



Mission to East Africa: Vulnerable Refugee Populations and the Need for Solutions

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TRIP DELEGATION

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Each year the office of Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) visits a different region of the world to review the issues related to refugees in that area and the status of assistance that governments and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) are providing to them. As a result of their assessment of the situation, the team formulates recommendations to governments and NGOs on ways to improve the provision of assistance to the refugees in that region.

The USCCB decided to focus on East Africa in 2011 because of the serious new refugee crises that are developing in that region. These crises are being driven by natural disasters, political repression, human rights violations, and internal conflicts. They come on top of chronic problems, such as continued political repression in Eritrea, which are generating a steady flow of refugees. The net result of these various factors is that a humanitarian emergency is developing in the Horn of Africa that is more severe than anywhere else in the world. The progress that was made in Africa in the 2000s in reducing refugee numbers is reversing itself as a result of the confluence of these various crises. The team of six people was headed by

Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, Bishop of Las Cruces, New Mexico and consultant to the USCCB Committee on Migration; and Ambassador Johnny Young, Executive Director of Migration and Refugee Services at USCCB. Other members of the USCCB team were Kevin Appleby, Director of Migration Policy and Public Affairs; Anastasia Brown, Director of Resettlement Programs; Beth Englander, Director of Special Programs; and Thomas Furey, a consultant for the mission. The team traveled to Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya from October 8 to October 18, 2011. Initially the team divided and made simultaneous visits to Uganda and Ethiopia, then reunited in Kenya. The populations examined were 1) Congolese in Uganda; 2) Eritreans in northern Ethiopia; and 3) Somalis in Kenya.

Congolese Refugees in Uganda

Comparatively, the government of Uganda has welcomed refugees to its country by providing them with land in refugee camps to become self-sustaining and by offering them safe haven. However, many challenges remain, especially for Congolese refugees fleeing unspeakable horror in their homeland due to the ongoing civil war and tribal conflict. Particularly vulnerable are women—many traumatized from rape and the loss of their husbands and children—and unaccompanied refugee minors many of whom have lost their families during the conflict, and some of whom could be conscripted by Congolese militias. Both of these groups remain vulnerable in Uganda, both in refugee camps and in urban centers, such as Kampala.

There are close to 140,000 refugees in Uganda, nearly 40,000 of who reside in Kampala, the capital and larg-



est urban center. More than half—about 80,000, are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 19,000 of whom reside in Kampala. These refugees—particularly women and children—have had traumatic experiences of rape and have witnessed the murder of loved ones. Many suffer emotional and psychological, as well as physical, effects from these experiences.

Findings for Uganda

Congolese have migrated from the settlement camps to Kampala to find work and better protection, but in many cases have found neither. Although many attempt

Africa: The Refugee Continent

During the 2000s, the overall number of refugees in Africa declined, as the resolution of internal conflicts in countries such as Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and Burundi led to the repatriation of significant numbers of refugees. Many people have returned to a newly independent South Sudan. In other cases, countries such as Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda have started allowing long-term refugees to settle legally in their countries. In 2011, approximately 2.4 million refugees are in Africa, approximately 20 percent of the total refugee population in the world.

Building Peace through Sport

The young boys, all unaccompanied refugee minors, at Bondeko Catholic shelter in Kampala spoke with pride as they relayed their triumph in a local football tournament. The team consists of refugees from the Congo, Sudan, and other countries in Africa. One of the stars of the team spoke of the loss of his parents in the Congo; he hopes to go to Sweden with his sister soon. “We like to watch the football games together, if we can find a television, particularly the World Cup. We play the Ugandans and have made friends with them.” The team asked for any help in allowing them to keep playing—shoes, balls, football shirts (BondekoTeam.yolasite.com). In Kwangale camp, a group of 30 young men gathered on an open field during twilight for a discussion. How can we clear the underbrush to make a better field to play football? They have arrived from Burundi, Rwanda, the DRC, and Somalia, yet come together for a common purpose—to play as a team. The visitors ask what they need. “We need a few balls,” said the leader. “Our last one is getting old.”

to sell small items in local markets, they are often harassed and closed down by local authorities. Women and girls are compelled to work in domestic settings and are vulnerable to human trafficking rings and prostitution. Refugees with significant health needs had moved from the settlements to try to find appropriate services, however meaningful Health-care—particularly for mental health—is generally unavailable, as refugees are unable to afford private care, and the public clinics often do not have needed medication. Survivors of torture often go untreated. They are unable to afford rent for steady

housing or pay school fees to provide their children an education.

