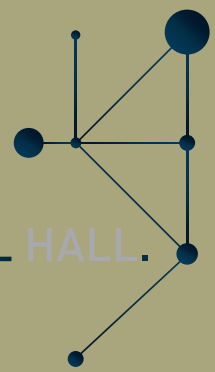




Towards Durable Solutions

Expectations vs. Reality –
Perceptions of Unassisted
Returns to Somalia

SAMUEL HALL.



Samuel Hall is a research think tank based in Asia (Kabul, Afghanistan) and East Africa (Nairobi, Kenya). We specialise in socio-economic surveys, private and public sector studies, and impact assessments for non-governmental and international organisations. Our teams of field practitioners, academic experts and local interviewers have years of experience leading research in Central Asia and East Africa. This has enabled us to acquire a firm grasp of the political and socio-cultural context in the country; design data collection methods and statistical analyses for monitoring, evaluating, and planning sustainable programmes; and to apply cross-disciplinary knowledge in providing integrated solutions for efficient and effective interventions. To find out more, visit samuelhall.org.

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ACRONYMS

AI	Amnesty International
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
IASC	The Inter-Agency Section Committee
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
RIS	Returns Intention Survey
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VoO	Village of Origin
WFP	World Food Programme

INTRODUCTION

This study gives a voice to refugees who have returned – unassisted – to Somalia and those planning to return: what constitutes a voluntary, dignified and safe return to Somalia? Respondents were chosen among those falling outside of UNHCR’s assistance program in order to inform return and reintegration programming in Kenya and Somalia.

A 2014 Intentions Surveyⁱ rates at 2.6% the number of refugees willing to return to Somalia. Yet, key informants report that the trend of returns is picking up in the Dadaab camps, most notably in Ifo 2 and Kambios, home to the most recent arrivals of refugees from Somalia. Key informants report that up to 10,000 refugees are considering return. UNHCR further reports that a total of 2,674 refugees have registered in Dadaab’s ProGres database as willing to return to Somalia.

It is therefore both timely and necessary to understand what return to Somalia means – this report is a fact-finding report on the unassisted returns from Kenya to Somalia, which, due to various reasons such as the lack of consolidated data collection system and absence of support networks, are not fully known and understood.

Since 2013, changes in the security and political context in Kenya and Somalia have led to a movement of spontaneous returns of Somali refugees from Kenya to their place of origin. Between January and November 2013, UNHCR had recorded about 33,000 spontaneous returns to Somalia. The return of Somali refugees has ebbed and flowed since owing to a number of push and pull factors to be further studied in this research.

UNHCR signed a Tri-Partite agreement on November 10th 2013, with the governments of Kenya and Somalia governing the voluntary repatriation of Somali Refugees living in Kenya over the next three years. This agreement put an emphasis on returns as a durable solution for Somali refugees in protracted refugee situations in Kenya, while underscoring the operation of the government of Somalia to protect its citizens and create conditions for a safe and organized return.¹

As a step towards facilitating the voluntary return of Somalis, UNHCR has launched a pilot program to support the return of an estimated 10,000 refugees. Through return information help desks in Dadaab, UNHCR provides information on conditions in return areas and the assistance packages for returning refugees. The project began on December 8, 2014 for six months.

While UNHCR has established a pilot program to support safe returns, the agency recognises the need for gathering up-to-date information on the conditions, mechanism of return and in particular on the protection challenges that *unassisted* returnees may face during their journey as well as in their place of origin, to further inform operational programming in both Kenya and Somalia.

A recent Intention Survey conducted by IOM in Dadaab found that only 2.6 % of refugees had the intention of returning.²

¹ IOM (2015) *Migration Profile of Kenya, to be launched on March 31, 2015.*

² Forthcoming: IOM-UNHCR (2014), *Refugees Intention Survey*, p.5

This calls for better analysis on:

- a) Decision-making mechanisms related to return in order to establish long-term programming geared towards durable solutions in Somalia;
- b) Precise and up-to-date knowledge about the protection risks before, during and upon return for refugees and practitioners alike.

While repatriation of Somali refugees may not be the optimal solution for many Somali refugees on Kenyan territory, the limited possibility of integration in Kenya coupled with the 2012 Directive on Urban Refugees calling for refugees residing in urban areas to relocate to Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps, have been among the factors leading refugees to return to Somalia. Nonetheless, while figures show a decrease in the number of refugees in Kenya over the last year³ speaking of return as a one-way movement may result in an over-simplification of the issues at stake. Two decades of protracted conflict in Somalia resulted in active cross-border movement amongst Somali refugees for many reasons including livelihoods, clan, lineages and survival. As such, 'return' is not an entirely new phenomenon but should be understood within the broader context of cross-border mobility of at the Kenya/Somalia border.

Secondly, Somalis in Kenya have since 2012 been facing a wave of restrictions including arrest, extortion and harassment under operation 'Usalama Watch' led by the Government of Kenya and resulting in the detention of Somali refugees considered to pose a threat to national security. During the period of November 2012 to January 2013, the numbers of Somali refugees asking for permits to return to Somalia had increased to 3,200 – compared to previous monthly averages of 150. The main reason cited for return was the fear of arrest by the police and police harassment. The 'Usalama Watch' operation provides an important lens through which to analyse the voluntariness of Somali returns from Kenya to Somalia. While many Somalis lead precarious lives in Kenya, they are usually granted refugee status on *prima facie* basis and, as a result, benefit from international protection.⁴

This legal protection, has led many to desire staying in Kenya or return back to Kenya after a temporary stay in Somalia. Returnees have not given up their refugee status in Kenya – UNHCR has not recorded any Voluntary Repatriation Forms (VRF) on returns to Somalia. This calls for a better understanding of this group of returnees or perhaps better described as 'refugee returnees' trying to re-integrate in Somalia yet wanting to keep their options open due to the volatility of the situation in South-Central Somalia. As such, 'voluntary return' has to be understood as a transitional phase for most refugees crossing the borders rather than a one way return movement.

By definition, spontaneous returns are taking place without UNHCR impetus. Yet, they can inform potential returns schemes, including UNHCR's pilot programme. This is especially relevant in the context of Kenya where the preference for return among durable solutions has been clearly stated by the Government of Kenya.

³ Registered Somali refugees in Kenya have decreased from 477, 424 in 2013 to 427,634 in 2014, UNHCR statistical summary as of 31.Oct.2015.

⁴ The UN specifies that refugees originating from south-central Somalia are granted *prima facie* status on the basis of the existing conflict in the region, while asylum seekers from Somaliland and Puntland are required to show evidence of persecution as per international refugee law (UN 24 Jan. 2011). UNHCR has noted, however, that it is "hugely difficult" to verify the identities and places of origin of Somali asylum seekers.

Returns to Somalia are few, returns are not new – but are they sustainable?

While figures show a decrease in the number of refugees in Kenya over the last year from 477,424 in 2013 to 427,634 in 2014,ⁱⁱ this drop in numbers cannot be solely attributed to return to Somalia. Although it is reasonable to assume that a significant portion of the number of refugees, not currently present in the camps, may have gone to Somalia, the assumption that people are returning to Somalia for good may be misleading. The situation in the region remains one of cross-border mobility. Cross-border movement is not a new phenomenon amongst Somali refugees who for decades have taken part in active border crossing for mixed reasons including livelihoods, clan, lineage and survival. Yet, what is new is the phenomenon of assisting spontaneous returns – to address protection issues, many of which are raised in this study as lessons learned to support such operational efforts.

Gaps of information persist as to who are spontaneous returnees, how they move and where and what they return to.

In theory, and by definition, spontaneous returns are taking place without UNHCR impetus – refugees themselves decide them. As such, tracking spontaneous returns, protection and reintegration needs are not easy tasks. The reality on the ground highlights a rift between the discourse on spontaneous return and reality. The discourse suggests that refugees are returning to their ‘homes’ to stay there permanently. Yet, the reality may hide key protection and reintegration challenges that can put lives at risk. Returnees can feel pushed to return. Returnees can end up with family or distant relatives, on their own or in internally displaced persons (IDP) settlements where no distinction is made between IDPs and returnees. While UNHCR has established a pilot program to support safe returns, the agency recognises the need for gathering up-to-date information on the conditions, mechanism of return and in particular on the protection challenges that returnees may face during their journey and in their place of origin – to ensure that UNHCR adheres to a strict “Do no harm” principle of humanitarian action.

Considering that the Pilot programme has its own monitoring and evaluation system, the information gathered in this report refers to experiences of returnees who fall outside of the Pilot.

Box 1. From Refugees to Returnees – Kenya’s Somali Refugee Population and Returns to Somalia

- Children and youth make up 52% of the refugee population in Dadaab and the vast majority (over 70%) do not attend school (CARE International).
- Education is a key concern for refugee children and their families. It is the main cause of family separation and split returns whereby children are left behind in Kenya.
- Currently, many returnees end up in IDP settlements in Somalia thus highlighting the limited prospects of reintegration and durable solutions. Access to basic needs is still an issue facing many returnees.
- Women are active participants in the decision-making process about return and often play very influential roles in shaping the household decision on whether to stay or leave.
- Youth from urban settings are among the most enthusiastic to return, expressing hopes and motivation for drastic change in their lives. Yet, often, after a short stay in Somalia, they are the quickest to return to Kenya, unable to integrate into the social and economic life of a country they have no strong ties to.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH

UNHCR has commissioned Samuel Hall to undertake this research documenting the conditions of unassisted spontaneous returns. Starting with decision-making processes up to the conditions of returnees post-return, the study provides **a cross-border, longitudinal view of spontaneous return as a process that begins in Kenya.**

This study builds on previous research to analyse the voluntariness, safety and dignity of returns to Somalia. The end objective is to provide UNHCR with strategic recommendations to improve its program in assisting voluntary returns in light of the changing political and security situation in both Kenya and Somalia. Documenting this little understood trend and the challenges faced by spontaneous returnees can inform potential return schemes, including UNHCR's pilot programme, and better protect refugees and returnees.

To this end, the study documents spontaneous returns by looking at the:

- Decision-making process documenting push and pull factors, mechanisms, levels of information of conditions of return
- Protection risks during and post-return
- Re-integration process of returnees in the country of origin and whether this constitutes a suitable transition to durable solutions

The report will inform strategic planning for UNHCR and its partners to pave the way for resilience building, sustainable and safe returns. The recommendations will inform advocacy initiatives with the governments of Kenya and Somalia as well as UNHCR's efforts to provide refugees and spontaneous returnees with up-to-date and reliable information on the conditions of return and the challenges upon return.

What can we learn from the process of unassisted spontaneous returns to inform refugees, returnees, and organisations mandated to protect them?

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

1/ A Cross-Border Research in Kenya and Somalia

With a total of 60 case studies and 12 focus group discussions, 160 respondents were interviewed in four locations: Eastleigh and Dadaab (Kenya) and Kismayo and Mogadishu (Somalia).

Geographic coverage

The cross-border approach allowed the research team to test perceptions against reality of return. To get a dynamic understanding of this, the research was conducted in two types of locations in each country of exile and country of return: urban / capital, main area of origin / exile, including a coverage of the Dadaab camps to shed light on differences and similarities between urban and camp refugees in Kenya.

In Kenya – Eastleigh, Nairobi (urban refugees) and Dadaab (five refugee camps)

Case studies looked at in-depth information on the life and living conditions of refugees in Kenya, their intention to stay or return, decision-making process, access to livelihood and employment, protection issues in Kenya and their expectation of life in Somalia.

Somalia – Mogadishu (urban returns), and Kismayo (origin of Somali refugees in Kenya)

In Somalia, case studies looked at the challenges during the journey and upon return, protection issues and priorities upon return, decision-making process, level of information and the difference between the expectation and reality of return.

Table 1: Qualitative Interviews Conducted

	Location	Case studies	Focus Group Discussions	Key Informant Interviews	Total of respondents surveyed
KENYA	Nairobi	10	3	7	35
	Dadaab	26	3	7	52
SOMALIA	Mogadishu	14	3	8	41
	Kismayo	10	3	4	32
TOTAL		60	12	27	160

2/ A Qualitative Research with 160 Refugees and Returnees

A qualitative methodology was chosen to allow for in-depth discussions consisting of: Case studies, Focus Group Discussion and Key Informant interviews. Each interview was framed using an open-ended guideline answering the key research questions below.

