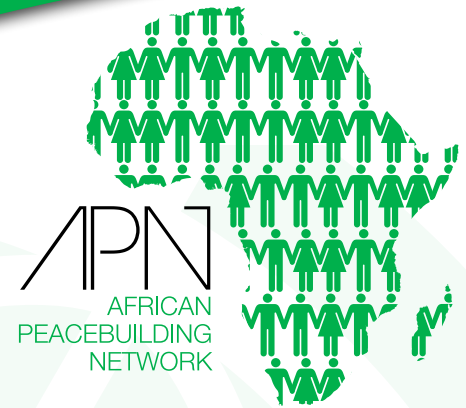




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Peacebuilding Engagement Activities by Resettled African Refugees: Policy Options

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- **The UNHCR should re-frame** Third Country Resettlement as an opportunity to share in rebuilding post-conflict states.
- **Post-conflict states should ensure** security prevails to facilitate the return of resettled refugees either temporarily or permanently to use their newly acquired skills and resources for post-conflict rebuilding.
- **Refugee host states should encourage and foster** civic participation, such as support for the formation of diaspora associations to facilitate the transfer of ideas to the country of origin.
- **More field research should be conducted** to provide greater evidence of the contribution of refugee diasporas to peacebuilding in various post-conflict African countries to inform policies and actions.

Resettlement of refugees in third countries of asylum is considered both a protection practice and a durable solution to refugee crises, particularly in protracted refugee situations. Unlike most migrants and particularly irregular migrants, refugees receive protection from their host country, and the road towards citizenship is chartered prior to their arrival. Additionally, policies are in place to facilitate their integration into host societies. For host states located in the global North, resettlement is not just a humanitarian policy, but also includes strategic access to direct and indirect benefits other than those accruing to the resettled refugees. Such benefits may apply to other refugees, the host state, other states, or the international protection regime. Many analysts tend to overlook the strategic use of resettlement as a peacebuilding tool. Recent research findings from Africa and Central America demonstrate refugees' capacity to contribute to peacebuilding in diverse ways including enhancement of safety and security; participation in political processes; and revitalization of economic, justice, and reconciliation systems.¹ The findings also show that the ability of refugees to engage in peacebuilding is often determined by asylum policies of host states and the willingness of peacebuilding actors to engage non-state actors outside of the country where the peace is being built. This policy brief draws attention to some of the peacebuilding engagement activities of African resettled refugees in the global North. It notes that the resettlement of refugees provides host states with the opportunity to fulfill their mandates of the shared responsibility of protection and peacebuilding, without falling into the traps of imposition and interference.

¹ See Amanda Coffie, "Filling in the Gap: Refugee Returnees Deploy Higher Education Skills to Peacebuilding," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2014): 114-141, <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdu015>; and Kristi Anne Stølen, *Guatemalans in the Aftermath of Violence: The Refugees Return* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

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RESETTLED REFUGEES AS CHANNELS OF ENGAGEMENT

Studies show that in spite of long periods of separation, resettled refugees find channels to relate to their home countries.² Primarily, they engage in financial remittances and transfers to family members and friends. Financial remittances form the bulk of transfers to countries of origin. Remittances provide lifelines to those who could not leave such countries, as well as for those living in refugee or internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. During the post-conflict phase, remittances from resettled refugees provide resources and economic opportunities for the establishment of small- to medium-scale business by relatives and friends.

Relative to other transnational groups, the transfer of social capital, such as ideas and skills, tends to manifest on a lower scale among resettled refugees. Very few of them consider returning to their countries of origin either temporarily or permanently. However, there are some that volunteer as teachers in primary and secondary schools, in clinics, and with other community engagement activities. These activities contribute to the broader social service provisioning agenda of peacebuilding.

Finally, on the political front, some refugees become emissaries for their home countries, organizing community activities to provide information and encourage others to stay in touch with their countries of origin. They also lobby the governments of their host countries to extend more resettlement opportunities to others in refugee and IDP camps and to contribute to peacebuilding activities.

CONSTRAINTS ON RESETTLED REFUGEES' ENGAGEMENT

There is a greater desire among resettled refugees to remit and transfer resources to the broader society and increase their current transfers, but they experience some constraints at the individual and state levels. First is the economic status of resettled refugees. The majority of them spent long periods of time in refugee camps before their resettlement, resulting in limited resources and skills. Thus, in their new, host countries, they had limited access to high-paying jobs leading to lower incomes. Additionally, some refugees do not possess the high-level skills required for some peacebuilding activities.

Second, the statist and highly institutional peacebuilding process has limited opportunities for individuals to participate, particularly those located outside the state where the conflict occurred. Thus, resettled refugees, like other

groups of migrants, generally choose to engage privately by focusing on family and members of their immediate community, rather than the broader peacebuilding agenda.

Finally, the integration policies and practices of host states present challenges and restrict resettled refugees' participation in post-conflict countries. For example, out-of-country travel restrictions, such as those associated with the residency requirement for Canadian and Australian citizenship, are a major constraint for those who wish to live transnationally and/or participate in skills development and exchange of ideas.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The UNHCR should re-frame Third Country Resettlement as not simply a humanitarian policy of sharing the responsibility of protection, but also an opportunity to share in rebuilding post-conflict states. From this perspective, host countries can align their resettlement and integration policies to address both their needs as well as the needs of the refugees' country of origin.
- Post-conflict states should ensure security prevails, as the refugees' willingness to engage in peacebuilding is predicated on experience with violent conflict. Safety is crucial and a major factor in refugees' decisionmaking process regarding whether to transfer or remit to their countries of origin, particularly on the question of whether they will ever return temporarily or permanently to use their newly acquired skills and resources for post-conflict rebuilding.
- Refugee host states should encourage and foster civic participation to facilitate the transfer of ideas to the country of origin. This can be achieved through their support for the formation of diaspora associations. These organizations become the links between the members and the new country as well as their countries of origin. For example, resettled Liberian refugees in the United States of America are known to have received support towards their successful integration from the existing Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA) and subsequently contributed to the organization's programs of remitting resources to Liberia.³ It is through such engagement that appropriate capacity- and relationship-building take place to allow resettled refugees, the host, and post-conflict states achieve the long-term strategic goal of refugee resettlement as a peacebuilding tool.
- More studies and research in the field may be useful to provide greater evidence of the contributions of resettled refugees to peacebuilding in various post-conflict African countries, to inform existing policies and actions.

² Nicholas Van Hear, "Refugees in Diaspora: From Durable Solutions to Transnational Relations," *Refuge: Canada's Journal of Refugees* 23, no. 1 (2006): 9–14, <https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/21338/20008>; and Cindy Horst, "Buufis amongst Somalis in Dadaab: The Transnational and Historical Logics behind Resettlement Dreams," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, no. 2 (2006): 143–157, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fej017>.

³ See Osman Antwi-Boateng, "The Transformation of the US-Based Liberian Diaspora from Hard Power to Soft Power Agents," *African Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 1 & 2 (2012): 55–74, <http://sites.clas.ufl.edu/africa-asq/files/Antwi-Boateng-2012.pdf>.