

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Living Out Of Camp:

Alternative to Camp-based assistance for
Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia



The present study was undertaken by Samuel Hall for NRC Ethiopia to examine the possible alternative to the encampment policy for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. Looking at the level of self-reliance reached by refugees living in the camps of Shire region and at the modalities and success of the recent Out-of-Camp scheme implemented by the government, the study highlights programming options and partnerships, as the way forward for stakeholders to address more effectively the challenges of migration, livelihoods, camp and out of camp programming in Ethiopia. Efforts to engage with out of camp programming are necessary in a migratory context like the Ethiopian one, where the prospects for durable solutions are severely limited, especially for Eritrean refugees, leading an increasing number of refugees to a situation of protracted displacement.

The study is based on primary data collected in Ethiopia according to a mixed methodology including:

- A 779-respondent quantitative survey in the camps of Mai Aini and Adi Harush,
- A 50-respondent small & micro-enterprise survey in Mai Tsebri & Addis Ababa
- 10 Focus Group Discussions, 10 Case Studies and 20 Key Informant Interviews

The findings of this study highlight 3 key conclusions:

Limits of camp-based assistance

The survey of the Eritrean camps points at the limits of camp-based assistance for refugees. It confirms that encampment prevents the development of livelihood mechanisms amongst Eritrean refugees living in Ethiopia, leading to a very low level of self-reliance in the camps and to negative coping mechanisms.

Low access to income-generating activities in the camps, especially for youth.

Activities available entail casual and irregular labour. The level of dependency on external assistance is very high demonstrating the very low level of self-reliance of refugees living in the camps.

- Eritrean refugees can rely on high levels of literacy (89%) but a very limited skill set and only a basic educational background, which reduces self-entrepreneurship and access to the labour market.
- Low access to work is one of the main obstacles for refugees living in the camp as 63% of them reported not having worked in the past 30 days and 59% of respondents work never or rarely throughout the year. Youth and women struggle particularly to access IGAs;
- The main types of jobs accessible are either casual labour in the construction sector or self-employment in the business sector. The main source of full-time employment available in the camp is with NGOs and ARRA, especially for women as 72% of the limited portion of women who had a full-time job worked in the NGO sector.
- A low connection to urban markets and a weak internal demand in the camp strongly limit the development of endogenous economic activities within or connected to the camps;
- Aid is the main source of income for 56% of respondents, along with charity (15%), community assistance (13%) and debt (17%) as part of their main sources of income.
- Low access to livelihoods is one factor further fuelling secondary movements out of the camps.

Social and economic isolation limits self-reliance

Measuring access to network and social connections for refugees in the camps reveals the high level of economic and social isolation, further limiting refugees' self-reliance.

- The family networks of refugees living in the camps are limited: only 22% refugees have relatives living outside the camps in Ethiopia and only 40% of them had Ethiopian relatives.
- The main type of interactions that refugees have with people outside the camp are for social or family purposes (45%), whilst business, financial and work relations are extremely weak (4%; 3% and 9%) confirming the poor economic integration of the two camps.
- 67% of respondents do not leave the camp nor have member of their household leaving the camp from time to time, confirming a high level of social isolation, fuelling frustration and secondary movements.
- Whilst the Eritrean diaspora is able to mobilize remittances to fund secondary migration, only a limited proportion of refugees in the camps (8%) reported relying on remittances. This resource should be better channelled to support livelihood activities in the camps rather than potential harmful migration strategies.

Vulnerable Sub-groups: youth & women

- The population of the camp is composed mostly of young male: 75% of male respondents and 60% of female respondents were under 29.
- The youth showed the highest level of inactivity in the camps, with 72% of respondents aged 15 to 24 having not done any work over the past 30 days, against 56% of respondents aged 30 to 34.
- Women have a particularly poor access to employment and income-generating activities with only 17% of female respondents having worked in the past 30 days. 76% of female respondents never work throughout the year.

- Whilst single male youths are tempted by secondary migration, women and families are more likely to stay entrenched in the camps.
- NRC's YEP programme, which targets specifically young refugees with a strong vocational training, has yet to build up a strong livelihood component to its intervention in the camps.

Overall, and as a consequence of economic dependence and social isolation, 2 main profiles of refugees co-exist in the camps:

- **a majority of young male refugees, ready to engage in further migration, despite the immense risks on the one hand;**
- **Refugees from vulnerable groups (including women, elderly, families) who are left behind, entering a situation of protracted displacement and highly dependent on aid.**

Both groups have low self-reliance levels and lack coping strategies, except for further movement, which increases their vulnerability.

A way forward? Out-of-Camp Scheme: opportunities & bottlenecks

The Out-of-Camp scheme established by the government is a welcome initiative that opens interesting opportunities for Eritrean refugees. Yet, it has not led to the expected results so far, as some gaps in the policy limit the protection and access to livelihood of refugees once out of the camp.

Low Self-reliance in the city

Assessing the living conditions of Eritrean refugees living in the city showed access to livelihood and self-reliance remains a challenge for some of the refugees in urban settings and that the OCP provides limited protection mechanisms for refugees in the city. Some connections are still lacking to increase the impact of the OCP on refugees' access to self-reliance.