Protection for Congolese women is virtually non-existent, as there are consistent reports of harassment and rape. Women who experience rape often are ostracized from their communities and experience domestic violence. They often have significant health issues related to the rape and medication and treatment is often not available. Although NGOs provide psycho-social counseling to women victims, the need is far greater

than the current capacity. Surprisingly and disturbingly, there are no shelters for refugee women anywhere in Kampala.

Unaccompanied refugee minors who may have lost parents in the civil war and are alone also face challenges in Kampala. There are approximately 600 unaccompanied refugee minors in Kampala known to local authorities, with many more unknown. Those who are identified by local authorities are directed to local NGOs, who attempt to find them foster families. Often these children had moved to Kampala after being placed in an abusive foster care arrangement in the refugee settlement camps. There are no shelters for minors in Kampala.



Tales of Horror

A 17-year old girl from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, she arrived in Uganda at age 14. As her father was killed in the DRC, she and her mother were dragged into the bush and gang raped. Her mother is HIV positive and is having trouble receiving life-saving medication. In the settlement, her and her mother live alone, but remain in fear, living in a secluded area with no light and no one to protect them from further violence. Despite her horrific experiences, the young girl would like to continue her education, with the dream of becoming a government minister, so she can help protect vulnerable women and girls.

A woman from Southern Sudan, her husband and family members have been killed. To send her four children to school, she needs money for uniforms, lunch, and materials. She goes alone to collect firewood to burn into charcoal, so she can sell the charcoal to others in the settlement. She has no money for candles, so she sits alone in a dark house at night, and does not come out unless the moon is bright. She has been raped in the settlement. Although she reported the rape, the area leaders have refused to take the incidents to the authorities. She cannot return to Sudan, since she has no family, no land, and no place to go.

Education in local schools is expensive and many of these children are unable to afford it. Even public schools require children to have uniforms and pay for materials and lunches. The United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and NGOs were attempting to complete Best Interest Determinations (BIDS), for the children, however the major objective of the BID appeared in most cases to be aimed towards determining placement in a foster family. BIDs to as-

certain durable solutions for minors were less evident.

Kyangwali Refugee Camp

Efforts to identify and protect vulnerable women and children are more robust in refugee settlement camps in Uganda. In the Kyangwali (Chung-walle) camp in western Uganda, where about 20,000 Congolese reside, UNHCR has begun profiling vulnerable Congolese women and assessing the needs of unaccompanied refugee minors (URM) through a BIDs process. According to UNHCR, about 200 URMs have been identified as at-risk in the camp, including 75 who are minor head of households and 125 who are in a foster-care arrangement. To date, about 650 Congolese women have been profiled for possible resettlement to a third country.

Despite these efforts, problems remain in Kyangwali and other camps in Uganda. Rape and sexual abuse are still prevalent, with women living alone or with children especially vulnerable. Tribalism has continued in some camps, and refugees have reported fear of their Congolese persecutors in the camps. American Refugee Committee runs a program to provide psychosocial support to victims of gender-based violence and was providing essential interventions. However, once again, these victims had no access to immediate shelter. While women are often moved to other settlement camps, it was noted that the perpetrator or their family often followed them. There was also no shelter arrangement for unaccompanied children.