Table 2: Research Questions

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
<p>DECISION MAKING PROCESS – Is return a well-informed process?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Level of information. How well informed are returnees about their return? How well informed are refugees about the conditions of return? ○ Push/pull factors. What are the drivers of return migration? Are returns voluntary? ○ Level of decision-making. To what extent various actors and institutions intervene in the decision of return and how: individual, household and community levels? ○ Networks. What is the strength of networks (transnational, domestic) as a resource for planning return and for reintegration? <p>PROTECTION - What protection risks arise during/upon return? Which actors ensure the protection of returnees?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Protection during return. What protection risks arise during the journey? ○ Protection upon return. What protection concerns and key networks impact return? <p>REINTEGRATION - What reintegration challenges face returnees?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Coping strategies. What are their coping strategies (positive and negative)? ○ Aid. How dependent are they on humanitarian and development aid? ○ Future. Is return permanent or temporary? Do returnees plan on further migration? <p>DURABLE SOLUTIONS - What is the potential for durable solutions? Opportunities and threats?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assessing the gap between reality and perceptions. How can humanitarian and development actor reduce the gap between perceptions and reality of return? What sort of resilience programming can be implemented in the PoO? What type of aid is most relevant – humanitarian, early recovery or development?

The research has three primary target groups:

Table 3: Target Groups

Refugee-returnees	Somali refugees who returned from Kenya specifically
Potential returnees	Somali refugees currently residing in Kenya and planning to return to Somalia (Nairobi and Dadaab)
Refugees unwilling to return	Somali refugees in Kenya who do not intend to leave their location of exile in Kenya (Nairobi and Dadaab)

Target groups were further disaggregated by variables to include:

1- Gender	6- Clans
2- Age	7- Location
3- Socio-economic profiles	8- Child educational enrolment
4- Length of exile	9- Split families
5- Timing of return	10- Spontaneous visitors

Focus groups and case studies with these target groups provide insight into what refugees make and interpret of the conditions around them. These reflect the perception of refugees and unassisted spontaneous returnees, reflecting on how actions and decisions are perceived by UNHCR's population of concern. These perceptions and feedback process provide key lessons learned for programming.

3/ A Consultative Research Process with Key Informant Interviews

Background data was gathered from 33 key informant interviews with government representatives, practitioners, researchers and civil society members who, through their experience and knowledge, shed light on the different facets of the return process of refugees and its challenges. They included government officials from DRA, Somali community leaders and members of international NGOs in countries of origin and destination.

Table 4: Key Informant Interview Profiles

Type of Organisation	Name of organisation	Total
Government	Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA), Ministry of Interior, Women's Affairs	6
NGO	IOM, DRC, NRC, Intersos, Mercy Corps, Save the Children, Refugee Unite, RCK	13
United Nations Agencies	UNHCR Kenya UNHCR Somalia	5
Researchers		2
Advocacy	Human rights Watch, Amnesty International	2
Community representatives	Refugee, IDP and returnee community representative	5
Total		33

REPORT STRUCTURE

This report follows the structure detailed below:

Chapter 1: Decision-Making process

- Drivers of return, obstacles to return
- Information levels and gaps of information available to refugees
- The discourse on return

Chapter 2: Protection and Re-integration

- Protection issues in Kenya, during the journey of return and upon return
- Challenges to re-integration in Somalia
- The gap between perceptions and reality of returns

Chapter 3: Transition to Durable Solutions

- The extent to which return is a durable solution for Somali refugees
- Coping strategies adopted by returnees in Somalia
- Transitioning from being a refugee to becoming a returnee

Chapter 4: Returning in Safety and Dignity?

- Conclusions
- Recommendations for UNHCR and its partners
- Informing UNHCR and its partners on their policy to enhance the conditions for return and re-integration of refugees.

1.1 REFUGEE DISCOURSE ON RETURN

1.2 WHO ARE THE DECISION MAKERS?

1.3 INFORMATION: GAPS IN REFUGEE KNOWLEDGE

1.4 DRIVERS OF RETURN

1.5. OBSTACLES TO RETURN



1.

HOW VOLUNTARY IS RETURN?

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

1.1 REFUGEE DISCOURSE ON RETURN

How Somalis construct themselves as refugees and as returnees gives an insight into their decision-making process. Is return to Somalia voluntary? An informed or a sudden decision? An individual or a collective choice? Refugees' own words inform us on their motivations and expectations. This chapter begins with an analysis of refugee discourse, followed by a review of decision makers, drivers and obstacles to return, and concludes on the voluntariness of return.

Return is the result of Somali refugees' self-assessment as 'outsiders' in Kenya

Return becomes a way for some Somali refugees in Kenya to prepare for entry into the labour market, for the youth particularly; for family reunification, for women; and for self-improvement and betterment of their life for those who do not see any other solution open to them – resuming their life where they left it is often times their only ambition. The discourse of refugees in camps, in urban settings, in their homes and in public places, through the occurrence of words, thoughts and ideas, paints a picture of people who are unwilling to fit in strict policy boxes (“*but even if I return to Somalia, I can also then return to Kenya, right?*”).

This section focuses on refugees willing to return spontaneously. But permanent return is **conditional**: if security is provided, if the government is stable, if jobs are available.ⁱⁱⁱ For the most part, return is **temporary**: a step in the migration cycle. This does not exclude that there are refugees interested to return permanently to Somalia. Yet, returns are largely temporary.

Return is a conditional process in Somali refugee discourse.

The discourse of return rests on:

- Perceptions of security in Somalia
“If violence starts, the things that made people flee in the first place, will make people flee to Kenya again. But if it is a peaceful place, my return will be permanent.” (Refugee preparing for return, 29, Dadaab)
- The failure to access other durable solutions – whether local integration or resettlement, with returns being a last resort option
“My hope was to be resettled but that did not work out, and since Kenyans will push us out, so I will return.” (Refugee preparing for return, 65, Dadaab)
- Inability to find work in Kenya vs. the (perceived) ability to find work in Somalia
“Here, I can only be an incentive worker, without a work permit or work prospects; there I can find work with an international organisation and earn a good salary” (Youth planning to return, 23, Dadaab)
- A temporary return: ‘Wait and see’, a first test trip
“Return has to be temporary, I have never been to Somalia so for a first time, I want to go step by step, with a probationary period first” (Youth planning to return, 22, Nairobi)
- Perceptions of the returns experience of other Somali refugees – their assessment of resilience and coping mechanisms
“There will be challenges as a newcomer but I will cope. There are many people making the decision to return to Somalia.” (Refugee preparing for return, 32, Dadaab)

Return generates a snowball effect – when information is shared.

Although numbers are low, interest to return is voiced by a growing minority. UNHCR notes an increased interest in return since the start of the Voluntary Return Pilot Project, a finding confirmed in this study. The successful return and integration in the labour market of urban youth to Somalia is an encouraging sign for youth remaining in Nairobi; while the return of refugee families from Dadaab has created an interest in return. Increasing numbers of people cross the border – whether temporarily or permanently is yet to be seen: the perceived increase in cross-border movement is leading to a snowball effect encouraging more returns. A respondent reported that he decided to return when he heard that people were returning:

“When I heard people are going back home, that’s when I decided to go back. I don’t know when this information started circulating” (Respondent Dagahaley Settlement)

While refugee discourse is closely tied to the official discourse, return means different things to different generations of refugees.

For urban refugees, the discourse on return reflects varying views. Return is a distant reality for most Nairobi residents. In Eastleigh neighbourhood, home to as many as 100,000 Somalis refugees,^{iv} return is neither popular nor sought after. The vast majority of respondents interviewed in Eastleigh did not consider return and did not know or hear of anyone returning to Somalia. The mere concept of return seemed absurd to them.

Refugee youth in urban settings are an important exception and distinct group requiring distinct solutions: return is a popular feeling amongst youth in Nairobi. They understand return in both more practical and more abstract terms than their elders. For them, return is an escape from the discrimination they face in Kenyan society, and Somalia a place that can potentially lead to a longed for sense of dignity, respect and individual possibility. In this sense, return for them is a vision. In more pragmatic terms, for the educated urban youth – return is also seen as the right to better opportunities and a better life.

These comments should be applied only to those who voice an interest in return. The vast majority of Somali refugees to date do not want to return – 97.4% of refugees interviewed in Dadaab.^v

1.2 WHO ARE THE DECISION MAKERS?

Return decisions are made individually, not collectively

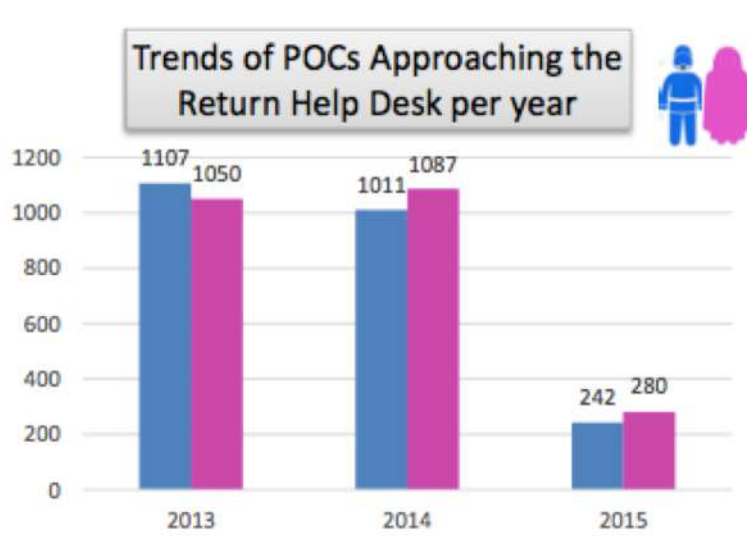
No decision-making has been found to take place on a communal or clan level, or by community leaders or elders. Instead this research highlights family and individual factors for return.

The weight of decisions falls on individuals – women stand out as key actors in this process, strengthened yet exposed; while youth fall out of the family structure in a solitary approach to return that leaves them more vulnerable to protection risks in the return process.

A. Women as decision makers: An active yet vulnerable actor

Women are active participants in the decision-making process about return. It is women, rather than men who are influential in shaping their children's choice and understanding of return, often advising them on whether to stay or return. Occasionally men are seen as the head of the family and the sole authority on decision making – as expressed by one of the respondents in Mogadishu: 'as a Somali community, the father is the head for all decisions so I suggested that idea to my wife and she agreed with me.' However, for the most part, in this research, women's voices were heard in the decision-making and implementation process: they are the ones who turn the decision into reality for the family, taking care of practical considerations in preparation for return.

Women's role increases with a reported rise in split returns: Women's participation plays a key role notably in the common occurrence of split returns – these are families that have been split across the border, men having returned to Somalia to find work, check on the security situation, reconnect with family or care for their parents and elders in an emergency. They split and leave to set up a base – or in reaction to an emergency – and ask their wives to take the responsibility of bringing over the rest of their family. In these cases – a common trend throughout the research – Somali refugee women are left with the burden of planning return help. Some showed signs of concern, anxiety and fatigue, lacking trust in the answers obtained and seeking verification for these. The uncertainty women are left in becomes their problem to cope with. This puts more pressure on women's shoulders – while men wait for them to return in Somalia.



Box 2. Split families and split returns: A key protection concern

This cross-border research highlights the prevalence of split families and of split returns. In Dadaab or Kismayo, some Somali refugee and returnee families are split across the border.