Key challenges of the OCP scheme for Eritrean refugees:

Uneasy adjustment to urban life due to:

- An unreliable system of sponsorship
- Difficult to access employment and livelihood opportunities

- Poor conditions of employment, as refugees are restricted to informal jobs with no legal protection

Obstacles to local urban integration and to labour market entry:

- The lack of work permit
- The necessity to have an Ethiopian guarantor to be hired
- Language can also be a barrier for business-related activities
- Lack of market information
- Lack of work experience.

Protection risks:

- Food insecurity
- Negative coping strategies (food restrictions, prostitution...)

Because they are supposed to be self-reliant, OCP beneficiaries receive little assistance once in the city. Support and monitoring mechanisms on their living conditions are very loose. This tough adjustment to urban life explains why refugees living in the city still see resettlement as the main durable solution that they could access.

Livelihood Programming: towards self-reliance in and out of the camps

Objective 1: Strengthening self-reliance in the camps

The most vulnerable and the least self-reliant are left behind in the camps. Developing livelihood initiatives in the camps is needed and would help addressing the problem of secondary movements. NRC should build up the livelihood wing of its programming in the camps. In particular, a strong livelihood component should be developed from the inception of the YEP programme up to the follow-up with YEP graduates.

In particular, robust linkages to the markets should be built for YEP graduates by:

- Developing an apprenticeship programme with private employers in the surroundings
- Organising local and regional trade fairs
- Developing innovative credit mechanisms with the support of the diaspora
- Establishing self-help groups to support micro-entrepreneurship

Objective 2: Strengthening access to self-reliance through the OCP

The OCP is an innovative mechanism but requires additional support to address the missing linkages and protection risks highlighted in this study. Much can be done to take advantage of the OCP legal framework developed by Ethiopian authorities to build refugees' self-reliance. Three main articulations can increase the impact of the OCP on refugees' self-reliance:

- a. A stronger link between refugees in the camp, who remain the most vulnerable and the least self-reliant, and the policy;
- b. A stronger link between refugees living out of the camp and urban livelihood.
- c. A stronger articulation between actors to optimize the impact of the OCP.

For all stakeholders, the research recommends simple measures to help bridging the gaps of the current mechanism:

- **Reviewing communications campaign & tools** with refugees and potential beneficiaries in the camps to avoid creating an expectation gap.
- **Develop a reference document detailing the exact modalities of the OCP** for stakeholders.
- **Set up an Urban Resource Centre for OCP beneficiaries** where they can get information, counselling and be targeted for livelihood interventions.
- **Develop innovative solutions to address the issue of informal labour** in close coordination with ARRA.

The research recommends a comprehensive “A to Z programme – from the camps to the City” to address the 2 lacking connections exposed above: the low linkage between the camps' most vulnerable and the OCP on the one hand; the low connection to and integration in urban markets on the other hand.

NRC's Pilot Programme ‘From the Camp to the City – A Phase Approach to Building Self-Reliance’

- **STEP 1 - Building urban skills and workforce preparedness in the camp**
- **STEP 2 - Transferring trainees to Addis Ababa, through the OCP**
- **STEP 3 - Temporary support mechanisms**
- **STEP 4 - Complementary training in urban settings**

- **STEP 5 - Small Business Grants /Urban Apprenticeship Programme**
- **STEP 6 - Strong Monitoring & Evaluation**
- **STEP 7 - Advocacy Component**

Objective 3: Strengthening information sharing and Knowledge-Base Management amongst stakeholders

Given the fluidity of movements in and out of the camps of Shire, a tighter system of data collection, data analysis and information sharing is recommended to strengthen information and knowledge management amongst stakeholders and inform more directly programming. For livelihood interventions in particular, the impact of secondary movement needs to be assessed and that can only be done through a dynamic data collection system.

- ✓ **Collect data and update information from all stakeholders on existing migration and movement dynamics.** Mechanisms of Population Movement Tracking (PMT) have been established in other countries and migratory contexts to capture the migratory dynamics. PMT systems are based on consortiums of NGOs willing to align and share their data collection mechanisms. NRC is an active member of the PMT initiative in place in Somalia and could use this experience to replicate the initiative in the Ethiopian context.

Conclusion

This study conducted on the Eritrean refugee caseload in Ethiopia and the increasing protracted nature of the camps in the North of the country should be seen as a case study and an opportunity to rethink refugee management in Ethiopia and similar contexts. It showed that, in the camps, a shift should take place to include development actors – more suited to tackle issues of livelihood – in the assistance framework for refugees. It confirmed the need to support non-camp based assistance to refugees and to use the opportunity of the OCP to see how this type of schemes could be replicated with other groups of refugees in the country as well as in other contexts where camp-based assistance have led to intractable protracted refugee situations. The OCP also represents a great opportunity to open a dialogue on refugee management and innovative

mechanisms to increase refugees' self-reliance in Ethiopia, a dialogue that organisations like NRC should support.



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