Although refugees in Kyangwali and other camps are given land to grow crops, food support is halted after a few years, leaving some families vulnerable. Additionally, extremely vulnerable individuals, such as women headed households, were struggling with the ability to cultivate land and provide their children with the required school fees, often forcing these individuals to seek additional income elsewhere. Health-care, in the camp was limited, with emergency care located 40 miles away.

Other Populations

Along with Congolese, other refugee groups in need of protection live in Uganda. The Somali population totals nearly 20,000, followed closely by Sudanese and Rwandans. These groups suffer the same problems as

St. Patrick's Catholic Parish—A Community Haven

St. Patrick's Catholic Parish, located in the heart of Kyangwali refugee camp in Uganda, provides a safe haven and sense of community for refugees. Run by Fr. Hosemarie L.W Kizito, the parish holds daily Mass and activities for local residents of the camp, especially for refugee children. Refugee families gather there for community support and to share problems. Fr. Hosemarie is attempting to raise funds for an AIDS clinic to serve the refugee community.



the Congolese. Access to health care and education for Somali women and girls was noted as a particular problem. Somali women were not comfortable with male doctors, and thus were not receiving pre-natal care and necessary care during childbirth.

About 800 Somali resettlement cases languish in Nakievale camp, the largest camp in Uganda located southwest of Kampala. Although approved by UNHCR for resettlement to the United States, these cases have been placed on hold due to disagreement between the United States and UNHCR as to their inclusion in the original agreement for processing of the larger group. Failure to resolve this dispute and resettle these cases could lead to unrest in Nakievale.

Recommendations for Uganda

Notwithstanding the hospitality of the Ugandan government toward refugees in the Central and East African region, improvements can be made in the protection of refugees in the country. Congolese refugees, the largest number in the country, require special attention.

Shelters should be constructed and operated on an ongoing basis for vulnerable women and vulnerable children, including unaccompanied refugee minors, in Kampala and the settlement camps.

In Kyangwali camp, resettlement should be pursued for the maximum number of Congolese women and

unaccompanied refugee minors where a BID indicates resettlement as the best durable solution. This model should eventually be expanded to other settlements in Uganda. BIDs and profiling of Congolese women and children should be expanded in Kampala.

Profiling of vulnerable Congolese women should include those who have been abandoned by their husbands after arrival or have suffered domestic abuse. Profiling of vulnerable women also should eventually be expanded to other nationalities, such as Sudanese women, with the intent of increasing protection and ascertaining durable solutions.

Assistance should be increased to meet educational costs for Congolese refugee minors in Kampala and the settlements and to provide health and psycho-social services.

The remaining Somali cases identified for resettlement by UNHCR, particularly in Nakievale camp, should be accepted by the United States.

Refugee Situation in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has a long tradition as a country of first asylum for refugees and takes seriously its responsibilities to assist refugees. As Ethiopian Government officials note proudly, that tradition reaches back into the mists of history with reports of Jews coming to Ethiopia during the diaspora. Ethiopia also has welcomed Russians

fleeing the 1917 revolution and Armenians fleeing repression in the waning days of the Ottoman Empire. In the last few decades, many of Ethiopia's neighbors have generated large inflows of refugees, with Somalia and Sudan being the largest sources. The current number of refugees in Ethiopia is 270,000, which is a significant reduction from the 1 million refugees in the country in 1986. One of the major reasons for that reduction was the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Sudanese with the resolution of conflict between the northern and southern regions of Sudan and the independence in July 2011, of the nation of South Sudan.



The number of refugees is increasing again, however. A severe drought, one of the worst in decades, is devastating agriculture and livestock herding in Somalia. In addition, Somalia continues to be wracked by fighting between the terrorist organization, Al-Shabab, and the central government that is fighting to regain control of the southern part of the country. Tens of thousands of Somalis are fleeing the combination of natural disaster, civil war, and political repression by the Al-Shabab. In addition, renewed fighting between Christians and Muslims in the Blue Nile State of Sudan (which borders Ethiopia) is generating a new inflow of refugees from there. Finally, political repression, religious discrimination, and human rights violations continue in Eritrea, generating a steady outflow of refugees from that country.