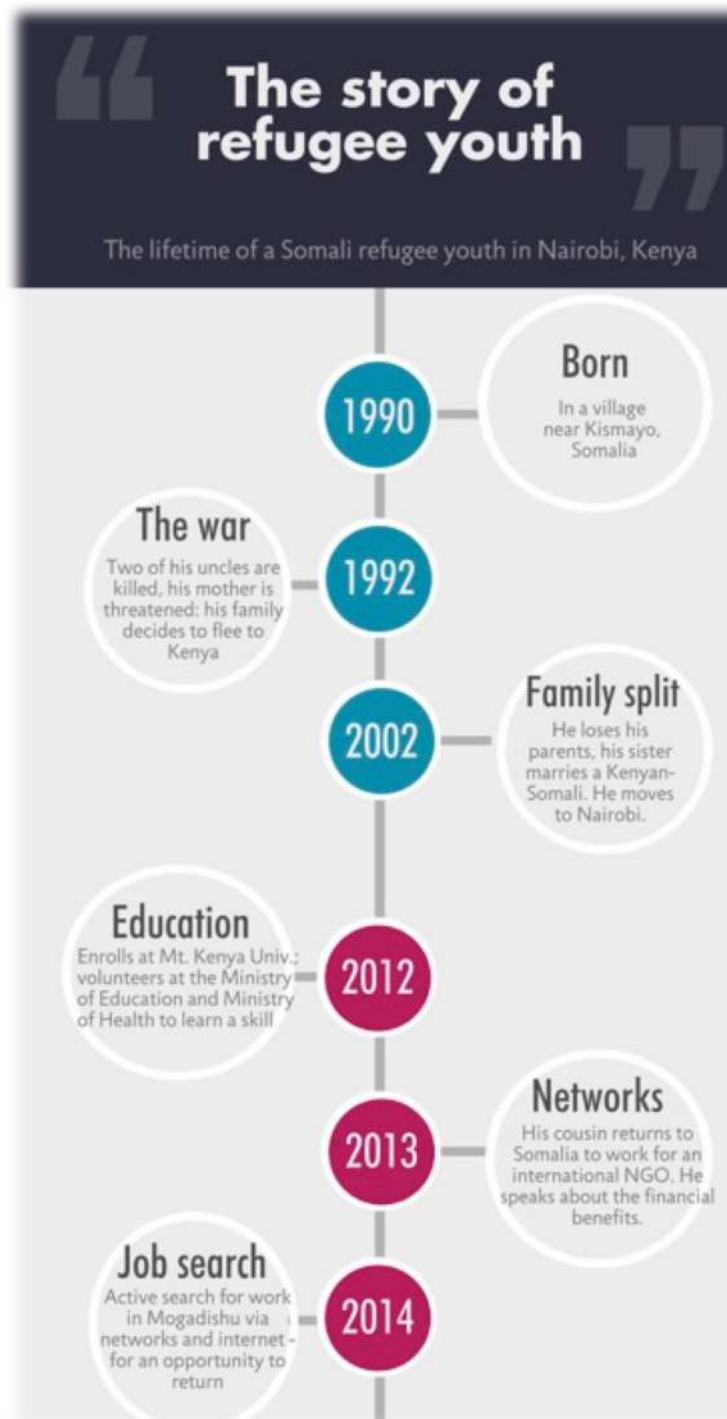
This is part of a “wait and see” strategy for return: male heads of household first travel on their own to Somalia to assess the feasibility of setting up a family base before a collective return. Of particular concern are the returns of families composed of women and children travelling alone. The protection of women and children is threatened in split returns.

B. Youth as decision makers: A solitary and marginalized actor

As far as youth and child refugees are concerned – the situation is mixed. Often, children are involved in the decision-making process and decide for themselves whether to join the family or stay behind (often in order to pursue their education in Kenya). Sometimes, however, no communication is established with children who are seen as too young to understand and they are forced into leaving with their families. The most cited incidents of disagreement in terms of decision-making is between the young and the older generation regarding return or staying with children deciding to stay in Kenya for their education.

Youth as risk takers – the biggest winners or the biggest losers? The case of youth presents challenges for practitioners and decision makers. Youth are among the most enthusiastic to return, expressing motivation and hopes for a drastic change in their lives upon return, through access to jobs. Yet they are also the ones with the least information or knowledge about Somalia. Youth are discouraged by their families to return and hence choose to take their decision in hiding. This is the case mainly with female relatives discouraging young Somali men to return. As one respondent explains *“If I tell my sister, she will do everything she can to keep me here in Nairobi. So I will find a job, leave and once I am there, I will call her to let her know”* (Nairobi).

Urban refugee youth wish to return not taken seriously: Somali refugee youth often live on their own in Nairobi – their families are



often split, some in Dadaab camps, and they live in small rooms with other refugee youth. They see better opportunities and less discrimination against them in Somalia. They do not see better prospects in Kenya, as a result of Usalama Watch and recent crackdowns on refugees. They are the most vocal about wanting to go back – a decision they are taking on their own, concerting only with other refugee youth. They do not consult elders on this. When refugee elders in Nairobi’s Eastleigh were interviewed and asked whether they knew of anyone going back, the answer was negative. They even expressed surprise or a sentiment of shock and mockery: “Who in their right mind would want to return to Somalia?” is a common phrase shared by elders in Eastleigh. This gives rise to contradictory feelings among youth and elders, and youth intentions are as a result not taken seriously by their elders.

Young adolescents: unwilling and feeling forced to follow the family: Not all youth voice the enthusiasm that urban youth shared. Younger youth, adolescents, are less optimistic and show little agency in the process. They are either part of a collective – a family member following the herd; or they find themselves trapped in a situation that they do not control. “I had no involvement in reaching the decision for us to return – I was ignored; my family decided to travel back. I was the youngest, my elder sister agreed and that left me no other choice”. In other cases, youth have been required to return to Somalia to care for their family, during holidays, and found themselves trapped – either with their families not allowing them to leave or with adamant requests for them to stay.

C. Men as decision makers: the lead actor

For single men and women, the decision to stay or return is often one of personal choice. For male heads of households, it is one of necessity: necessity to work, necessity to care for their parents and elders. Yet most will not recommend people to return. Their decision will remain an individual and family-oriented one. Networks do not play a role but their family ties do.

When return is not a choice but a decision out of necessity: Most returnees in Kismayo returned because of some form of family issue – whether family violence (the need to escape an abusive husband), family illness (the need to care for ageing parents), or need for family re-unification as a result of split returns. In these cases, decision makers are responding to a crisis or shock: prospects for a better life become a secondary motivation, while the primary motivation remains safeguarding and protecting the family.

When return is not a choice, nor a decision – but an imposed reality: Most of the returnees interviewed in December 2014 left Eastleigh, Nairobi during the security operations that were carried out in the city. Harassment by the Kenyan security forces, discrimination and marginalization all contributed to being ‘pushed’ out of Kenya.

D. In camps, a snowball effect

With the start of the UNHCR-led pilot assisted returns scheme, a new dynamic is seen in camp settings: a group approach to return. Certain camps are more disposed to hearing of the opportunities of return presented by UNHCR. This is notably the case in Ifo 2 and Kambios, where refugees arrived from Somalia post-2011 drought and famine. A Return Intentions Survey highlights the link between people intending to return and their period of arrival – most people with a positive intention to return to Somalia arrived in Kenya in the last five years.^{vi}

“Kambios was not like the other camps – why should we stay?”

Kambios and IFO2 are the two camps registering the highest number of people desiring to return as they are the two most recent camps set up for the recent arrivals from Somalia's 2011 drought. This highlights the link between the desire to return and the duration of exile – but also the desire to return and the level of assistance and care provided to refugees in the camps.

“We want to go to Mogadishu but UNHCR will not let us”

Significant numbers of refugees want to return to areas where assistance is not being provided as part of the pilot project, like Mogadishu. On the other hand, some voiced their interest in changing the area of origin in their registration so that they could go back with the help of UNHCR. This is part of an overall sentiment that because an agreement has been signed, the time is conducive to return and that the government is stable in Somalia.

Word of mouth: I have heard families are going back, can you confirm?

Fieldwork revealed a momentum in December 2014 with the start of the UNHCR pilot project to assist returns to Somalia. UNHCR field offices in the five camps in Dadaab were busy with visits of refugees seeking questions from the return help desks and from the people in charge – information was sought regarding the first convoy of December 8: have they arrived safely? What is their feedback? Did they receive the assistance promised? The need for information – and for being connected to returnees – will play an important role in future returns process.

1.3 INFORMATION: GAPS IN REFUGEE KNOWLEDGE

Most refugees have only vague and general information about Somalia and the journey, some even travelling without any information at all.

Moreover, there is a serious gap of information concerning conditions on road, livelihood opportunities and market situation in Somalia, and finally the level of assistance upon return. These information gaps are concerning as they heighten protection risks and threaten the sustainability of return.

Transnational networks are weak in the case of Somali refugees in Kenya.

According to the Return Intention Survey, only an estimated 18% of refugees in Kenya have contact with people in their area of origin.^{vii} Hence information does not flow regularly from Somalia to Kenya. A review of the information sources and quality will highlight key gaps in the information available. This is an important protection and programmatic aspect – if return is not well-informed, it can impact the degree to which return is a voluntary, safe and dignified process, and hence impact the sustainability of return.

*What I see on TV and hear on the radio shows me that the situation is under control and ripe for return in Kismayo, with better services. I don't have any phone contact with my brothers or relatives in Kismayo or Mogadishu, I will just see them when I go back.
(Respondent, Dadaab)*

A. SOURCE OF INFORMATION

The power of media and social networks over traditional, family networks: Radio, Television, Lorry drivers, Facebook and UNHCR

The most cited source through which respondents obtain general information on Somalia is the radio, followed by television, for those who have it.^{viii} Family and friends networks are a source of information for middle-aged men and women who like to discuss these issues in their community – yet they are not the main source. Instead refugees spoke of non-traditional sources of information. For youth, Facebook and social media were important sources of information – a resource for them to follow the lives of those who have returned before them and a means to keep track of potential job opportunities. None of the respondents cited community leaders or elders as a source.

Dadaab residents mentioned the importance of UNHCR's Help Desks for those who did intend to return. As for those going unassisted, many obtain information from lorry drivers who are seen as the most up-to-date information providers on the route.

For the most part, people rely on radio and do not communicate directly with people in Somalia given the lack of finance to cover airtime. As one youth explains: *"I don't personally communicate with people in Somalia. I follow the radio and T.V. I generally trust the news. Even most peaceful areas in Mogadishu are not totally safe"* (respondent, Eastleigh)

B. TYPE AND QUALITY OF INFORMATION

Although scarcity of information is rarely a barrier to return, there is a clear gap of information regarding conditions upon return (livelihood opportunities and availability of basic services) and the security situation on route. There is a general sense of confusion regarding rights and status upon return, the level of assistance that returnees will be given and whether assistance includes shelter provision. Similar findings were established by the Return Intention Survey which highlighted that most refugees would like to receive more information on security in their home area, and the availability of basic services – food, water, shelter, education and health.^{ix}

Information about the journey

Information levels about the journey differ greatly between those who live in Dadaab and those who live in urban settings such as Eastleigh located far from the Somali-Kenyan border. For those in Dadaab, the geographical proximity to the Kenya border results in more frequent contact with people who cross the border - whether to visit family and friends or trade. Such contacts often result in more knowledge regarding conditions on the road. Moreover, information is available from lorry drivers who were often cited as accurate providers up-to-date information.

On the other hand, refugees in Eastleigh have less knowledge or information about the journey to Somalia and expressed a stronger fear of the journey given the lack of contact with people who cross the border.

Many returnees went back without any information on the road or with very basic information only to find that the journey is not what they expected.

I had no previous good information about the kind of route we will be travelling through, and sincerely speaking my journey was unexpected. If I had information regarding the journey, it would have been helpful to me. For example if I knew that we would spend a few nights along the journey, I would have prepared for it. I would carry beddings and other important items for protection from the cold and harsh weather at night.

Respondent, Kismayo

Information about conditions of return

Most respondents had very generalised information about life in Somalia. The vast majority had not received regular information on Somalia unless they had immediate families with whom they communicated on a regular basis. This is corroborated by the Return Intentions Survey, which indicates that very few households receive regular information regarding Somalia – 51% of households receive updates sometimes while 46.2% don't obtain any information at all.^x For the majority, there is very little information from family members - almost no reliance on networks for information with a 'we will go and see' approach to return.

C. INFORMATION GAPS ON RETURN CONDITIONS

Most return with little information to find out that the situation is not what they expected.

Info Gap 1: Livelihood Opportunities and Market Situation

There is an assumption that livelihood opportunities are abundant in Kismayo and Mogadishu – without any precise knowledge on the type of jobs available or the type of jobs they can engage in upon return. When asked about plans on return to Kismayo, a respondent in Dadaab answered: *I have no house nor land in Kismayo but I know it is a town with a lot of jobs for people like us. I will just rent a house when I get there – I have relatives there too but I have not been in touch with them since I left.*

There is another assumption that business opportunities are abundant in Mogadishu and Kismayo with many respondents believing it will be possible for them to start a business with a little bit of capital. However, little planning is involved - *"I will go there and decide what to do after"* - was the most typical answer when asked about future plans upon return. Respondents discussing their future livelihood plans upon return:

I am into business. I can be successful as a businessman back in Somalia – I can do anything from selling cosmetics, or having a pharmacy or selling food. I will go there and decide what to do after. My life will be better there as the security will be better. I just need some help setting up a business, creating my business. I don't need more skills; I know how to operate a business. I just need the financial assistance to get going. Respondent Dadaab.

I don't know what type of business I'll be doing. I need to observe my situation and once there I'll decide. Do you have any information about the market situation there? I have no information but I heard it is easy to do business. Respondent, Dagahaley.

Info Gap 2: Assistance

Interviews and focus group discussions in Dadaab with potential returnees indicate a general assumption that assistance is available in Somalia and is superior to assistance in Dadaab, although when prompted most people did not know who is giving assistance or what is the exact level or what they should expect.

A woman in Ifo2 explains: *Yes, I know a lot of people who have returned. Life in the country is very ok and there is peace. They are living a better life. They are given food better than the one distributed here – wheat, rice, and oil. I know there are organisations distributing those food. I don't know exactly which organisations.* FGD, IFO2.

