number of refugees (586,000).⁹

Sudan and South Sudan

Before its partition in 2011, Sudan was the largest country on the African continent. The region is characterised by two long-lasting wars. Six years after independence from Great Britain and Egypt in 1956, the country fell victim to its first civil war which lasted ten years and culminated in the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972, which granted the South the right to self-determination. The discovery of oil in the southern part of the country in 1978 caused enormous problems in relations between North and South. When the North introduced Sharia law in 1983, this was the spark which ignited the civil war in the South again.

For more than 20 years, the government in Khartoum fought against the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), the main rebel grouping in Sudan, on grounds of religious differences between Muslims and Christians, disputes between Arabs and Africans, ethnic violence between certain groups and the struggle for mineral resources, above all the oil reserves in the South. It was one of the longest and worst wars of the 20th Century: Two million people died, four million were displaced in their own country and more than half a million fled the country.

The war did not finish until 2005 with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA included a ceasefire as well as articulating terms for sharing power and mineral resources, holding national elections in April 2010 and a referendum on independence in the South in January 2011. In this referendum, 99 per cent of the population voted for independence for the South, and on 9 July 2011 South Sudan declared itself to be a sovereign state independent from the North.

9 | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), *Eastern Africa: Displaced Populations Report*, No. 12, 31 Mar 2012 - 30 Sep 2012.

The new country faces enormous challenges. **“There is a paradox in the Sudan: Which is that the region which contains most of nation’s natural resources and arable land is also the least developed.”**¹⁰ remarks Sudan expert, Douglas H. Johnson. The security situation on the border with Sudan has deteriorated since independence – above all in the oil-rich regions of Abyei and in Upper Nile, Unity and South Kordofan, where the conflict has resulted in 70,000 people being displaced.¹¹ In September 2011, new fighting broke out between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) in Blue Nile State. In January 2012, the UN reported air attacks and shooting by the SAF in South Kordofan. Since then, more than 175,000 Sudanese have fled to refugee camps on the other side of the border in South Sudan, while a further 40,000 have sought refuge in Ethiopia.¹² Furthermore, the Ugandan Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) rebel group regularly attacks villages in Western Bahr el Ghazal, Western Equatoria and Central Equatoria. In addition, there are clashes between tribal communities which led to the displacement of almost 16,000 people in May and June 2012 alone. Between July and September, floods following intensive rainfall caused many people to flee their homes. In spite of its own problems, South Sudan shelters more than 207,000 refugees from Sudan, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The example of South Sudan clearly shows what challenges refugees face when they return to their home country after years or decades of conflict. Education is essential for the long-term development of a country, the condition of the education system will therefore be discussed in more detail. Longterm conflicts pose major challenges to the development of any country. Two million people have returned home since the peace agreement, and have subsequently been confronted by enormous challenges. Most roads in South Sudan are in a bad condition, and sometimes inaccessible. Many districts are difficult to reach, and

10 | Douglas H. Johnson, *The root causes of Sudan’s civil wars*, Indiana University Press, 2002, 16.

11 | Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), “South Kordofan briefing”, 26 Jun 2011.

12 | UN OCHA, “Sudan humanitarian update”, III/2012, 1 Nov 2012.

road construction is proceeding at a snail's pace. Large parts of the population have no access to the few clinics or clean water. About 80 per cent of the population are small farmers, landmines hinder the farming of the extraordinarily fertile land. Almost all goods have to be imported, so prices are high. Half of the population lives below the poverty line, with an average income of less than one U.S. dollar a day. Corruption prevents progress in many areas.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to recognise the progress the South has been able to achieve since the end of the war. It has formed its own government and the capital Juba is growing. In the meantime, more than 20,000 kilometres of roads and about 80 per cent of the particularly badly affected land have been demined.¹³ Fields are being cultivated, permanent houses built. The first elections after 24 years in April 2010, the referendum in January and April 2010 and the independence celebrations in July 2011 all took place peacefully. More than two million people have returned, there is relatively good freedom of movement and the first signs of growth are apparent.