Eritrea fought for decades for independence from Ethiopia and formally became an independent country in 1991. Unfortunately, it now suffers from one of the most political repressive regimes in the world. In the opinion of U.S. Government officials, it has the most severe abuses of religious freedom in Africa. In recent years, the government has harassed, arrested, and detained members of a reform movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church and of independent evangelical groups. The government has also sought greater control over the four state-approved groups: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church, and the Islamic community. Significant numbers of people are being

held solely for their religious beliefs. The U.S. Government lists Eritrea as a “Country of Particular Concern” because of its severe violations of religious freedom.

Findings in Ethiopia

During its visit to Ethiopia, the USCCB team focused on assessing the situation for Eritrean refugees in the camps in northern Ethiopia near the Eritrean border. The team visited the Mai Aini camp north of Shire and the nearby Endabaguna Reception Center for newly-arrived refugees. A particular focus of the assessment was on issues surrounding one of the most vulnerable groups -- the URMIs between the ages of 7 and 17. The team visited and met with some of those minors in both locations and held discussions about them with officials from UNHCR, the Ethiopian Government, and NGOs.

More than 32,000 Eritreans are refugees in Ethiopia under UNHCR protection in the Tigray region. Approximately 1,000 new Eritrean refugees arrive each month. They are located in three camps and the reception center. The latter is a holding facility until space is available in one of the camps. UNHCR reported to the team that it had nearly 1,000 URMIs under its protection, with the majority of them in a group care arrangement in Mai Aini. A smaller number, mostly teenagers estimated to number around 250, are in Adi Harush, a camp that was constructed after Mai Aini reached its physical capacity. The number of URMIs peaked in 2010 and has dropped

Children in search of hope

Living in a receiving center in Mai Aini camp in Northern Ethiopia, the 9-year old boy is part of a large group of energetic, gregarious boys ages 6-18 waiting for a place in the camp. They live in cramped quarters, with little to occupy them during the hot days. When queried about where he wants to go, the young boy says “Sweden,” to join his older brother.

The 14-year old girl lives in a mud-brick, tin roof, one-room shelter with two other girls. When asked where she gets her clothes and shoes, she looks down at the worn plastic sandals barely hanging onto her feet and acknowledges that the girls got one outfit of hand-me-downs and then must scavenge. Still, her eyes are bright. A little boy of 10, scruffy and in tattered clothes, sleeps packed like a sardine on a mat on a dirt floor. The room is about 10 by 12 feet, but includes up to 16 other young boys. When asked what he wanted, he said he just wanted the bed bugs to stop.

20 percent in 2011.

The border between Eritrea and Ethiopia is long, remote, and rugged and it is possible to cross at several points. Once they cross, the children’s first contact is usually with members of the Ethiopian Army or village militia. They are then transferred to the reception center at Endabaguna, which is run by the Administration for Refugee and Resettlement Affairs (ARRA) of the Ethiopian Government. The International Committee of the Red Cross attempts to send a “safe and well” message to the families in Eritrea after the arrival of the children at Endabaguna. When queried by members of the USCCB team, the children were not forthcoming about how they actually travelled to Mai Aini.

Lack of Sufficient Adult Supervision and Care for the Children.

Children do not have sufficient adult supervision and care. According to sources at Mai Aini, a social worker hired from the refugee community checks in with each household once or perhaps twice a day. If a child happens to be away from the house during that visit, the social worker will not see him or her and it did not appear that there was a psycho-social case management component to the social worker’s interaction with the children. Moreover, children are in a separate area of Mai-Aini camp away from the rest of the refugees and at night no adults are staying with any of them, regardless of their ages.

The children are housed according to age groups (7 to 12 and 13 to 17) and gender. That being said, the houses are literally feet away from each other and, without adult supervision at night, the separation of living quarters is not meaningful. The population of URM’s is more than 80 percent male, as so many boys have fled Eritrea to avoid conscription.