Info Gap 3: Shelter: *Will I get shelter? Where will I live?*

Whenever asked or prompted about shelter provisions in Somalia, most respondents could not give an answer as to their most basic need – are you given shelter? How are you assisted? How will UNHCR assist you? These become even more crucial questions for those who have no networks to rely on upon return, no family ties, no shelter or land and no livelihood opportunity. Some respondents were actively requested information regarding shelter.

I don't have a land or farm but I'm hoping as I go there I'll find shelter. We have been given information from UNHCR that when we reach there, there are agencies we'll be referred to help us. We will be taken from here to Baidoa then agencies will take us from borders to Kismayo. Once I reach there, I'm hoping to get land or farm from one of the agencies. I don't know whether it is true or false but I have seen from T.V there is a place prepared for people going back. Third return convoy, Dagahaley.

1.4 DRIVERS OF RETURN

I never thought of returning before – I studied primary and university education here in Kenya. But now, I'm ready to go back and rebuild my country. I still have 6 months to finish my education. I can't leave my education now but after 6 months I'm seriously considering going back. I want to go to Puntland. I've been in Kenya for a long time and still can't find adequate job opportunities that match my qualification. I have learned Swahili and I have a certificate but I can't find a job to the level of my education.

Shukri, FGD, Eastleigh

There are three main drivers of return.

- The first and most common driver of return involves family reasons such as the need to be re-united with a partner, or the need to look after an elderly or sick member of the family
- The second driver of return involves underemployment in Kenya and prospects of better livelihood opportunities in Somalia
- The third prospect involves deteriorating living and security conditions in Kenya.^{xi}
- Other drivers of return include: the need to resume normal life and improved security in Somalia.

Family Reasons

Focus group discussions and interviews with refugees in Somalia and Kenya show that most refugees have returned or intend to return because of a family reason whether it is for family reunification (joining husband/wife) or looking after a sick family member. A common scenario involves the disruption of the life of the refugee family in Kenya due to the death of a breadwinner or departure of the main breadwinner to Somalia leaving the rest of the family in Kenya without an income and no alternative but to join the breadwinner in Somalia. Another common trend is for people to go on family visits to Somalia, with no intention of staying in Somalia but due to changed family circumstances, they end up in Somalia.

Better livelihood opportunities: *Going back means high risk but also high opportunity*

University graduates are willing to go back. Education is seen as an asset for return as most people in Somalia do not have the level of education of Somali refugees in Kenya. A youth in Eastleigh explains 'university graduates like us cannot work here – and people in Somalia don't have our level of education, they are mostly illiterate. There is something we can do there for them'. While Kenya is seen better in terms of education, Somalia is perceived as better for job opportunities – with possibilities of working at international NGOs or the UN, of opening schools and of participating in the economic life of their country.

For the youth 'going back means high risk but also high opportunity'. While the youth themselves are not sure if their return is permanent, return is a risk they are willing to take given the limited prospects available to them in Kenya and greater prospects in Somalia.

For casual labourers, youth and incentive workers incapable of making a stable income in Dadaab due to their status as refugees, and due to the livelihood opportunities perceived upon return, Somalia provides the promise of better and more stable job opportunities.

Why do I want to go back? Because of three main reasons:

1. Here there is insecurity everywhere: not good for us because when anything bad happens, we become the target. The police is all over us these days.
2. My family still owns land in Kismayo, I want to either live there or sell it and take the money to settle elsewhere.
3. University graduates like us cannot work here – and people in Somalia don't have our level of education, they are mostly illiterate. There is something we can do there for them.

Respondent, Eastleigh.

Box 4. Youth: A specific type of return

Among those who have voiced an interest to return are the voices of youth – male and female urban youth, to be specific. These are youth who have received a good level of education, who show countless certificates and diplomas, who have worked in Dadaab as teachers, volunteered in Nairobi, and want to now serve a purpose and earn money in Somalia. In Kenya they see their future as being limited by low pay scales (“incentive workers”). For those, leaving Kenya, is the only way to achieve a good opportunity and a dignified life far from police harassment in Kenya.

The three main motivations driving Somali youth to leave Kenya:

- Better livelihood opportunity that matches their level of qualification
- Escape from harassment of police and discrimination in Kenya
- Satisfaction of being back in their own country and contributing to the reconstruction process in Somalia

While youth express the most enthusiasm to return, their vision for return is not a permanent one but involve a more exploratory, risk-taking enterprise to escape a marginal existence in Kenya for a more dignified existence in Somalia.

Return is a popular feeling among youth b/c of police harassment in Kenya. I know people who have returned to Somalia – I know 3 people who returned. Sometimes it is the young people's decision to go back. Sometimes it is their parents because they can't raise money for their children to bribe the police and release them. Most people are frustrated. There are many problems in Somalia. You can't go back to Somali and can't stay in Kenya. We are frustrated. FGD, Eastleigh.

Deteriorating Security and Living Conditions in Kenya

You can have big incidents – terrorism – to small incidents – robbery. You never know what may happen. I don't like the uncertainty.

(Dadaab)

Interviews in Dadaab show two types of security threats: harassment and crackdowns by the Kenyan police or armed forces; as well as robbery, gunmen or gender-based violence. Many stated that if one compares the level of insecurity in Dadaab to Somalia, it will be the same or worse in Dadaab.

For refugees living in Eastleigh, deteriorating security and living conditions involves an increase in police arrests and harassments impeding their day-to-day functioning and leading to an inability to pay daily bribes.^{xii} Although these are

not led by institutions, they occur due to individual actions.

Somali youth – especially urban youth – are the prime targets of the Nairobi police. They suffer from frequent police arrests, bribes and are jailed without charge.^{xiii} They are also accused of links with Al-Shabaab. Almost all the youth interviewed said they were arrested and jailed at least once in their life and some were even arrested and jailed on a more regular basis – up to two to three times a year. As such, many desire to go to Somalia in an attempt to escape police harassment in Kenya.

The security in Kismayo can't be worse than here now that the war there has ended! Here we have robbers, rapists, terrorists....this is really not a secure place. You don't know what it's like outside but it's not safe for our families.
(Dadaab)

The need to resume a normal life and the signing of the tripartite agreement

Another major driver for return is the need to resume normal life, often mentioned in relation to the signing of the tripartite agreement. Many have mentioned that they decided to return upon hearing of the signing of the tripartite agreement, which gave them a sense of security that the situation in Somalia - or at least parts of it – is stable. These sentiments are best illustrated in the quotes below:

I decided to leave Kenya when I heard Somalia was peaceful and government have stabilized the city, which means life is getting normal for people like me who are tired of being a refugee for the whole lifetime. Respondent, Mogadishu.

When the Somali government, Kenyan government and UNHCR held a conference (tripartite agreement) for the return of Somali refugees voluntarily. I would like to go back to Somalia for good. I was told the newly created Somali government and AMISOM are trying to enforce security and order in the country.

By the time, the UN and the two governments agreed to return refugees, that's when I decided to go back.
Respondent, Mogadishu.

1.5. OBSTACLES TO RETURN

A number of obstacles have been identified blocking returns in practice. These obstacles to return are presented according to their frequency in interviews:

<p>1. Journey/border crossing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fears of border crossings and of physical harm during the journey • Lack of financial means to cover the cost of return 	<p>3. Weakness of ties: lack of networks and support systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No family • No contact • Lack of capacity to support
<p>2. Education: lack of provisions in Somalia leading to split families or giving up on return by some families</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of education in refugee lives • Education as a driver to leave Somalia in the first place 	<p>4. Family influence discouraging return</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems of acceptance • Problems of integration and adaptation

Journey/Border Crossing

Fear of the journey was cited as the most common obstacle to return – these were young, urban, educated Somalis who grew up in Kenya having never lived in Somalia; as well as women, men and elders who had not crossed the border in recent years. While the option by airplane is not an affordable option, travelling by road is the only viable route for the majority. However, the journey is a “deal breaker” for many whereby anything can happen – *“anyone travelling from Kenya to Somalia can face risks like rape, killings, hunger, long travel days which can pose dangers and so on”* a respondent in Eastleigh explains.

For refugees living in Dadaab, the journey has not come up as an obstacle for return although some expressed similar fears about the perceived dangers. While an awareness of potential risks exists, given the adverse situation in Dadaab, the risks involved in the journey are worth taking.

‘I know security is really bad in Somalia. UNHCR helps us from here to Doble. From Doble, you have to hire a car and that road is unsafe and in the hands of al-Shabaab. I know I will face all these problems. But life in Dadaab is bad, very bad’ respondent, FGD Hagadera.

Another obstacle for return is lack of means to cover the journey. Typically those who go unassisted raise money by selling their belongings or ration card.

‘The issue of those who are willing to return, yes there were many back in the camps who were really eager to come back one day but transportation expense was an issue to them’, Female Mogadishu.

Education: lack of provisions in Somalia, a barrier to return

Lack of education provisions are the biggest obstacle hindering the return families with children, sometimes leading to conflict and splits within a family, or to children left behind – a key child protection concern raised in this study.

“My life in Kenya is better and I’m not leaving it’ The best part of my life here is that my children are now going to school in Nairobi but my children didn’t go to schools in Somalia.” - Nimo

Most families or youth expressed a concern for education and are aware of the consequences of lack of free education in Somalia. Lack of quality and free educational provisions is resulting in either an abandonment of the return idea by the whole family so long as the children are in school or in split families whereby one family member stays with the children whilst they receive their education in Kenya while the other family member leaves to Somalia. Education is also a reason for family conflicts – when the family doesn’t reach an agreement and youth are forced to abandon their education to in Kenya, which results in very dissatisfied Somali youth returnees.

Education was often the driver to leave Somalia in the first place: *“I decided to leave Somalia so that I could give a better education to my children. It is very important to me that they receive a good education. I have made all my choices with that priority in mind. I knew that education would be better in Dadaab than in Somalia.”* (Father of 3, Ifo1, Dadaab). Prioritizing education often leads families, children and youth to leave Dadaab – to Nairobi, but not to Somalia. Departure in this case does not equate return. To the contrary, refugees seek better opportunities in Nairobi – whether better education or better health care. *“There is in general a much better education offered to people in urban areas. In camps it’s not good.”* (Father, Ifo 1, Dadaab). As a driver for exile, education remains in most families the main obstacle to return.

Lack of networks and support system

While networks are an important and valuable resource facilitating return for those who have them, very few respondents mentioned having access to networks of support. Weak family and network ties are a major obstacle for almost all refugees returning – for youth, for heads of household, for single men and women irrespective of whether they were going back to their village of origin or not. Different forms of isolation persist across the board:

No contact with family or no family: Some respondents have not been in contact with their families in years: although they think that they have family in Kismayo or Mogadishu, they have lost their number and have not been in touch with them. Others simply don’t have any relatives.

Most of my relatives are in my Village of Origin (VoO): Some refugees returned to Mogadishu because of a lack of stability in their VoO but they do not know anyone in Mogadishu. *“I don’t have strong support system and I also don’t have relative around me since I am not in my regions of my village of origin. (He lives in Mogadishu).”* Yarrow Mohamed Ali, Mogadishu.

Those with family networks cannot rely on their family: A very common grievance comes from those who have family members in Somalia but have not been able rely on them for information or any kind of assistance given that they themselves have their own problems - and that everyone in Somalia is living in similarly distressing conditions. A common settlement pattern is for returnees to start at a close relative’s upon arrival to Somalia then end up at an IDP

settlement upon realisation that they cannot afford to pay rent nor depend on their family member - typically a brother or cousin.

Family influence - especially on youth

Family influence is sometimes a deterrent for youth to return due to parental pressure. Some youth have expressed a desire to leave Kenya but out of respect and obedience to their parents, they have come to abandon the idea.

Family influence is not just a top-down process (from parents to children). Interviews highlighted the voice of children in the process: from the bottom up, children voice their discontent about return, overturning their parents' decision in a small number of cases. *“One woman seriously considered returning and bought an airplane ticket. She wanted to leave with her children because of the level of police harassment in Eastleigh fearing her children will be arrested. Finally, her children refused to leave Kenya and their education behind so she decided to stay”.* (FGD 4/12)

Problems of Integration

For youth, the biggest obstacle to return is lack of educational provisions, lack of employment opportunities and lack of networks in Somalia. Although the youth have expressed the most enthusiasm for return, they are the quickest to leave. They face the biggest challenges in terms re-integration and adaption leading many to leave after failed attempts to settle.