Outdoor lessons: a destroyed secondary school in Nimule, South Sudan. | Source: © Angelika Mendes.

13 | Wanjohi Kabukuru, "Clearing South Sudan of its deadly landmines", *Africa Renewal online*, UN Department of Public Information, 16 Jan 2012, <http://un.org/africarenewal/web-features/clearing-south-sudan-its-deadly-landmines> (accessed 30 Jan 2013).

The new autonomous government of the South faces the enormous challenge of building an education system from scratch, with very limited resources. After the war, primary school teaching mainly took place under trees, there were fewer than 20 secondary schools and hardly any qualified teachers. From time to time, individuals gathered the children to teach them the ABC. No-one was paid for this, and many teachers had only attended primary school for two or three years themselves.

With a currently estimated literacy rate of 24 per cent, the Sudanese population is hoping for improved educational prospects.¹⁴ Only seven per cent of the people who work as teachers have been trained to do so. 48 per cent have since received in-service training, but only 45 per cent have completed primary school.¹⁵ On average, teachers in South Sudan earn 200 U.S. dollars a month, but only three out of five teachers are paid by the government. The others teach without financial remuneration. Each teacher, paid or unpaid, is responsible for about 80 schoolchildren. About 75 per cent of primary schools and 22 per cent of secondary schools are temporary structures made from mud walls and have grass roofs, or teaching takes place under a tree and must be suspended when it rains.¹⁶ Building a permanent school building with seven classrooms, administration building and toilets costs about 62,000 euros. On average, 129 primary school children share one classroom.¹⁷

During the first four years after the peace agreement (2005-2009), the number of school children tripled from 343,000 – then the lowest proportion in the world – to 1.3 million.¹⁸

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In 2009, South Sudan cut its education budget by 25 per cent, from 134 to 100 million U.S. dollars, due to reduced income from oil revenue. Education accounted for six per cent of the total budget, while one third of the budget was channelled into military equipment. At the same time, the

14 | Feinstein International Center, "Livelihoods, social protection and basic services in South Sudan", Aug 2012.

15 | UNICEF and the Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GoSS), "A report of the study on socio-economic and cultural barriers to schooling in Southern Sudan", Nov 2008.

16 | World Bank, "Education in the Republic of South Sudan: Status and Challenges for a New System", 12 Sep 2012.

17 | Ibid.

18 | UNICEF and GoSS, n. 15.

South Sudanese display a hunger for education which is hardly matched by any other population in eastern Africa. After all, 60 per cent of children currently have an opportunity to receive education, compared to 40 per cent ten years ago.¹⁹

The future development of South Sudan needs a strong, visionary government which coordinates its ministries, defines clear roles and is prepared to get the necessary work done. The infrastructure needs to be improved, above all the electricity supply, followed by development in agriculture which – if carried out correctly – could turn South Sudan into the breadbasket of eastern Africa in the best case. The signing of various economic, trade and security agreements between both governments on 27 September 2012 in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, has sparked new hope. It opened up the possibility of oil exports resuming after they had been interrupted since the start of the year, and also included the establishment of a demilitarised border zone. However, a solution for the Abyei region and the border demarcation is still outstanding.

In August 2011, Sudan changed its legislation to the extent that obtaining South Sudanese citizenship automatically resulted in the loss of Sudanese citizenship. An estimated 350,000 South Sudanese, who have hardly any connections with South Sudan, live in Sudan. Mixed marriages, above all in the border area between North and South, mean there are a large number of people of mixed origin. Their situation has been successfully settled by the Four Freedoms agreement in September 2012. This grants the citizens of both countries the right of residence, freedom of movement, the right to own property and conduct economic activity in the respective other state.

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In addition to the conflict at the border with South Sudan, there are two other regions worth mentioning. For more than 40 years, the east of Sudan has been the setting for the

most protracted refugee situation on the African continent. About 84,000 Eritrean refugees sought refuge there, the first arriving in 1968. Every month, an average of another 1800 cross the border into Sudan – a consequence not only

19 | World Bank, n. 16.

of Eritrea's policy of forced recruitment of young men and obliging them to serve in the military for their entire life, but also a combination of drought and an extremely weak economy which leads to impoverishment and an absence of viable prospects.