The camps are open, which means that children go into the local community if they so choose. According to sources, the older children are all too often visiting local bars and engaging in activities such as drinking and gambling. While all the children can attend schools for half a day, the schools are overcrowded and there is



a high dropout rate. Most of the young people have no training or income-generating skills. The health facilities in the camp are not well-supplied and the children suffer from a variety of maladies, including sexually transmitted diseases. Of growing concern is an outbreak of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis that will prove difficult to control in the current camp environment. The younger children have their meals provided. The older children are provided injera bread (a basic food staple) that has been prepared by adults through the USAID food program, but they are otherwise expected to prepare their own meals from the food that is provided for them. Most survive on the injera and shiro, a chick-pea paste similar to hummus.

Limited Psycho-Social Support for the Children. A few NGOs provide psycho-social support for these children, but it is insufficient to meet the demand. Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) in Mai Aini provides sports facilities, music and fine arts training, and a library. At the time of the visit, the library was filled with youths who were reading and studying. This JRS facility is perhaps the most important outlet the children of Mai Aini have for their development and to boost their morale; however, there are many children who are emotionally isolated and do not participate in these activities.

For all the limited psycho-social support the children in Mai Aini receive, no such support was being provided at the Adi Harush camp, a new camp in the area. That camp was built to handle the overflow from Mai Aini and 14 percent of the residents of that camp are children.

Insufficient Number of Shelters. Both Mai Ani and Adi Harush camps do not have enough shelters to meet the growing populations, due primarily to a lack of materials. The insufficient number of

shelters meant that children at the Endabaguna reception center often remain there for months, even though the center is set up only to provide the most basic needs (food, shelter, and latrines) and has no education or recreation resources. Although shelters in Mai Ani are built to hold no more than 12 occupants, many held up to 20.

Strained Relations with Local Communities. The local communities near the camps are extremely poor, and the inhabitants perceive that the refugees receive more support for basic needs than they do. For example, a water pipe built to bring water to Mai Aini is inaccessible to local residents, who must rely on water from trucks and are resentful of the water pipe provided to the refugee population. Regardless, water shortages occur both in the camp and in local communities during the dry season.

As a result of this and other like issues, relations between the refugee camps and the local communities are strained, precluding local integration. Local residents have resorted to building shelters near the camps in an effort to access some of the services and resources at the camps.

Few Options for the Children. The options for these children are limited. Repatriation is impossible at this time, local integration is prohibited, and resettlement opportunities are scarce.

Since 2009, there have been no repatriations to Eritrea. Anecdotal evidence indicates that refugees who return to Eritrea put themselves and their families at great risk of detention or even death at the hands of the Eritrean government. The long-term ex-





pectation by UNHCR, however, is that most children will return to Eritrea when conditions permit repatriation in safety and dignity. The Ethiopian Government does not support local integration, even though many of the Eritreans share the same ethnicity and language as the Ethiopians living in the Tigray Region, which is where

the refugee camps are located. In 2011, however, the Ethiopian Government is providing 651 scholarships for promising students to study for university degrees (including one Ph.D. candidate) at the University of Addis Ababa. UNHCR is working with the Ethiopian government to pursue improved conditions of asylum, including strengthening “out-of-camp” programs to allow refugees to live anywhere in Ethiopia, particularly if they can demonstrate they have means to support themselves through work.

As a result of the limited options, some refugees, including children, try to leave for third countries, either on their own or with the help of professional smugglers. This is dangerous and many have reportedly died in the effort. Of course, if they reach their intended destination in Europe, Israel, Egypt, Sudan, or other countries in the Middle East, they have to live there as illegal immigrants with no legal protection. UNHCR estimates that 30 percent of the Eritrean refugee children are being lured to go to third countries, with some portion becoming trafficking victims.

Recommendations for Ethiopia

More resources are needed for Eritrean refugees in northern Ethiopia.

