

A written information report on refugees and displaced people in Somalia

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Introduction

Until 2017, Somalia hosts nearly 25,000 refugees and asylum seekers, 90,000 returnees and nearly 1.5 million internally displaced people. Almost 61,000 Somalis have also returned from Kenya since 2014, including 20,900 in the first three months of 2017. The escalation of the conflict in Yemen has also led to the return of about 30,600 Somalis since 2015 out of more than 255,000 Somali refugees who were in Yemen.

In addition to returns and internal displacement caused by the conflict, Somalia has become vulnerable to widespread famine, after only six years of devastating famine that led to the death of many Somalis.

The recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council directed at the State of Somalia emphasized on the need to adopt more effective policies towards the rights of refugees and displaced persons in Somalia. The recommendations related to the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons in Somalia in the 2016 Universal Periodic Review consisted of 8 recommendations, which focused on depositing instruments of ratification on the African Union

Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) and the initiation of the process of sorting out individuals to decide who are qualified as internally displaced persons in Mogadishu, in order to assess the needs and develop durable solutions, and making every effort to address the issue of internally displaced persons and not to discriminate against them. Moreover, to expedite the finalization of the programs aimed at addressing the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons. However, since 2016, the status of refugees and displaced persons in Somalia has not changed, as it will be monitored as follows:

First: The situation of Somali refugees in other countries

a. The status of Somali refugees in Kenya

In May 2016, the Kenyan government announced its plans to accelerate the return of Somali refugees and close the Dadaab camp in northeastern Kenya by November, which is the largest refugee camp in the world that houses more than 300,000 Somalis. Kenya and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee Rights announced the activation of the "voluntary return of Somali refugees" program to Somalia. However, refugees are worried about that demobilization and forced return, fearing the Kenyan state. In November 2013, Kenya, Somalia and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees signed an agreement for the "voluntary" return of Somali refugees, which stipulates that both countries and the UNHCR will ensure the voluntary return of Somalis in safety and dignity.

However, Partners for Transparency expresses its concerns about the implementation of this plan in reality, especially since the current experiences of many Somali refugees in Dadaab camp are in stark contrast to those obligations on these parties. The situation these refugees fled from still persists; as Somalia is still suffering from armed conflicts, famine, drought and poverty.

B. The conditions of Somali refugees in Yemen

Yemen hosts the world's second largest Somali refugee population, around 250,000 refugees. It is a long-standing refugee host nation and the only country in the Arabian Peninsula which is signatory to the Refugee Convention and its protocol.

The ongoing conflict in Yemen has made it difficult for many refugees to cover basic needs for their families and to sustain themselves given the limited work opportunities and economic hardships.

Therefore, some Somalis in Yemen found no other solution but to return home. Partners for Transparency shares the refugees the same fears and concerns, given the difficult situation and deteriorating conditions that Somalia continues to suffer from, including poverty, armed conflict between various movements and militias, and the lack of either an economic or political system.

Partners for Transparency values the cooperation between the Somali government, human rights organizations and the High Commissioner for Refugees in order to return Somali refugees who wish to return home from Yemen, whose number reached

more than 4,800 Somali refugees from 2017 to 2019, in the hope of providing them with a better environment where they can live peacefully¹.

On the contrary, with regard to the conditions of Yemeni refugees in Somalia, many Yemenis have been displaced to Somalia as a result of the war and have settled in a refugee camp in the Al-Khadda region, near the Somali capital, Mogadishu, and complain that they hardly have access to food and education.

B. The conditions of Somali refugees in Ethiopia

In November 2019, the number of Somali refugees who fled drought and protracted conflicts and went to Ethiopia this year reached about 7,800 refugees, seven times more than the previous year, raising the number of total Somali refugees in Ethiopia to more than 263,000 refugees, who are currently being housed in refugee camps. Al-Shabaab Movement did not care about the drought afflicting the country, but rather forced farmers to cultivate specific crops and pay large taxes on agriculture, leading citizens to flee their home and go to Ethiopia as refugees.

However, Partners for Transparency expresses its concern about the Ethiopian government's lack of commitment to facilitating the conditions of Somali refugees in it in line with the 2016 New York Declaration on Refugee Rights, to which it is committed.

Second: The situation of the displaced in Somalia

¹ Somali refugees return home from Yemen in latest UNHCR-facilitated departure, UNHCR, 2919, <https://bit.ly/3hTrt2n>

a. Displaced people due to natural disasters

Some 5,547 new disaster-related displacements have been recorded in Somalia. About half of this number, equivalent to 2,249,000 displacements, was associated with drought, especially in the southern regions of Bay, Central Shabelle and Bakool, where citizens were displaced from rural areas in search of water and livelihoods. The rain, which exceeded the general average, flooded the southern and central regions of the country during the rainy seasons in April and May, which caused 289,000 new displacements. Some families in villages far from the rest of the country have been cut off for months.