On the other side, in the west of the country, the conflict in Darfur has been going on for almost ten years between the Muslim/Arab government in Khartoum and various rebel groups who took up arms for the first time in 2003 because for too long, the government had neglected the region, mainly populated by the three ethnic groups Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa. Khartoum responded with brutal persecution of the civilian population. According to the United Nations, this conflict has claimed 300,000 victims so far, whereas Khartoum continues to claim that no more than 10,000 people have died. In March 2009, the International Criminal Court in The Hague issued an arrest warrant for Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir, on grounds of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Darfur. In 2010, the accusation was extended to include genocide. Since 13 international humanitarian organisations were expelled from Darfur in March 2009, little has been published about the humanitarian situation in the area; even media agencies scarcely have access. Although violence flares up occasionally, it has generally declined: 200,000 internally displaced persons and refugees have been able to return home. In July 2011, the government and one of the rebel groups signed the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur and on 8 February 2012, the Darfur Regional Authority was inaugurated in North Darfur, one of its tasks being to help displaced persons to return and to promote reconstruction and development. Furthermore, Khartoum has announced a new peace and development strategy in Darfur, and has reached an agreement with Chad and the UNHCR to regulate the return of refugees from Chad.

Kenya

Following the post-election violence in 2007/2008 which led to the deaths of more than 1,000 people and the displacement of 600,000, the situation in Kenya has largely stabilised. The country failed to set up a local tribunal to try the perpetrators, as a result of which the International

Criminal Court in The Hague has taken up the process with support of the coalition government. In January 2012, four prominent Kenyans, including Vice President Uhuru Kenyatta and the former minister William Ruto, were indicted for crimes against humanity. Both reject the indictment and publicly announced an alliance in December according to which Kenyatta will stand for the office of President and Ruto as the VP candidate. The next national elections are planned for 4 March 2013.

Economic growth is at 4.3 per cent, while property prices in Nairobi are ten times higher than five years ago.

The country has ushered in a new constitution in August 2010, the result of a process lasting more than 20 years, which is a reason for optimism. Economic growth is at 4.3 per cent, while property prices in Nairobi are ten times higher than five years ago. At the same time, Kenya is the country in eastern Africa with the greatest inequality in income distribution. The crime rate is high, particularly in the larger cities such as Nairobi. The International Corruption Index published by Transparency International in 2011 states that Kenya is still one of the most corrupt countries in the world, ranked 154 of 183 countries.

In contrast to assumptions after the unrest following elections, the Kenyan government has made significant progress in finding solutions for internally displaced persons. On 4 October 2012, it passed a law offering legal protection to citizens displaced by violence, natural disasters or development projects. In addition, an institutional focal point for internal displacement was created. Successful progress is also being made with the return and resettlement of people who were displaced during the post-election violence.²⁰

In August 2012, tribal conflict broke out over land and water issues in the northeast of the country and in the coast province (Tana River Delta) claiming more than 100 victims and forcing 12,000 people to flee. In addition to the conflict over natural resources, some experts believe that the violence was sparked by widespread frustration with the economic situation, persistent impunity and political ambitions by certain politicians. For decades, the population of the coast province felt neglected by the government which had not created any jobs but had nevertheless given

20 | UN OCHA, n. 9.

thousands of hectares of land to its allies. The uprising in Mombasa led to the conclusion that there are deep social and political divisions in Kenya, in addition to differences of religious denomination, which might lead to a rise in violence in the run-up to the elections.

In October 2011, the Kenyan government deployed troops to Somalia to fight the Islamic militant group, Al Shabaab. For a country that had never before sent troops abroad, this represented the greatest security risk since independence.²¹ In July 2012, the Kenyan military intervention became part of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Since then, security within Kenya has significantly deteriorated, above all in the capital Nairobi.²² Repeated bomb blasts and attacks with explosives, mostly in Nairobi's Somali neighbourhood Eastleigh and in Garissa, have strained relations between Kenyans and Somalis enormously, and led to demonstrations and uprisings.