This refugee crisis is a chronic one. It did not start due to any dramatic natu-

ral disaster or political or military event. Rather, it has been building relatively slowly but steadily due to the severe human rights violations and political repression in Eritrea. There is no telling when the situation might improve in Eritrea. In the meantime, tens of thousands of refugees face the possibility of spending years in the camps with limited opportunities for education and no possibilities for gainful employment.

The camps for Eritreans need to expand to accommodate a continuing influx of refugees. The Ethiopian Government and UNHCR need to work together to expand the amount of land for the camps. All parties need to make a greater effort to build more shelters so that the newly arrived refugees (especially the URM) do not have to stay in the reception center so long. The greatest need is for more materials. The refugees themselves should be able to help in building the shelters and, if trained, could garner skills that could allow them to be self-sufficient and capable of integrating elsewhere. The ground is rocky and it is difficult to dig into it. An excavator would be helpful.

The children should be given continuous adult supervision, seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Ethiopian Government officials indicated that, if the resources were available, the government would be willing to consider providing round-the-clock supervision, which



is currently not the policy. The USCCB urges all parties to work together to effect this change, including recruiting and training adults from among the refugee community who would provide adult supervision for the children.

The children in the camp and reception center need screening and counseling for the trauma, separation, and sometimes loss they have experienced. As with adult supervision, this is a capacity matter and can only be addressed through the addition of professional social workers and clinicians.

The social-developmental support that is currently being provided by JRS in Mai Aini needs to be expanded to the other camps. More resources need to be devoted by the NGOs to this important need and the camp authorities need to do more to assist children to take advantage of what is already on offer by JRS.

More resettlement opportunities should be given to the Eritreans in general and to the children in particular.

The reasons why the refugees fled Eritrea are not going to go away in the foreseeable future. A political solution is needed to Eritrea's problems, but there is no prospect of that happening in the near future. Repatriation is currently not a viable option, given the unwillingness of the Eritrean Government to allow organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross to monitor the welfare of those who would be repatriated. In the absence of repatriation, resettlement provides a viable durable solution for the children of Mai Aini, even as tracing efforts and attempts at family reunification continue. Expedited solutions for refugee children are even more critical when you consider the developmental ramifications of time in the life of a child and the longer-term implications that protracted displacement has on the mental and behavioral health of children.

Capacity must be improved with regard to conducting early Best Interest Assessments (BIAs) and Best Interest Determinations (BIDs). (see conclusion)

The Ethiopian government should permit long-term refugees to integrate into the local communities. For many of those refugees, this is the only viable option for them. That being said, the Ethiopian government should be commended for taking its responsibilities seriously as a first country of asylum. Programs which allow refugees to live in other parts of Ethiopia should be expanded.

Refugee Situation in Kenya

Kenya is one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in the world, with well over half a million refugees currently – the majority of them Somalis. The number of Somali refugees is increasing by approximately 1,000 per day as people flee political violence, civil unrest, and severe drought in southern Somalia. The refugee camp at Dadaab is the largest refugee camp in the world and holds more than 460,000 people. Tens of thousands of refugees have had to be moved to the refugee camp at Kakuma in northwestern Kenya to handle the overflow. As it has for decades, Kenya continues to be a generous host to refugees and should be commended for handling responsibly its role as a country of first asylum.

Besides Somalis, Kenya hosts large refugee populations from Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, and Eritrea. Since the peace agreement in 2005 that led to independence for South Sudan, hundreds of thousands of Sudanese have returned to their homes. Renewed fighting in South Sudan and Sudan in 2011, however, has cut dramatically the flow of returnees. Refugees from the Darfur region of Sudan have not returned to their homes.

In Kakuma, Catholic educational programs provide hope

Don Bosco, the social arm of the Salesian religious order, runs a vocational training center in Kakuma refugee camp that teaches more than 400 refugees at a time practical skills such as carpentry, masonry, plumbing, automobile mechanics, tailoring, and computer literacy. “I want to learn a trade,” said one student, “so I can build a life away from here.” Nearby, Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) assists students who are taking university courses on-line through Regis University in Denver, Colorado. A large room with computers is filled with students. With more resources, these two programs could expand and affect positively more young refugees.