Heavy flooding, conflict, a crippled economy, impending desert locust swarms and the exponential spread of COVID-19 are threatening the safety and welfare of Somalia's 2.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs).

Since the start of this year, more than 220,000 Somalis have become internally displaced, including 137,000 due to conflict. Natural and climate-related disasters including drought and resulting lack of livelihoods and floods are additional complex and interlinked drivers of displacement.

Partners for Transparency would like to highlight the deteriorating situation of the displaced, particularly in South and Central Somalia, where flash floods and the beginnings of riverine flooding caused by the seasonal Gurains have already displaced an estimated 90,000 with additional displacement expected, worsening significant pre-existing humanitarian needs faced by

IDPs and host communities. If current trends continue, this year's rains give every indication that they could pose the same catastrophic threat as the Deyr rains of 2019, which led to more than 400,000 people being forced to flee their homes. Swarms of desert locusts, the most destructive migratory insect in the world, threaten to decimate crop yields and cause widespread food shortages post the Gu rains.

Partners for Transparency is also concerned about the recent floods, which indicate a disturbing pattern as extreme weather conditions are increasing in frequency and intensity, which may cause an additional wave of displacement. Before June 2020, flash and river floods caused by the monsoons caused the displacement of more than 450,000 people in the country. Floods in 2018 and 2019 caused the displacement of 281,000 and 416,000 people respectively. Flood-based displacement figures show an upward trend from year to year. Recurring climate-related emergencies in Somalia are having devastating effects on communities that depend heavily on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods.

Partners for Transparency is calling for more logistical support, especially for the communities of Hershabelle and the southwestern states. Although these IDPs managed to survive the floods, their living conditions are miserable. Many of the newly displaced are now living live in overcrowded settlements and many, especially those newly displaced, live in makeshift shelters made of plastic bags, cardboards and sticks. Physical and social distancing is close to impossible, and there is scarcely enough

clean water for drinking, let alone hand-washing. Conditions are ripe for widespread viral transmission. This shelter provides little protection from the inclement weather, and leaves families at increased risk of crimes such as theft and rape.

The Foundation is more and more concerned about the lack of food they receive, as many of them suffer from hunger with increasing malnutrition among children, which puts them at risk of starvation. In some areas, the prices of basic foodstuffs, especially milk and vegetables, have risen between 20 and 50%. As for the health status of these displaced people, it is not better than the above. Health conditions are poor and access to medical care is scarce.

B. People displaced due to armed conflict in Somalia

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, especially in Mogadishu, are crowded with large numbers of people fleeing the escalation of military confrontations between armed fighting groups and the drought that struck a number of agricultural areas in southern Somalia.

In March and April, armed operations against Al Shabab resumed in Lower Shabelle, resulting in more than 50,000 people being forced to flee their homes. Communities were directly exposed to crossfire and mortar attacks in their villages, and roadside explosions while in flight. Recruitment of children, gender-based violence including rape, and arbitrary arrest were also reported. In Gedo, Jubaland State, fighting between various parties to the conflict in the region also forced an estimated

40,000 people to flee their homes in Belet Xawoo in early March.²

Banadir region hosts more than 700,000 internally displaced persons. About 270,000 of whom face acute food insecurity, while the rest suffer from critical levels of acute malnutrition.

70% of these women and children suffer from harsh conditions, and their lack of income to support their families makes them face difficult choices either to stay in the camps or move around Mogadishu in search of available income opportunities that rarely lead to accepting exploitative work that provides them with less than one dollar a day.

Partners for Transparency is concerned that the continued deterioration of the security situation in the Middle Shabelle and Lower Shabelle regions due to the escalating military confrontations between armed fighting groups will lead to large-scale displacement in many parts of southern and central Somalia.

Conclusion

Partners for Transparency believes that despite all the efforts made, all solutions are temporary, short or medium-term solutions, and their impact quickly disappears. Therefore, permanent solutions must be developed that will help maintain the suitable living situation for Somali refugees, and therefore the Foundation recommends the following:

1. Work to form a ministry in Somalia or a national or local council that takes care of only refugees and displaced

² Conflict and heavy floods force tens of thousands of people to flee their homes in Somalia, amidst COVID-19 threat, UNHCR, 2020, <https://bit.ly/32LQsjl>

persons, so this fund or ministry allocates part of the state's general budget, as well as forming a body to direct international grants and donations to refugees and displaced people, for sustainable service projects that help them earn a living.

2. We recommend the need for government coordination in Somalia to record the ages of refugees and displaced persons, and the need to pay attention to their databases to address the problems of missing persons during displacement and asylum.
3. We recommend the necessity of allocating military forces affiliated with the government to protect international aids coming to the camps.
4. Working to provide alternative work for the population living in the agricultural areas that have been destroyed by drought, so that they will not be forced to flee to the camps, and to double the numbers already present.