This development is also tragic because 91 per cent of all refugees who seek refuge in Kenya come from Somalia – more than half a million. For many years, the government has shown enormous generosity in hosting Somali refugees but it is now responding with increasingly harsh regulations for Somalis, tens of thousands of whom live in Nairobi. A declaration by the government on 14 December 2012 stated: "As a result of the intolerable and uncontrollable danger to national security, the government has decided that all refugees and asylum seekers from Somalia must return to the Dadaab refugee camp."²³ A few days later, the order was also extended to all refugees who do not come from Somalia. They were ordered to relocate to the Kakuma refugee camp.²⁴ UNHCR is now in negotiations with the government to ensure that the rights of refugees continue to be respected.²⁵

21 | International Crisis Group (ICG), "The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia", 15 Feb 2012.

22 | IRIN, "Kenya: Security concerns persist", 10 Dec 2012.

23 | Associated Press, "After attacks, Kenya restricts refugee freedoms", 14 Dec 2012.

24 | AFP, "Kenya orders all refugees back to camps", 18 Dec 2012.

25 | "UNHCR urges Kenya to continue upholding refugee rights, cautions against stigmatizing refugees", press release, UNHCR, 20 Dec 2012, <http://unhcr.org/50d2e9ec6.html> (accessed 30 Jan 2013).

Since the fall of the dictatorship under Siad Barre in 1990, the flow of refugees from Somalia never fully subsided, and with the drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011, it swelled to enormous proportions.

Kenya is currently sheltering about 630,000 refugees from nine countries. Four of Kenya's five refugee camps are located in Dadaab, close to the border with Somalia in the east of the country. These camps are now hosting 470,000 refugees, mainly of Somali origin, and are regarded as the largest refugee site in the world, as well as Kenya's fifth largest city. Since the fall of the dictatorship under Siad Barre in 1990, the flow of refugees from Somalia never fully subsided, and with the drought in the Horn of Africa in 2011, it swelled to enormous proportions. Every month, 2000 Somalis continue to cross the border into Kenya, which was officially closed in 2007. Human rights organisations have repeatedly warned that Kenya is unable to deal with the inflow of Somali refugees on its own.

Another refugee camp, Kakuma, is located in the north-west of Kenya, in the hot and dry savannah of the Turkana district, 92 kilometres south of the Sudanese border. This camp hosts more than 100,000 refugees. It was originally created for South Sudanese fleeing the civil war. It now hosts people from 13 different nationalities. The largest group are once again Somalis, followed by refugees from Sudan and South Sudan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Eritrea, Uganda, Rwanda and other countries. In recent months, it is above all the number of Sudanese which has increased because of the border conflict between the two Sudanese states. Clashes with the local Turkana population are common. Natural resources in the area are scarce. Nomadic pastoralists who often struggle to survive and have been neglected for decades by the central government, the Turkana feel provoked by the fact that for decades, tens of thousands of refugees have been supported by the international community – even though from an objective perspective the support offered is inadequate for a decent existence. Repeated negotiations have resulted in all aid agencies now including a certain number of locals in their programmes. However, these agencies are by no means capable of making up for the lack of government support in this region and it is not their mandate either.

Uganda

For 20 years, from 1986 to 2006, the northern Uganda was the setting for one of Africa's longest and most brutal conflicts. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) fought the Ugandan government, although quite soon it abandoned any political agenda and instead terrorised its own Acholi population, plundering villages and mutilating, torturing, raping and killing their inhabitants. Most of these actions were carried out by child soldiers.

UNICEF estimates that the LRA kidnapped 20,000 children in the course of the conflict turning them into child soldiers or sex slaves. They had to undergo induction rituals including torture, killing and eating of family members. "I was unhappy about killing, torturing or destroying the property of innocent people, but I had no choice", says Francis, who was a child soldier with the LRA for two years before he managed to flee. "The instructions were clear: Follow the commands and live, or refuse and die."