Findings in Kenya

Visit to Kakuma

Kakuma refugee settlement, in northwestern Kenya, lies relatively close to the Sudanese border. This camp has been operating for decades and was the one from which the “Lost Boys of Sudan” were resettled. It currently houses 86,000 refugees, 60 percent of whom are Somalis. Many of the latter were moved to Kakuma from Dadaab camp in eastern Kenya to relieve overcrowding and to provide them better protection. The rest of the refugees in Kakuma are a mix of Sudanese, Congolese, Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Burundians.

One of the characteristics of the camp was that various nationalities living there mix freely and, on the whole, get along well with each other. Unfortunately, limited resources for the long term nature of the camp were in evidence, as refugees that had been in the camp for an extended period could no longer be provided with appropriate roofing for their housing, and were resorting to cardboard and plastic bags.

An UNHCR estimated 4,000 unaccompanied or separated minors reside in the Kakuma, although the number could be much larger. This number overwhelms the current capacity of the UNHCR and partner NGOs to conduct BIAs and BIDs to help them decide how best to proceed in the case of each child. As is the case in Ethiopia, these capacity issues are of concern when considering the ramifications for child development.

Many of the young adults had in fact entered the camp as unaccompanied minors and were now living on their own. The fact that they had reached the age of 18 now moves them out of a classification of vulnerability, but in fact their circumstances have not changed.

Vulnerable women in the camp living as refugees with their children have been unable to access resettlement without the consent of the father. In many cases, the mother may have escaped from an abusive husband or father who had been abusive toward the children. This has left many refugee families in limbo and unable to resettle, effectively leaving them in camp conditions and vulnerable for the foreseeable future.



Compounding the difficulty of these situations is the fact that mothers are often unable to work because they have young children. Reports of children being kidnapped from the camp by members of the husband's family were common.

Urban Refugees in Nairobi

In Nairobi, there are approximately 100,000 refugees from surrounding nations. Under the auspices of UNHCR, several NGOs are providing basic health care, legal advisory services, and vocational and English-language training for refugees in Nairobi. In Eastleigh, a neighborhood of Nairobi that is mixed ethnically, many of the refugees, especially the Somalis, have opened small businesses in the neighborhood. Still, many refugees in Nairobi live in the shadows, as the government does not grant refugees legal status outside the camps.

Moreover, refugees in Nairobi, especially young persons, remain at-risk, especially to human traffickers. Two teenagers from the DRC had fallen victim to sexual exploitation and a third young woman from Somalia had fallen into the hands of an adult woman who placed her into indentured servitude in Nairobi. Several NGOs commented that there are concerns about active trafficking rings, particularly into Nairobi.

Recommendations for Kenya

The UNHCR and partner NGOs need to devote more resources to be able to conduct BIDs on all the unaccompanied refugee minors in Kakuma (Note: More on BIDs, below, in this report).

Vocational training and education programs at Kakuma refugee camp are providing important services and should be supported with more resources.

The services being provided to the urban refugees in the Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi are also provid-



ing needed assistance, but those programs need more resources in order for them to expand.

The US government and UNHCR should continue to expand and diversify the identification of refugees for resettlement. Within the urban population in Nairobi and the Kakuma camp there are many refugees—including women with children—for whom resettlement would be an appropriate solution. This is particularly important as the security situation in Dadaab camp remains unsettled.

Processing Women and Children without consent from an Absent Father. As previously noted, women with children of-

ten do not have access to resettlement because a father/husband is required to provide consent, both under government laws and UNHCR guidelines. This prevents these vulnerable families from receiving protection, even, in some cases, from the father/husband himself. These requirements should be revisited, particularly in extremely vulnerable cases.

Conclusion

Although the mission focused on distinct refugee populations in East Africa, some themes emerged that were relevant to all three nations.

