



Co-Chairs' Summary

Delivering the Nairobi Declaration & Action Plan on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees

Roundtable Meeting of IGAD Foreign Ministers and IGAD Secretariat, EU and UNHCR 29 September 2017, Brussels

Introduction

A roundtable meeting was held in Brussels on 29 September 2017 between IGAD Foreign Ministers¹ and the IGAD Secretariat, UNHCR and EU – representing the core group supporting this process. This was aimed at discussing the key challenges and priorities in delivering the Nairobi Declaration and Plan of Action² that were agreed at the IGAD Special Summit on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia held in Nairobi on 25 March 2017.

Progress, challenges and priorities

The progress made in delivering the Nairobi Declaration commitments and rolling out the Nairobi Plan of Action was welcomed. At the regional level, the focus has been on putting in place the building blocks to support it. A road map and results framework have just been agreed and an ambitious timetable set. It was announced that the core group has now expanded to include UNDP and the World Bank. It was underlined that the pool of partners should be widened to include especially development actors, as well as the private sector and civil society, and notably the Somali diaspora.

As this process represents the regional application of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) of the New York Declaration on Refugee and Migrants, the experience – both within each country and regionally - provides a model for others, as well as informing the development of the Global Refugee Compact due next autumn.

Through the discussions, particular attention was given to the achievements made in delivering the Nairobi commitments, particularly at the national level, and highlighting the major challenges and constraints faced, as well as priorities for the coming months. These centred around five themes.

a). Political commitment

It was strongly acknowledged that IGAD countries have been hosts for many years and continue to receive refugees. Some populations, such as the South Sudanese, have been repeatedly displaced due to recurrent conflict. Notwithstanding this, countries in the region committed to maintain an open door policy with regard to asylum. Commitments made at the Leaders' Summit on Refugees and more recently at the IGAD Special Summit demonstrate an enduring regional resolve to provide asylum and protection, and to create opportunities and solutions for refugees. Refugee legislation in a number of countries, such as Ethiopia and Djibouti, would reinforce this, so too would the development of National Action Plans. However, this needs to be matched by international solidarity. These refugees - some of whom were in their third generation of exile – should not be forgotten as a result of donor fatigue.

¹ Countries represented at the meeting included Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan.

² See: <https://igad.int/communique/1519-communique-special-summit-of-the-igad-assembly-of-heads-of-state-and-government-on-durable-solutions-for-somali-refugees>

b). Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration.

There was recognition that in most situations the majority of refugees want to go home whenever conditions are conducive for them to do so in safety and dignity. With the large number of Somalia refugees in the region and the important contribution they can make to the reconstruction of Somalia, sustainable voluntary returns has to remain the longer term goal. Already more than 100,000 refugees have been assisted to return to Somalia since 2014. The forum on durable solutions held in Mogadishu in August 2017 and the development of a National Plan of Action were welcomed. However, there is a need to accelerate investments and impact on the ground in Somalia to create conditions for sustainable return. It would be destabilising if refugees returned home but were then forced to flee back to their country of asylum due to lack of opportunities and services. Simply hoping returns would work is not sufficient.

c). Self-reliance and inclusion of refugees

The importance of self-reliance and social inclusion of refugees within countries of asylum was underlined by all. In Kenya, many Somalis were integrated into Kenyan society. The same was true in Djibouti, in particular through their integration into the education system. In Ethiopia, progress was being made in developing industrial parks, for which 30% of the work force would be reserved for refugees. 10,000 hectares of irrigable land was also being made available. However, to reinforce this in the region, there is a need to include refugees systematically into national development plans, so enabling development investment in areas hosting refugees, and also to think differently, such as by allowing refugees to live outside of camps.

d). Education

The fundamental and transformative importance of education was stressed. It creates opportunities for young people and a new generation capable of rebuilding their country sustainably on return. It also guards against these young people being magnetised towards radicalisation or other negative tendencies. Kenya highlighted its commitment to invest in a training facility in Dadaab for Somali refugees towards which UNHCR has committed its support. Djibouti's hosting of the first regional thematic meeting on this issue was warmly welcomed. However, the scale of the challenge and consequences of failure are very real considering that of the 900,000 Somali refugees in the region, 60% are young people. It was reported that in one IGAD member state, up to 1,500 refugees making the grade for university or other tertiary levels of education compete for 11 university places.

e). International solidarity and responsibility sharing

In the discussions, the key elements included resources, and increasing resettlement places and the opening up of complementary legal pathways for third country admissions. In the case of resources, the EU reiterated its strong commitment to continue supporting this process, whilst also highlighting the need to mobilise other partners to provide predictable, multi-year and additional support. Furthermore, it is imperative that pledges are paid, new partnerships built, and increased development investment made that supports host communities and refugees in a more robust way – a core requirement of the CRRF. It was noted that on the same day, the World Bank Board was meeting to discuss the first allocation of finance under the IDA 18 refugee window, which included three IGAD countries.

In the case of third country resettlement, concern was expressed this was becoming more and more difficult for Somali refugees, and emphasised that 'doors need to be kept open' beyond the region. UNHCR noted that it has requested for 40,000 resettlement places to be made available for refugees located in 15 priority asylum countries along the Central Mediterranean route, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan.

Conclusion and next steps

Participants lauded the regional approach that is being employed by IGAD to comprehensively address the Somali refugee situation. At the same time, the regional approach would ultimately be only as good as the national plans and actions that deliver it. Hence, a key next and enabling step is the development of National Action Plans, which was a key requirement set by the Heads of State and Government through the Nairobi Declaration. These plans are due to be completed as far as possible by the end of October 2017, and needs to reflect the Regional Results Framework. Robust support for this process was called for, as well as improvement of coordination between humanitarian and development actors both within the Governments and amongst partners.

The next key regional event is the first regional thematic meeting, which will be held in Djibouti from 23-25 October 2017 and focus on refugee education. At this, it is hoped the education ministers and partners will set ambitious targets to support both refugee and host children.

This will be followed by the first inter-ministerial stocktaking meeting, which will be held from 21-23 November 2017 in Addis Ababa. This will provide an opportunity for a candid discussion on progress made in delivering the Nairobi Plan of Action, and what is working or not. The update report feeding into this needs to be backed by solid evidence of results achieved on the ground for both host communities and refugees, based against agreed milestones and indicators, as well as mapping of the state of donor finance.

Mahboub Maalim
Executive Secretary
IGAD

Stefano Manservigi
Director-General
DEVCO

George Okoth-Obbo
Assistant High Commissioner
for Refugees