During the conflict, 95 per cent of the population (1.7 million) fled into protection camps set up by the government, although continued to be targets of LRA attacks. For years, 40,000 children referred to as night commuters walked to the towns every night to seek safety from these attacks.

The International Criminal Court in The Hague issued arrest warrants for Joseph Kony and four other LRA commanders in 2005 on grounds of crimes against humanity and war crimes. From 2006 onwards, a ceasefire agreement negotiated as part of a peace process initiated upon in the South Sudanese city of Juba did stabilise the situation and allowed the displaced persons to return; the agreement failed in 2008, however. By March 2012, there were only about 30,000 displaced persons in transit camps. The people of northern Uganda now need to cope with the devastating consequences. Everyone has a terrible story to tell. Everyone has been traumatised in one way or another. Throughout the long years in the camp, traditional family structures have collapsed and cultural values and customs have been lost. There is no longer a guaranteed supply of food after long dependency on aid organisations, the infrastructure is inadequate, there is poor access to education

and the majority of the population do not have either work or a means of existence.

Child soldiers “suffer from sleeping disorders, have difficulties concentrating and are often depressed. Many of them are rejected by their community and their family”, says a psychologist.

Above all, the child soldiers are struggling to be reintegrated into society. “They suffer from sleeping disorders, have difficulties concentrating and are often depressed. Many of them are rejected by their community and their family; they withdraw, are uncertain and are afraid of the future. Others become aggressive and seek distraction in alcohol and drugs”, says Stephanie Brosch, a psychologist and, until March 2012, the JRS project director in Kitgum. “However, stories from children and young people who regain hope after years of despair, show us that the situation is not hopeless, in spite of the difficulties that we are confronted with every day. The children seem determined not to abandon hope or to become bitter. They are trying everything to improve their lives”, says Brosch.

On the other hand, attempts to destroy the LRA have failed and have only sparked worse attacks. The rebel group with its leader Joseph Kony initially withdrew to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, since 2008, has also entered the Central African Republic terrorising the population in both countries, sparking new flows of refugees into South Sudan.

In October 2011, the U.S. government deployed 100 soldiers to assist Uganda and the Central African Republic in their fight against the LRA.²⁶ The African Union is also working to establish a regional intervention force comprising 5,000 from the four affected countries. However, the AU must also encourage leading politicians in the region as well as international donor countries to support a comprehensive military and civil-society solution otherwise the process will fail and tens of thousands of families will have to continue to live in fear.

26 | ICG, “Ending the LRA: Reason for optimism and political commitment”, 10 Jan 2012.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia was never colonised, and has the highest population density on the African continent after Nigeria. The modern history of the country has been dominated by military coups and conflicts with the neighbouring countries Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan. Although the majority of the population are farmers and the country is the largest coffee producer on the continent, drought, floods and continued conflict are responsible for the fact that one Ethiopian in ten remains dependent on food aid. Ethiopia is one of the main recipients of foreign development aid.²⁷ In spite of this, the country hosts almost 370,000 refugees from Somalia, Eritrea, South Sudan and Sudan. Every single month, about 1,000 young people, mostly men, flee because of the Eritrean regime and its policy of forced military recruitment. A considerable number of Ethiopians live abroad as refugees or economic migrants as a result of poverty and also because of the repressive political regime.

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In 2009, the government passed a law placing restrictions on NGOs working on human rights and good governance in Ethiopia and receiving more than ten per cent of their funding from abroad. This has enormously restricted the work of many organisations, including those assisting refugees.