Delays in Resettlement Processing

An overarching theme is that the process for refugee resettlement to the United States is not working as efficiently as it could. The U.S. Government implemented new security check requirements in 2011 which have severely slowed, if not halted, resettlement of the Somali caseload. While there is a need to ensure that certain refugees are not a threat to the United States, there are steps that can be taken to prevent unnecessary delays in approving applications.

Scheduling of Refugee Interviews. For example, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) does not schedule refugee interviews until the security clearance has been approved. These interviews are conducted by circuit riders travelling around Africa, and there is a significant time lag between receipt of the security clearance, the scheduling of the interview, and the actual interview. During that time lag, the clock is ticking on the validity of the security clearance. As a result, many cases have to be submitted for another security clearance before final processing due to expired validities. In the end, this time lag consumes more U.S. Government resources in addition to slowing down the processing of the applications.

Most security clearances are approved within an average period of time. If the interviews could be scheduled on an assumption that the clearance will be approved by the time of the interview, however, the process could be expedited. Those scheduled who have not been cleared by the time of the interview will experience a delay in the processing of these cases, but the majority of applicants will be processed more expeditiously.

A Transparent and Responsive Security Process. A more complicated security process has led to delays in the refugee pipeline, especially for Somalis. In many cases, Somalis already approved for travel to the United States have been later denied because of security issues. This process needs to be examined

for accuracy and efficiency. Further, those who are denied based on security reasons should have a transparent appeals process that permits them to provide additional information to refute any evidence against them. Finally, family units should not be impacted if one member of the family is denied.

Need for Improved Capacity and Training on Best Interest Assessment and Best Interest Determination

UNHCR and NGOs in all three countries need improved capacity and greater training on conducting Best Interest Assessments (BIAs) and Best Interests Determinations (BIDs) for the thousands of URM. While the number of children receiving BIAs is much higher by location, most of the children are simply not having BIDs made on them. One NGO in Kenya estimated that while close to 95% of children entering Kakuma camp have BIAs, only 10 percent are receiving a BID. And, the USCCB delegation heard from some NGOs that BIDs are not always of good quality, i.e., thoroughness and accuracy.

Processing Women and Children as a Family Unit. Another cause for processing delays is that the USCIS requests that all applicants who are related to each other or have close ties be interviewed at the same time. This means that, if there are delays in a security clearance for applicant, all the people in that group have their interviews delayed. U.S. refugee law requires any individual that is not a spouse or unmarried minor child of an applicant establish their own refu-

gee claim. Tying other relatives or friends to the family is unfair and can create inordinate and unnecessary delays in processing applications. Only those individuals that are dependent on the principal applicant should be required to be interviewed together.

The use of BIDs to place children within foster families in a refugee situation should not be a final determination of the best interest of the child. This is particularly disconcerting when there is no capacity to follow up on that placement, which was evident in several of the situations observed. BIDs should also be used to ascertain other durable solutions,



including resettlement.

In all too many cases, children get frustrated after long periods in which nothing is happening to come up with a long-term solution for them. They fall into the hands of traffickers who lure them with stories of riches in other lands. Many end up being exploited, sexually or otherwise, and others die on the way to third countries. Many others develop long-term mental and behavioral health issues often stemming from untreated exposure to trauma or health problems.

BIDs need to be conducted on a case-by-case basis. What is a viable long-term solution for one child may not be the right solution for another child. As indicated in the UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interest of the Child, (pp 38-39), BIDs “should be initiated as early as possible in the child’s displacement, and UNHCR should not wait until prospects for a durable solution emerge. The BID should be conducted within two years of identification of the child, and more quickly in the case of young children.”

Although not all BIDs lead to a determination that the child should be resettled, the process should not automatically rule out resettlement. It also can be used as a tool to identify an interim environment that can provide a child with safety and well-being at the same time efforts continue to search for parents or identify a permanent durable solution.

Unfortunately, systematically these steps are not being taken in the countries visited.



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