A common scenario is for the youth to travel to Somalia looking for a job opportunity only to realise that given their lack connections and understanding of Somalia, they are unable to find support in a new context. The difference between the expectation and reality of return is very pronounced amongst this group. Most, if not all, of youth returnee respondents interviewed in Somalia expressed a desire to return to Kenya when the opportunity arises. Others have already gone back to Kenya after a short experimental period. Another major challenge facing youth is inability to integrate due to cultural barriers – the acceptable dress code in Somalia is different to dress code in Kenya.

The problem is also the way we dress – here we dress in tight and fitting clothes, there it's very large. “Anybody with small shirts” is in danger there! For us urban youth it's very complicated to travel to Somalia.
KAMAL, Eastleigh

Return is not permanent. I am planning to go back for a first try – maybe 3, months or more. Maybe 2 years for a first job experience. But I will return. I will not give back my refugee card. It is my only escape route. Abdi, Eastleigh

CONCLUSION on the voluntariness of unassisted returns

To answer the initial question of this chapter – is return voluntary? – The answer depends on what “return” may mean. Is it about leaving Kenya for good? Does spontaneous unassisted return equate to leaving Dadaab, leaving Kenya, or crossing the border and coming back? Is it about going ‘home’ to Somalia or testing if better options are available in Somalia?

A range of drivers, including “push” factors relating to how the tripartite agreement is perceived, to “pull” factors play a role. According to the findings of this study, unassisted return remains temporary. Refugees still reserve a right to return to Kenya. Return remains, at the time of this survey and for the target group of this research (i.e. unassisted returnees), a two-way and fully mobile process.

Firstly, in Kenya, the decision to return is the result of refugees’ self-assessment as outsiders, and a cautious process: the discourse on return paints a conditional process: *if security is maintained, if violence starts, if resettlement fails...* conditions determine the length, purpose and outcome of return. Urban youth, specifically, speak of a probationary period of return, a ‘wait and see’ to test what return can mean in reality.

Secondly, the perceived stability and livelihood opportunities in Somalia act as a key driver to return – and mark the voluntariness of unassisted returns. Among the pull factors are:

- The perceived improved security in Somalia and the comparative assessment of what type of freedom they can have in Somalia
- The return ‘home’, a sense of belonging without sufficient networks, however, to facilitate employment. The need to be recommended is a key obstacle for returnees in Somalia
- The potential in terms of business opportunity: for those who have the capital, they are able to open their own businesses and small shops. Women can have small shops, cafés, but lack the capital

Thirdly, decisions remain individual or at the family level – they are not collective decisions. Among decision makers, men remain the lead actor while women are active yet vulnerable: their role increases in situations of split families and split returns; and youth remain a solitary and marginalized actor: youth are risk takers, among the most enthusiastic to return, but the ones benefiting from the least support in the process.

Last but not least, unassisted returns are plagued by information gaps. Among the gaps in refugee knowledge are (mis-)perceptions on the journey, the weakness of transnational networks as sources of information, and the lack of knowledge about and preparation for livelihood opportunities and adaptation to the Somali market.

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2.1 PROTECTION ISSUES IN KENYA

2.2 PROTECTION ISSUES IN SOMALIA

2.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR REINTEGRATION



2.

HOW SAFE AND DIGNIFIED IS RETURN TO SOMALIA? REINTEGRATION AND PROTECTION

Are Somali refugees who have returned from Kenya protected? How do they look back on their life in Kenya once they have returned to Somalia? And how can a study of these perceptions help improve an understanding of the impact of spontaneous returns and UNHCR programming on durable solutions? These questions allow us to assess whether return to Somalia is done in safety and dignity – the latter being defined by the level of choice, redress and restitution available to returnees.

Those interviewed after their return in Somalia are all refugees who chose to return unassisted – mainly in 2014 (between January and September), but the sample also includes returnees from December 2013 and 2012. Their experiences inform our lessons learned on protection and reintegration.

This chapter answers these questions by analysing findings on:

1. Key protection issues in Kenya against which to compare their situation and protection standards post-return
2. Key protection issues in Somalia and shocks that returnees are currently unable to cope with but for which they are building their self-reliance
3. A comparative analysis and implications for reintegration – are Somali refugees and Somali returnees enjoying the same levels of protection?

Protection of Somali refugees in Kenya has been widely documented in various reports. The goal of this chapter is therefore to focus on protection issues *in Somalia*. Yet, it is important to show the “before and after” picture in terms of protection, to be able to put in perspective the lives of returnees in Somalia, as part of their migration cycle. The extent to which they can cope with life in Somalia is a result, as well, of their experiences living in Kenya. The two sets of experiences – being refugees in Kenya and returnees in Somalia – are often compared in respondents’ discourse. This chapter therefore adopts a comparative lens.

Why I want to leave? Personal security. There is general security and personal security. I have been arrested and taken to court but no one comes to defend me. I have my documents and my university cards but it didn't help me. They say a Somali is a Somali. I am nothing here in Kenya.

(Shukri, 20)

2.1 PROTECTION ISSUES in KENYA

A. Generalized violence and Insecurity

Arbitrary Arrests – The case of urban refugees

Usalama watch affected everyone in this neighbourhood. Many got arrested and held in detention centres. Whole families were taken away. But there is a way out by paying bribes. Elders kept track of the people who got detained and mobilized entrepreneurs for money to pay police bribes and get people out.

– Nimo

Worsening trend: *“The situation got worse with Usalama watch but even before it was bad.”*

– FGD

Although international and Kenyan law prohibit arbitrary detention,^{xiv} arrests are common for Somali refugees living in Kenya despite possessing registration papers and alien cards. Police arrests impede the day-to-day functioning of the Somali community with respondents reporting their inability to leave the house when they see the police walking around their blocks. An illustration in our data is a common concern of urban refugees’ inability to leave their house at night to go the hospital fearing the police given the high chances of being arrested at night. This is a concern shared by all members of the urban refugee community.

If you fall ill at 8pm, you cannot go to the hospital due to the fear that the police will arrest you at night. (Youth, Eastleigh)

Police arrests can be followed by imprisonment unless bribes are made. The high frequency of arrests means that Somalis have to budget for bribes on a regular basis. Fearing prosecution, Somalis are known for readily bribing the police having little or no other alternative for protection – this being specifically raised in interviews among urban refugees in Eastleigh.

Somali refugees interviewed outside of camps have report worsening police harassment and extortions during Usalama watch launched by the

Government of Kenya to eradicate Al-Shabaab from Eastleigh. Although Somalis have long been prime targets of police harassment and bribes, under Usalama watch, Somalis in Kenya have faced increased arrests, and harassment. Police sweeps had an impact on youth, women, men, elderly people, to whole families being detained. Many of our respondents reported police entering their homes unexpected at night to arrest them and their families.

Somali insecurity on Kenyan soil

Northeast Kenya is an insecure area with armed bandits, militias and clan feuds. Refugees interviewed in Dagahaley, Hagadera and Ifo feel vulnerable to these threats, and trapped in an uncertain environment – not knowing when they might be attacked. An environment of fear and instability persists in the camps, pushing some to say that the security is actually better in Somalia.

Refugees interviewed reported the following instances of attacks:

- Incentive workers. Somalis who work with international organisations as incentive workers are vulnerable to receiving threats and house attacks. UNHCR staff reported such instances to the research team. Police reports trace back these attacks but the police are not able to stop them.
- Visible targets - daytime attacks. Thefts and targeted attacks occur in the camps – police are routinely targeted and shops attacked.

“Now I want money and security – I am young and capable – but I can’t have both here or in Somalia. Here in Dagahaley the security is bad for everyone. The other day in the market, 2 policemen were shot and killed.”

Dagahaley settlement.

- Targets of police harassment. The police are not trusted by the refugee population and are often regarded as perpetrators of violence.^{xv} When refugees leave the camps, they often fall prey to police harassment with or without the necessary documentation.^{xvi}

B. Acute Protection Challenges – Women and Children

Split Families

The sample surveyed showed a prevalence of split families and protection issues affecting women and children left behind in Kenya following their husband and father's departure to Somalia for family circumstances or livelihood opportunities.

I decided to join him. I'd rather go back and join him. If my husband was here of course it is better to stay here.'

FGD, Hagadera.

A common scenario is for the man, usually the main breadwinner, to leave alone first to set up a family base and bring the rest of the family once he is settled in while women and children are left behind waiting in Kenya. Some of the female respondents interviewed were looking urgently to be re-united with their husband as women felt vulnerable on their own in the camps in Dadaab. Some women are forced to leave not out of choice but rather out of necessity, as they are unable to cope with life alone in the camps or provide an alternative income.

Split families are also a concern for children. Children are often separated from their families sometimes left behind with their uncles and grandparents, or distant families in order to pursue their education while parents leave for Somalia. Splits within the family are also common whereby the younger children go with their families and the elder ones stay behind.

Questioning the quality of education in Dadaab

Do you think a starving child can learn? A hungry child cannot access learning. Educational facilities are there in Dadaab but there is no food,
Respondent Dadaab.

Education is a major protection priority for refugees and one of the prime reasons for their decisions to stay in Kenya. In Dadaab, education is free and offered by aid agencies within the camps. However, due to the huge demand for the services, their capacity to offer universal education is severely limited.^{xvii} According to the IOM Intention survey, more than 100,000 children are out of school.^{xviii} It is common that in each family, only 2-3 children go to school, while the rest stay at home or work. Attendance rates drop off towards the end of primary school particularly for girls due to a number of economic and cultural practises. Inability to cover materials and school uniform were also cited as an obstacle for sending children to school.

On food security, mothers complained of a lack of variety in food distributions affecting their children's development: a common complaint given that only grains are being distributed as the main staple instead of meat and milk. Women associated their children's school dropout to their inability to concentrate. Reportedly, refugees receiving remittances from the diaspora or those involved in trade and business activities are able to supplement their diet, while the poorest are dependent fully on aid.

C. Legal obstacles: lack of legal protection and livelihoods

Lack of free legal aid

Somali refugees are granted refugee status on prima facie basis and, as a result, benefit from international protection.^{xix} Nonetheless, being registered with UNHCR and having the right documents does not protect them from arrest or police harassment as seen above. This is an issue for policy makers and aid organizations to address – as is being done by NGO actors (Kituo Cha Sheria, for instance). Yet, none of the respondents interviewed had access to legal protection when arrested although many said they would have required legal protection. However, given that paying the police to get released is much cheaper than paying a lawyer, refugees opt for bribing the police to get released.

*You always need someone to represent you and speak for you. I felt I needed a lawyer when I was arrested. I felt I was totally helpless.
Respondent, Eastleigh.*

Lack of livelihoods

Somali refugees are not entitled to work in Kenya. Refugees may only receive stipends as incentive workers. Access to employment is limited given their status as refugees and inability to apply for work permits which are extremely difficult to obtain. The lack of livelihood opportunities is one of the biggest challenges facing urban and camp refugees alike making self-reliance difficult.

Refugees repeatedly dwell on how finding employment in camps is desirable but they face lack of alternative.

Refugees are faced with few options; they may work as:

- Incentive workers – earning no more than \$100 a month. As refugees are not allowed to work in Kenya, this involves a special agreement between aid agencies and the Government of Kenya to hire refugees for a fraction of the salary that a Kenyan national would receive in the same post.^{xx}
- Low paid casual workers loading, washing clothes or cleaning houses.
- Securing employment out of the camps is possible for the few who venture out of the cities but face harassment by the security forces.^{xxi}

A study by the Danish Refugee Council shows that the only source of income for refugees in Dadaab is through casual labour. Only 2 out of 25 businesses approached during the study said they employed refugees.^{xxii} Moreover, a distinction must be made between long-term refugees, those who have arrived in the 1990s and newcomers who have arrived in 2010 and 2011. While refugees in protracted situation are less dependent on aid and showed more engagement in entrepreneurial (a variety of small and medium sized generating activities), newcomers have not developed such coping mechanisms and are in general more dependent on aid in the camps.

The economy and market facilities in Dadaab is generally very limited – apart from those within the camps or Dadaab town, there is not little choice for refugees engaging in activities such as weaving, tailoring, vehicle repair and tie and dye. Some refugees reported having skills to work in these sectors but were unable to find any opportunities in Dadaab.

2.2 PROTECTION ISSUES IN SOMALIA

A. Danger in the Journey: Border crossing risks

“Somalia’s security is better than here”

Although a minority, some intend to return but how to do so safely? Returnees in Somalia reported not being sufficiently informed about the actual journey of return. Before thinking about reintegrating, the process of getting from point A (in Kenya) to point B (in Somalia) is a concern.

Risks at the border: how to safely cross the border into Somalia?