The 2011 drought in the Horn of Africa forced tens of thousands of refugees to cross the border from Somalia into Ethiopia where they are hosted until today in what has become the second-largest refugee site in the world: Dollo Ado. Five camps accommodate more than 170,000 refugees, and a sixth will open soon. In 2012, between 700 and 5,000 Somalis arrived in Dollo Ado every month. The influx will not stop for as long as Somalia has not stabilised and the war, which has now lasted for 20 years, has not come to an end. Like its neighbouring countries, Ethiopia is pursuing a camp policy in order to protect its scarce natural resources and infrastructure against the pressure of the influx of refugees. Refugees live in camps

27 | Wenzel Michalski, "Schützenhilfe für Diktatoren", *The European*, 15 Nov 2010, <http://theeuropean.de/wenzel-michalski/4845-korruption-in-aethiopien> (accessed 30 Jan 2013).

with restricted freedom of movement, access to education and opportunities for work, and are confronted on a daily basis with their own lack of prospects.



Somalian refugees carrying their few belongings to the transit centre out of Dollo Ado. | Source: © Angelika Mendes.

HIDDEN AND VULNERABLE: REFUGEES IN THE CITIES

Hand-in-hand with the global trend towards urbanisation, more and more refugees are seeking refuge in cities instead of camps. According to estimates, about half of the world's 15 million refugees live in cities, however the exact number of this largely hidden population is unknown. No accurate figures are available for eastern African cities. Based on unofficial estimates, about 100,000 refugees and asylum seekers are living in Nairobi (Kenya), while 52,000 are officially registered.²⁸ In Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), hosts 4,100 registered refugees whereas for 2010 alone the government estimated that the Somalis numbered 160,000.²⁹ About 40,000 refugees live in Kampala (Uganda), most of them from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes region (Rwanda and Burundi).³⁰

28 | Sara Pavanello, Samir Elhawary and Sara Pantuliano, "Hidden and Exposed: Urban refugees in Nairobi, Kenya", HPG Working Paper, Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Mar 2010, <http://odi.org.uk/publications/4786-urban-refugees-nairobi-kenya> (accessed 30 Jan 2013); UNHCR, "2013 UNHCR country operations profile – Kenya", <http://unhcr.org/pages/49e483a16.html> (accessed 30 Jan 2013).

29 | UN OCHA, n. 9.

30 | UNHCR, "2013 UNHCR country operations profile – Uganda", <http://unhcr.org/pages/49e483c06.html> (accessed 30 Jan 2013).

There are varied reasons for moving to the cities: harsh living conditions in the camps, lack of space, medical care and educational opportunities as well as lack of security. Refugees in camps report sexual abuse, brutal attacks, killings, abductions and alleged recruitment by militias. They leave the camps because they fear for their lives. Others, above all Ethiopians, Somalis and Sudanese, who have spent up to 20 years in camps, move to the cities because they long for normalcy, economic independence and security. The governments in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia are concerned about this development.

Life is not easy for refugees in the cities either. Large families share small rooms in poor neighbourhoods. They receive no aid, or significantly less than refugees in camps, and are expected to be economically independent. As a result of the policies of most countries, they have great difficulties in accessing the regular labour market.

In Ethiopia, for example, refugees in cities cannot receive a work permit. Although the Kenyan government does theoretically allow refugees to work, in practice the conditions imposed in order to obtain a work permit or to form a business make it impossible for refugees to access formal employment. Many had to leave behind their documents in the process of fleeing, while many others cannot afford to pay for the permits. Only Uganda allows refugees to access formal employment, not just theoretically but also practically.

CONCLUSION

Refugees in eastern Africa have lost everything, many even several times. They face major challenges, they do not belong anywhere, they are excluded from society and are without prospects. Some are highly skilled, many were doctors, university professors or lawyers in their home country. Now they depend on external aid. The international protection system for refugees can only respond to meet their needs to a limited extent.³¹ Often, host countries are unwilling to consider local integration and new approaches as a possible solution to the refugee problem,

31 | UNHCR, "The state of the world's refugees 2012. In search of solidarity".

and instead use traditional methods such as strict camp policies. Many countries could offer more places for resettlement, financial resources or technical assistance.

All in all, it will require greater international solidarity in order to address the challenges together. Global solidarity and equal sharing of cost and burden are essential as long as few countries host the majority of refugees in the world simply because they happen to be the geographical neighbours of the affected states. These countries need the support of the international community in order to meet their responsibilities and offer the necessary protection.