The Kenya-Somali border is fluid and known to be crossed easily by Somalis, yet protection issues highlighted are life threatening and at best, a danger to Somalis’ material wellbeing. Protection risks during the journey – raised by respondents as a key obstacle to return for many include the fear of perceived threats including:

- Killings
- Rapes and gender-based violence
- Physical assaults, beatings and torture
- Thefts, stealing financial and material belongings
- Starvation

“On my way, I encountered a lot of obstacles. I met with some bandits who killed both my biological father and my grandmother and some of my young brothers died of starvation.”

Some protection issues persist – others are based on perceptions: part of the memory of those who crossed the border when leaving Somalia years, or decades, ago, or part of myths regarding return.

Whether they are reflective of the reality or of perceptions alone, they showcase protection issues raised by refugees willing to return and by returnees themselves.

How to deliver on the promise of a safe return, beginning from the journey? The border itself presents protection risks for unassisted returnees.

“We did not have much information about the journey before we left Kenya. We had assumed it was going to be generally safe; we did not expect militia groups having checkpoints along the way. If we knew the journey was going to be unsafe, we would have waited until it became safer.”

It is reportedly common for people passing by Al-Shabab controlled areas to be stopped, searched and have their phones, alien cards and any identification confiscated. Respondents report, specifically having to swallow their phone memory cards and take a beating for having cassettes with songs.

Unassisted returnees use commercial vehicles – mixing goods and persons

Unassisted returnees reported using vehicles transporting goods from Somalia to Kenya, and back as they are cheaper means of transport than buses. The disadvantage is that these vehicles often pass through illegal routes in the border areas to avoid police presence. On these routes, returnees report that bandits take bribes and at times, may burn the vehicle or threaten the driver. Among other challenges raised in conversations are:

- Long roads with poor vehicles
- Shortage of food – due to unplanned circumstances on the road
- Losing their cash – to pay for transport and bribes along the way

All the returnees interviewed arrived by minibus or commercial trucks – only one respondent came by plane.

B. Initial Days After Return: Housing and Land Conflict

Following the journey, in the initial days after return to Kismayo, returnees speak of their difficulties finding adequate housing – especially after heavy rains had destroyed their original homes. They also report having to move homes – on average 2 to 5 times. “The rent is too high, that is why I moved five times” (Faduma, 37, divorced with three children).

Not knowing where to go, unassisted returnees report living in IDP settlements – because their homes and lands are occupied. The issue of land conflict was a repeated concern among returnees. Frictions occur between refugee returnee and local communities: “the guy who took the property will argue that his child was born here, that he is now 22 years old and cannot be convinced that this is not their home”.

Others are not able to go back to their homes because they are being occupied by militant groups, and are unable to rent a house. Those are the ones that find themselves in IDP settlements. Interviews held in settlements highlighted the concern over the lack of differentiation between IDPs and returnees – especially within minority groups.

Multiple displacements become a common occurrence among unassisted returnees: whether due to the heavy rains and floods in Kismayo, or due to evacuations and evictions in Mogadishu when government or private owners claim illegally settled land.

Minority group respondents shared their perspective: for them access to land is an issue as much as access to services: with the lack of food distribution in urban centres like Mogadishu, the lack of access to water and the lack of education, they choose to live in IDPs settlements where they may get more assistance. Yet, access to humanitarian aid is seen as being limited to people who have links or “good communication” with the gatekeepers and staff.

Box 5. Accessing protection in Kismayo

Kismayo is the capital city of Lower Juba. Its inhabitants live off of livestock, agriculture and sea fishery. Access to basic services remains a main challenge – specifically the lack of access to clean and protected water, and sanitation levels pose a health threat to returnees. During the rainy season, with no system of drainage, the population of Kismayo is vulnerable to flood-induced outbreaks and other water born diseases. The town remains with no waste disposal centre, and all former public infrastructures have to be rebuilt from scratch. In addition, returnees are surprised by the lack of cash, food, and little development in the area that limit the absorption capacity in a location where internally displaced persons (IDPs) also gravitate.

Key challenges faced upon arrival are the lack of shelter, scarcity of food clean water, and free health facilities. These are addressed through coping mechanisms, networks and returnees' self-reliance – but only to an extent. The majority resort to negative coping mechanisms and cannot get support from their relatives and friends.

- Difficult access to clean water
- Difficult access to health services
- Missing livelihoods, cash and food upon return

C. Basic Services: Negotiating Access and Inter-community tensions

“Somalia is not a good place to be but it is better than Dadaab” was repeatedly heard in interviews before return. For the minority intending to return, Somalia is seen as the home of cheap food, fresh fruits, good weather, available jobs and overall security.

As returnees, access to humanitarian aid is gone – unexpectedly: returnees report being unprepared. The standards of exile are not met upon return. All interviews confirm the priority to be on shelter, schools, hospitals, clean water and food, first, then job creation, and last security.

Most returnees feel that they have given up adequate services in Kenya for no services in Somalia. The main concern is having no free education for their children. Other compromises include access to food aid, free health care and health facilities, clean water, and more reliable security. On the other hand, the gains that refugees mentioned include freedom of movement, better quality and cheaper food (fresh fruits and fish), and not facing daily discrimination for being a refugee. Perception of wellbeing varies between great satisfaction for not being refugees or lament for having lost all the free services that were once available and made life easier.

Currently, the problem is not insecurity. The security environment is conducive to return. But the major town – Kismayo – that hosts the majority of returnees, has no access to protected and safe drinking water, integrated schools with recognized curricula and syllabi, no adequate sanitation capacity and only a limited number of health centres. This is insufficient to meet the needs of returnees and host communities.
– Head of Women's Affairs, Kismayo

Access to health services and inter-community tensions

*“We have access to health services but they do not match the populations of IDPs, returnees and the host community living in Kismayo.”
(Returnee youth, FGD, Kismayo)*

“The returnees will need water source and free health services to avoid the collision with the host community.” Head of Women’s Affairs

Inability to absorb demand and rising tensions over health care in Kismayo The lack of free healthcare and the high demand for healthcare are increasing pressures on Kismayo’s health infrastructure. Health care providers and authorities concur that they are not in a capacity to absorb the population

of internally displaced persons, returnees, and local communities. This sentiment is echoed in focus group discussions with returnees, who fear growing tensions with local host communities over access to health care.

Mistrust of health services in Somalia

There is a general mistrust of the health services in Somalia and especially medication given in the absence of government regulations over the import of pharmaceuticals. Returnees regard healthcare in Somalia to be exorbitantly expensive. Most respondents have claimed no to have access to health-services either because of lack of free health facilities around their area or because of the high cost of services. Some health providers are free but it they lack adequate medical facilities.

I don’t have access to health care. The healthcare system in Somalia is not good and it is expensive. And I do not trust the medication here in Somalia, they do not have the expertise needed,

Respondent, Mogadishu.

The healthcare system in Somalia is seen as poor and expensive, highly commercialized, with expired medicines being sold by doctors without proper qualifications. The lack of a regulating authority is seen by respondents in Mogadishu as a concern that they did not face in Kenya.

Returnees who relied on government hospitals explain that, due to few medical practitioners or personnel, the number of patients outnumbers the number of doctors. Several reported having to return home unattended. Overwhelmingly, returnees consider that hospitals cater for the rich and are too expensive for them.

Going back to Kenya to access health care

Returnees voiced their belief that healthcare is not only cheaper but of higher quality in Kenya, including in the camps. As a result, the main factor cited for “return” to Kenya is for medical purposes. Lack of access to healthcare is the main driver for continued cross-border mobility and an impediment to reintegration.

Access to clean water

Lack of fresh water is a protection challenge for reintegration of refugees in Somalia. The challenge is three-fold:

1. Lack of access – Returnees report that fresh water is located far from their homes, with a 2 to 5 kms of distance to access fresh water.
2. Financial constraints - Fresh water is either too expensive to buy (20 litres jar of water cost 10,000 Somali shilling - 0.5 USD) or unavailable. Water vendors have created a business out of selling water to returnees at a high cost.
3. Lack of drinkable water - Shallow wells are available but the water is reportedly salty and unfit for drinking.

Secondary displacement as a coping strategy to negotiate access to services

The problematic access to fresh water leads to multiple displacement upon return – with records of five displacements upon return in the sample of returnees interviewed – with a mix of IDPs living inside and outside of IDP settlements interviewed for this study. The preference is to move from rental rooms to IDP settlements where refugees turned returnees are associated with the assistance given to IDPs, relying on aid for basic services. The advantage of being able to move freely in Somalia is taken up by many respondents – using free movement as a means to better access basic services. Mobility then continues to be a coping strategy in the lives of returnees.

Returnees have reported moving to Dalhis where IDPs live to access free health services, shelter and water. Dalhis is known to returnees as a settlement for IDPs. Returnees are looking to be resettled by the authorities in places demarcated for IDPs – a trend that could also lead to tensions between displaced communities, IDPs and returnees.

Others are unable to access basic services as they cannot afford the cost of moving. “There was a time when I wanted to shift from my current place but I did not have the money to do so.”

Food insecurity and clan discrimination

Access to food is a recurrent problem before and after return. Returnees rely on the support of the local community to receive food – but patterns of discrimination were reported against the Bantus who feel discriminated in Somalia. Bantus are distinct from other clans in Somalia – although these distinctions did not impact their access to food in Kenya, upon return, it becomes a factor of marginalization.

“I meet Samaritans of the locality and I request them to give me food but they said that I don’t deserve to be assisted because I’m Bantu.”
(Ibrahim, 30, Badari settlement)

Seasonality negatively impacts food access – with a shortage of goods reported at the time of this study in December 2014 at the seaports.

Food remains a problem, “here and there” although the food ratios were larger in Kenya than those distributed in the IDP settlements in Somalia, the impact of the WFP cuts in 2014 in Kenya meant for many that the situation was becoming unfavourable. Upon return though the situation is worse. *“Sometimes my children don’t eat for at least three days because I can’t find work”.*

D. Child Protection

School dropouts, child labour and children left behind

School Dropouts

The dropout rate of school-aged children is high in the sample interviewed, and parents revert instead to religious schools as public and private schools are out of the reach of a majority of returnees. Priority is given to learning the Holy Quran, but the official curriculum is left aside due to the absence of free education in Somalia.

Limited access to education initiatives

Children stop going to school in Somalia due to the school fee, the quality of the curriculum and the use of the old syllabus, and the lack of quality teachers. Despite the “Go-2-School” or “Back-to-School” Initiative, access to education is a clear issue for returnees. “Our children don’t get access to education despite the program of the government for free education” (Mahdi, Kismayo). Returnees highlight the lack of financial resources and networks as an obstacle to enrolling their children in school – seeing both discrimination in access and unfair practices giving away poor children and orphans’ school seats to “higher profile families”.

Child Labour

Lack of access to food and food insecurity lead children out of school and into labour. Many returnees with no strong networks of support and no livelihood opportunities struggle meeting the daily needs for their families. This is particularly true for single-headed family households.

A major facing returnee children in Somalia is child labour. Respondents reported having to send their children to work because they are unable to get assistance or support. This is particularly true for isolated returnees in Mogadishu or returnees in IDP settlements who receive limited access to aid. Children most commonly engage in housework, shoe-shining, car wash or street work, the latter exposing them to security threats.

Children Left Behind

The situation regarding education is leading to further splitting of families as heads of household report that keeping their children in Kenya, in camp or urban schools, as they cannot afford the 10 USD pupil fee and prefer knowing they have access to education, free, in Kenya. Returnee families are designing ways to continue travelling between Somalia and Kenya to visit the children left behind in the camps or in Nairobi – how viable that is for low income returnees is a key question. It seems however more likely that children will join their parents once their

I normally send my young children to work as shoe shiners in the market. It's the easiest and cheapest business that children can do in order to sustain their family and contribute to the family bill. (50 year-old returnee with 19 children in the household)

My children don't go to school because of the circumstance I am in now. I am unable to get my three meals, let alone access to education.

*Kaltumo Mohamed Jimaale,
Mogadishu.*

“I left my children in Dadaab and I don't know currently how their life is. I wanted to explore the situation in Somalia before bringing my family. Now I know the key gaps are shelter, food, and education, I do not want to bring my children here”

(Yarrow, 32)

education has been completed.

In this process, children are not consulted, as reported by their parents – they are left behind with other relatives to take care of them, with the aim of a temporary split but with no timeline set. Although this study did not include child respondents, further research should be done on the implications (positive and negative) of return migration on children left behind in Kenya. UNHCR has integrated this issue into its Pilot program with discussions with education partners, and further monitoring the situation. The Pilot aims to respond to these protection challenges faced by the unassisted returnees – hence feeding lessons learned to avoid key protection issues.

Box 6. Adapting to life in Somalia: Difficulties for children

“I was received by my cousin and lived with him for about a month. I left him because the house was too congested and could not house all of us. The environment at home was bearable, but the environment outside was the toughest as we had been away for 7 years. Adapting to life in Somalia became harder every day, for my children and for myself. Adapting in terms of the culture was hardest for the children, who ask me to go back to Kenya”. (Egad, 40, 6 children, currently lives in Mogadishu)

Adapting to life in Somalia is a challenge for many returnees, especially for the second-generation refugees who return to a homeland that they only have vague memories of, if any. Adaptation is a rocky road for returnees, in three ways:

- Cultural assimilation is an unforeseen challenge especially for girls who return to their families' homes in Somalia. Returnees report specific problems faced by girls especially, being the most vocal about their desire to return to Kenya. *“All my relatives were happy except my son's children, especially the daughter, she studied school in Nairobi, she had friends there, whereas here she does not meet any children as she does not go to school. My grandchildren are not able to adapt to life here, they want to go back to Kenya”* (Halwa, 60, female living in Mogadishu)
- Language barriers impact social and family cohesion – The use of Swahili and Kenyan slang impacts daily vocabulary (food, vegetables) and sets them as outsiders in their own homeland. Children realize that returning is not as easy as their parents had told them it would be, creating tensions at home.
- Climate changes impact health – especially pronounced for those migrating back from Nairobi to Mogadishu. The hot climate of Somalia reportedly made them feel dizzy and unwell for many months after their initial return.

I want to go back to Kenya, I am unable to continue living here in Somalia, I miss my friends and classmates in Kenya. The education standard in Kenya is better than this one in Somalia. I also miss my parents, I hope that they come soon.

Abdirizak: I miss my parents, they will come soon. I don't miss Kenya that much, I like Somalia too. I am in class 2, I like my school and I like my friends here in Somalia. I left Ifo refugee settlement and stayed in Nairobi for two months and I left for Somalia, I therefore do not have many friends in Nairobi.

E. Youth Protection

With the removal of Al-Shabaab from Mogadishu and the surrounding cities, the security conditions in certain parts of Somalia is perceived as having considerably improved. Yet:

Returnee youth are vulnerable to arrests

Male, youth are targets in Somalia too. Many left Kenya to live in a more welcoming environment but are met with hostility upon return – and no legal aid available to them against allegations of terrorism or association with Al-Shabaab.

The security situation is worse here compared to Kenya. In terms of security Somalia is a little bit chaos than Kenya for example the explosions here in Somalia happen frequently whereas in Kenya they happen once in a while. I come to place where I was not expecting anybody to receive me.

Fadumo Sharif Haba

Returnee youth lack access to legal aid

Round-ups occur specifically after high profile incidents in public places in cities – which call for better protection of youth and provision of legal aid in such instances. However, youth lack legal protection as well as political exclusion through lack of political participation.

F. Still no livelihoods: Prospects for youth and women?

Livelihoods are hard to come by for returnees as they

1. Lack the networks to facilitate an income generating activity
2. Lack skills or lack pertinent skills to the local context
3. Lack of capital
4. Lack of local labour market knowledge.

Women want to work, but lack the network and the capital

Yes, I am an able person who has the ability to work, I can be a housemaid, or can own my own business if I am invested for a start capital. For now I am not working neither learnt any skill in Kenya, particularly the refugee camps.

Women's voice on livelihoods is particularly promising – as they want to work, looking to contribute, but do not know how or where to start.

The problem for women is the lack of support given to them – with a lack of female-sensitive training programs and labour market

Yes, I can work. I can do several things if I am given money to start a small business, I know how to operate a clothes shop or work in a hotel as cook. Unless I start a business, which I do not have the capital, it is difficult to get a job in Somalia.

(Khadija, 40, Mogadishu)

integration mechanisms. Yet their skills in cooking, tailoring, farming are repeatedly cited in interviews. Women go as far as asking for capital to start-up their own business in Somalia. Women are also most often working as maids, and in small businesses – whether cafés, selling stacks.

Men face similar challenges – not knowing the right people to get them back to work. “I am a farmer from a farmer society, these are my only skills” –not ones adapted to life in Kambios, Dagahaley or Ifo camps. In Kismayo, the hope of these farmers is to resume agriculture work – but on which land? “I will need to find someone to hire me” – the focus being on the people who can offer jobs, not particular locations or sector that can offer jobs.

Returnees did not acquire new skills in Kenya...a result of aid dependency.

Aid dependency and the lack of legal recourse to work means that many refugees never actually worked while in exile. For others, the challenge was finding skills in a new Kenyan environment. For Somalis from Kismayo, most were pastoralists and farmers before their displacement.

In Kenya, refugees learned mainly casual labour in the form of brick making, low-skilled construction work, transporting firewood, and for some, driving.

In Kenya I never learnt any business activities because I was getting full support from WFP.

My level of income is zero because I have no skills at all. In Kenya I was fully supported by humanitarians

A few success stories stand out: Trade and Seaport

Somalis are known for being entrepreneurs. Among our sample, some have succeeded upon return to generate a stable income. Among success stories in Kismayo are stories of:

- Trade of milk and dairy products from rural areas to Kismayo town
- Trade of common goods
- Credit providing schemes using retail goods
- Raising livestock animal
- Carpentry

For the most successful, the hope is that their business will allow them to fund family returns and reunification – as they have relatives left behind in Kenya. Others hope their success will translate into further migration abroad – either through formal or informal resettlement prospects.

Yet, for another group of returnees, the seaport in Kismayo is the hope for reintegration. The fresh body of water is seen as being a source of daily livelihood – creating jobs of various kinds: porters, loaders, wheelbarrow pushers, water trucking, waiters in hotels, maids at houses, construction workers on building sites, with most of these jobs being open to men and women alike.

Lacking the local knowledge

This is linked to the lack of preparation to return – economically, business start-ups were reported to fail, wasting all the initial investment and savings brought back by refugees. “*With the little saving I was carrying from the camp, I decided to start a small business. I rented a room in the market and purchased all the required equipment for the shop. Then, in the first months, I was not able to get enough customers and quite quickly, all my money went in the shop. I took the decision to close the shop and run towards the camp, later get some more customers*”. (Furefarah, 28)

Absence of economic institutions and banks leading to limited economic interactions

Lack of economic and financial structures within the state limits the chances for economic interactions. There are no financial institutions in Kismayo, Luuq and Baidoa leaving people with very limited options for economic engagement or even saving money. According to a key informant, the weak institutional framework in parts of Somalia led some pastoralists to travel to Kenya and sell their livestock in order to have access to financial means where they can deposit their earning.

We don't have trusted Bank that we can save the little we have, respondent Kismayo.

2.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR REINTEGRATION

Life in Somalia is great for those who work only: I don't work so I have no access to services. No, I do not have access to basic services because I do not work.

*Muminaabuud Aden,
Kismayo.*

How do they look back on their life in Kenya once they have returned to Somalia?

Reintegration can be difficult – especially for those who left Eastleigh: they feel discriminated against upon return, and their expectations are often much higher than other returnees from camps. Their higher expectations on access to employment and security are at stake, especially for youth who continue to witness harassment by security forces as they are suspected of being members of Al Shabaab and other militant groups.

Reintegration is difficult for minority groups – and most unassisted returnees are from minority groups who report challenging clan dynamics. “I am not hopeful about our future in Somalia because everything works through the 4.5 based clan system” (Yarrow, 32, 5 children). Focus group with minority groups revealed the challenges posed by clan dynamics in reintegration. Dominant clans are reported involved in:

- Taking property
- Creating obstacles for property recuperation

Return migration and societal adjustment: Experiences of return require adjustment to a society. In Somalia, returnees face compromise over basic services, access to clean water, free education, and above all free food – they enjoy free movement and being home. Yet their coping mechanisms remain too few to handle life back in Somalia. “I have not been able to cope with

the challenges”, “I used to just manage by skipping breakfast, lunch or supper” but that is no longer enough. There is a gap of assistance and presence of NGOs in Kismayo and Mogadishu, and insecurity in Mogadishu, that returnees did not expect – not to such an extent. There are other nuances – the longer they stay, the smoother the transition becomes. Transition remains more difficult in Kismayo than in Mogadishu, for youth than for elders, for families with children than for split families with multiple migration strategies.

When family networks work, return is reinforced, yet networks remain rare. Either through split families keeping one foot in Somalia and one foot in Kenya, or through supportive and resourceful families upon return, transnational support systems in split families or with links to the diaspora are essential to those experiencing a positive return process.

Signs for youth are promising but dissatisfaction or disenchantment is most common for youthful returning nationals who face unemployment and police harassment. These youth are unable to find spaces in Somalia that are theirs. They are caught in ambivalence about their return – but still hopeful.

Compromise is apparent among all returnees who highlight a set of advantages and disadvantages to return. All talk about having more coping strategies in Somalia than in Kenya where they were solely dependant on aid. Although faced with very similar difficulties, and often a more challenging reality in Somalia, they boast coping mechanisms. Some can have a negative impact on wellbeing, others can be reinforced.

I am unable to feed all of my family members. We sometimes stay unfed for long hours or skip meals. I have not been able to cope with these challenges, I use to manage like skipping breakfast, lunch or super.

Respondent, Kismayo

I left 5 of my children with my brother in Kenya. I could not afford their upkeep, so my brother suggested that they should stay with him. He works as a casual labourer. But my children in Kenya do not go to school because my brother whom they live with cannot afford to pay for their school fees, he pays for their most important basic needs.

(Respondent, 46, Mogadishu)

A. Coping mechanisms

Our findings show that returnees in Somalia have engaged in a number of coping mechanisms which include borrowing money, not eating on a daily basis, day to day survival, relying on family members, receiving remittances from abroad, and splitting families. Some are positive, others present risks.

The most common coping mechanism cited by returnees involves not eating or surviving on one meal a day – this is a common strategy for all displaced households in all country settings: food insecurity is a well known displacement-related vulnerability that is met by decreasing the quantity and quality of food.

The second most common coping mechanism is splitting families – extensively reviewed in previous chapters. The choice is made to divide up the sequence of return, with the head of household going first, then planning for the return of the family – in this sense splitting of families also may lead to reunification at a later stage. Women and children join their husbands or families who left earlier. Return is a phased process, and takes time to plan properly. Those who take that time might suffer in the short term from family separation and protection issues facing women and children left behind; but they might also present advantages – ensuring education for children, a diversification of income for the household, and a cost-benefit analysis that leads to more informed strategies.

Borrowing money is another coping strategy for those who you have access to someone who can lend them – a better-off relative or a shopkeeper in the neighbourhood who will lend them cash or, most often, who will give an advance on food needed.

However, for most of our respondents borrowing money is not an option given their lack of networks and most importantly their lack of income and means to recover debt. Many respondents highlighted that they could not take out loans as everyone knows that they would not be able to pay back. There is very limited risk taking when it comes to taking out debts upon return in Somalia. As one of the respondents emphasized – borrowing money is based on three conditions: having networks, having an income and having trust. As the findings from this study show, most returnees lack the network and the income upon return to be able to afford to take out – and repay – debts.

*No, borrowing money is not easy and not accessible: First who do I know who could lend me money? Second, nobody gives something to somebody who has nothing like me, they always give to someone who has something.
Respondent, Mogadishu.*

*I am much better here, because I learned to be self-reliant: I am fulfilling all my basic needs on my own. There is no single agency that supports me as they do in settlements in Kenya.
Respondent, Mogadishu*

B. A positive discourse on self-reliance

Perception of self-reliance

The transition from being a refugee to becoming a Somalia returnee is often one of self-reliance. Returnees report that in Somalia, unlike life in Kenya, self-reliance is the key to survival as every person – young or old can and must work for their daily bread. On the other hand, this perception of self-reliance is eroded in Kenya where aid dependency is mentioned.

People in the settlements are dependent on humanitarian support like the dry food given by WFP, they count the days to look for their rations or may borrow dry food from neighbours. But it is never enough.
Khassim 50

The actual ability to be self-reliant depends on the returnee's ability to generate an income. A crucial distinction must be made between returnees in IDP centres and those living outside. Returnees in IDP settlements are more reliant on aid and have more access to assistance while those outside IDP settlements are not much assisted and face severe cases of isolation.

“When I returned to Somalia, in the first two weeks, I was in state of confusion because I found the whole environment was completely different from the environment I knew because there was change in terms of atmosphere and my all colleagues were out of the country. After some days I opted to become a tailor which actually improve my livelihood, as a matter of fact I was not received well by anybody, even if relatives visited me. I made it on my own” – Ibrahim, 30, 5 children

Learning from businessmen: Trading food and goods

Those who were able to return from Kenya with funds from sale of assistance, goods or belongings were able to use the money as capital to start a small shop or kiosk for retail. Upon return, these business are often involved in giving credit and allowing exchange of goods that provides a market for reintegration: trade of butter for vegetable with a farmer, or taking livestock animal against sugar and other food substances. These exchanges require a network of business that can be engaged with – these business are often set up by returnees.

Dependency on aid – Kenya vs. Somalia

All respondents pointed out that aid in Kenya is of better quality than aid provisions in Somalia especially in terms of access to health and education. For those who live outside IDP settlements, most claim not to have access to any assistance given that there is no assistance outside of IDP settlements or because they do not have the networks and contacts that will enable them to access aid. It is believed that aid is prioritized on clan-based system. Furthermore, another complaint is that there is no special assistance for people with high-level vulnerabilities such as female-headed households, divorced and widows as everyone in Somalia is extremely vulnerable.

C. Lack of networks

The role of networks is key in assessing people's ability for re-integration. In Somalia, upon return, networks are weak and unable able to offer material support. As a result, those with strong family ties are not better integrated. In the absence of family networks many returnees face isolation.

Weak ties are a result of the returnee not having family where they reside because it is not their village of origin, or because they cannot rely on their family because their families are in similar or worse conditions.

Lack of networks impedes the ability to cope as well as the returnee's ability to find work opportunities. Respondents mentioned that in order to gain access to the most menial jobs such construction work, one must have direct link with engineers or managers to become part of their construction tea.

I was received by one of our cousins, who could not support us that much because he too is in a very poor state. (...) I do not have a strong system of support here in Somalia. People are just not better off than me.

In Mogadishu, I live with my mother and elder brother, I don't have any other relatives and the ones are poor like us and in fact they are from Beletweyne, too far from us.

Everyone is vulnerable in Kismayo

The same reality confronts all Somalis in Kismayo, whether returnees, IDPs or locals. The only ones to receive family support are the elderly for whom relatives make special efforts to provide assistance. Elders are confident that they will be supported. But for the rest, they talk about the lack of any special treatment, even for the most needy.

No privileged assistance: "I was a special case in Dadaab, but not here"

"All humanitarians were supportive in the camps, people in the camps were divided in two special cases, just like me, I was a divorcee – that is why they helped me several times. But here all people are victims no one is safe. In the refugee camps where I was recognized as a divorcee, I could get some privileges but here all the IDPs are all vulnerable to the same circumstances of having poor basic requirements." (Sitey, Somali female returnee, Dalxiis boolow)

CONCLUSION

"I am not coping well – services are only available for those who can work and pay'. 'It was tough there, it is tough here, but how can we move ahead?"

Return for those interviewed were spontaneous and voluntary – to Mogadishu and to Kismayo. Do these add up to a safe and dignified return?

Safety is lacking – in Kenya as in Somalia. Return has not worsened that aspect of refugees' / returnees' lives – although the journey itself poses fundamental questions about safely returning refugees home, getting from point A to point B being the ultimate security challenge for most, creating key vulnerabilities with life-threatening incidents. The journey is life threatening and must be assessed.

Dignity is a concept that contains elements of choice, redress and restitution. Redress is a cornerstone of dignity^{xxiii}: through this process, inequalities are recognized, and refugees seek pathways to resolve them. Not being dependent on aid nor on networks in Somalia, refugee returnees are left to fend on their own: revealing a degree of agency. Although still in difficult living conditions, lacking the most basic protection standards, returnees can be empowered by return, if they are properly supported and enabled. Youth want to have a future in Somalia, women want to be actors in the reintegration process, and children are already working if they are not going in school. Yet, inequalities and injustices abound, and stakeholders must act to correct them. The list below summarizes the key findings on the protection issues reported in this research – with the aim to diminish negative consequences on protection and enhance the positives.

- Rising inter community tensions: competition over resources
 - Between refugee returnee and local host communities
 - Between refugee returnees and IDPs
- Discrimination based on clan affiliations
 - Being from a minority clan: vulnerable refugee returnees
- Secondary / Multiple displacement upon return
 - A sign of free movement
 - But a challenge to resume a normal life
 - Refugee returnees mix with internally displaced persons
- Living as IDPs in centres
 - From refugees to returnees...to IDPs? A difficult transition
- Child labour
 - Children dropout of school
 - Unable to pay school fees
 - Children become contributors to the family income
- Children left behind
 - Some stay in Kenya, to continue school
 - They stay with relatives but far from their parents
- Youth protection
 - Youth run the risk of being disenfranchised upon return
 - They have the highest hopes, and can be met by the highest disenchantment
 - The need to better inform Somali refugee returnee youth

Positive consequences of return to Somalia include

- Women's willingness and ability to work
 - Women want to be a key actor in the return process, from planning to resuming livelihoods upon return
- Efforts to build self-reliance
 - Somali returnees are proud of the opportunity to step out of the aid dependency cycle to make it on their own – yet they have a difficult time knowing how? Without networks, capital or local knowledge
- Finding own resilience through positive coping strategies
 - Trade is the best economic survival method of Somali refugees who trade all sorts of daily goods

to restore dignity, 'safe spaces' are needed in Somalia – spaces for youth to learn skills and work, spaces for women to have access to livelihood, and spaces for children to go to school.

The next chapter on transition to durable solutions will review whether return is a promising option for Somali refugees today – is it a sustainable one?

3.1 REFUGEE-RETURNEE TRANSITION: EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY

3.2. OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS TO DURABLE SOLUTIONS

3.3 FUTURE INTENTIONS



3

TRANSITION TO DURABLE SOLUTIONS?

OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

How to smoothen the refugee-to-returnee transition, supporting refugees from Kenya to becoming self-reliant, self-sustaining returnees in Somalia?

This chapter will be dedicated to:

- Understanding the refugee-returnee transition in the Somali context for unassisted returnees. It will not assess whether durable solutions have been or can be achieved; instead, it will detail how far along the durable solutions process returnees are, or whether return is just a transitional phase, another step in the migration cycle.
- Analysing opportunities and threats – What is the potential for durable solutions? What can be done to help individuals and families in their refugee-returnee transition?
- Discussing returnees' future intentions and plans after return.

According to the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions, a durable solution is achieved when returnees 'no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement.'^{xxiv} In order to assess the potential for durable solutions for returnees, it is important to understand how returnees view durable solutions, their hopes and expectations, the challenges they face and their understanding of return – do they perceive of return as a permanent or transitory phase?

Two key findings are highlighted in this chapter.

First, the disparity between the expectation of refugees and the reality on the ground is posing a challenge for durable solutions and calls for better access to information in order to align refugee hopes with reality.

Second, none of the spontaneous returnees who have left Kenya have given up their refugee status upon return to Somalia choosing to keep it as 'an escape route' back to Kenya – in their own words.

3.1 REFUGEE-RETURNEE TRANSITION: EXPECTATIONS VS. REALITY

The missing link between humanitarian and development actors is often raised as an obstacle to durable solutions for returnees in their places of origin. Durable solutions require a coordinated transition from humanitarian to development assistance. Are spontaneous returnees experiencing this transition? What are their needs and their position on the spectrum of humanitarian – development assistance?

This research shows that a key challenge to durable solutions is a vast disparity between the expectation and reality of return. Most returnees in Somalia expressed a sense of disappointment, especially in their access to aid and livelihoods. Interviews with return candidates in Kenya indicate that they have similarly high expectations. What are the chances that their expectations will be fulfilled upon return? Providing accurate information to refugee is key in order to bridge the gap between the expectation and reality and ensure that refugees are prepared to reintegrate in a sustainable manner.

Expectations vs. reality: Livelihood and skills mismatch

Most refugees intending to return to Somalia plan to farm or pursue business activities. There is a belief amongst those intending to return that livelihood opportunities are abundant whether it is farming, petty trade, raising livestock or casual labour. However, most respondents did not have information about the market situation in Somalia although they expressed a confidence that they will be able to figure out what business to engage in upon return. Some have even heard that the government in Somalia was giving out jobs to people as farmers and animal keepers thus raising their expectation to find immediate jobs upon return.

Most returnees struggle to engage in income generating activities, impeding their re-integration.

Among those interviewed in Mogadishu, work was mainly found in blue collar jobs or casual labour, while women worked in domestic jobs – washing clothes, caring for babies or cooking for others. Men worked in quarry, construction sites or selling snacks in Somalia, a skill that they had learned selling snacks in Kenya. Returnee men expressed interest in working in the transportation sector: some of the men are drivers of big trucks but have not found opportunities in that sector.

One of the main obstacles upon return is the lack of connections to labour market actors. Returnees are being asked to provide recommendation letters or a reference – which they often lack. “Nobody will trust someone who does not have a recommendation letter” (Salmo, Mogadishu).

Yes, I hear they are getting jobs. The Somali president welcome returnees with jobs as farmers and animal keepers. So many jobs are available there but not here. I don't know more specific details but I now the president is giving people who are coming back jobs.

FGD IFO2, Dadaab.

A realistic one-month target for youth? Adjusting expectations for youth

Youth are the most job-driven. They have targets set in their mind of finding employment within one month of arriving in Somalia. The lack of employment within a reasonable timeframe – or underemployment – impacts their confidence level, their wellbeing and their sense of self-worth. “I felt bad when I returned to Somalia and stayed more than 3 months without a job”, says Abdirahman, 26, who returned to Mogadishu to see his friends working but himself staying idle. “Now I am working, but not enough for even my basic needs. Life in Kenya was better than this one – I had free education, access to basic needs and health care.”

Perceptions of jobs: before return, in Kenya

Finding work in “1-3 months”: “High risk, high opportunities!”

“What I have been told is that it takes on average between 1 to 3 months to find a job in Somalia. In Kenya it would take a lifetime! For job security, it is better in Somalia. But for human security it is still better in Kenya.” – Kamal, 22

Youth aim to go to Somali because of the belief that it is their country and that they will be given jobs, unlike in Kenya. The aim is to obtain a decent education in Kenya, then travel to Somalia for better job opportunities. Yet, they do so right out of college, with no work experience in Kenya – at best, with only volunteering experiences. Few are trained with professional skills.

Skills – “Will they teach me there in Somalia, are there programs?”

Most did not learn any skills while in Kenya. From Dadaab to Nairobi, the biggest problem for Somali refugee youth is two-fold: 1) the lack of professional skills, and 2) the lack of local labour market knowledge. The situation is worse for those living in Dadaab than in urban areas. “As I grew up, it was just conflict: no education, nor skills, nor work. And in Dadaab I didn’t learn anything either and I was mostly sick. So now I need to learn a skill to earn an income for my future family.

- What programs can I enrol in for skills?
- What type of skills should I seek?
- What type of work can I do there?
- Do you have any information to help me connect to a job there?”

Skills – “How can I contribute to reconstruction in Somalia?”

What are the skills needed for reconstruction programs? When interviewing Somali refugees in Kenya and returnees in Somalia, they identified four key sectors in which they could and want to contribute. These four sectors include:

- Education. Youth focus on education as their key added value in Somalia’s reconstruction. They could become teachers, trainers, interpreters, and community mobilizers – aiming at providing these services to international organizations, non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies first and foremost.
- Construction. Older returnees put forward their skills in the construction sector that could be used for shelter programs – from low skilled workers to semi skilled workers in the carpeting industry, returnees have a general skills in construction.
- Agriculture. Refugee families define themselves as pastoralists, who want to go back to a lifestyle where they can work on land. They are from a society of farmers and only have skills in farming. Yet on which land do they plan to work on?
- Business – retail trade. Among the better off, building a business is the preferred option. They recognize the need for help in creating a business – through capital, drafting of business plan, identification of investors or clients – but they do not consider being in need of skills. “I know how to operate a business, I just need the financial assistance to get it going.” (Mehdi, 35, Dadaab)

Reality of jobs: after return, in Somalia

“Had I known about the market situation”

Thinking they could use their skills in Somalia as they did in Kenya, refugees return to find out that all skills are not transferable – demand in Somalia is different. Activities in tailoring are a prime example of a low demand sector. *Here in Somalia we lack opportunities for tailors, but I did not know. I thought organizations could provide us with machines but even that would not help that much, there is no demand for this work. (Abdifita Hassan, 36)*

“They don’t need drivers here”

I am a mechanic and a driver. I searched for a job here in Mogadishu but did not find anything. Yes, I was a driver and a mechanic before I left Somalia. I continued in Kenya. But now that I am back in Somalia, I cannot find a job (Mahdi Ali, 42)

Not fitting in – Lacking the right networks

The social and economic integration of Somali refugees are intertwined. They are rejected at times by their own compatriots for having become too “Kenyanized”, for being seen as outsider. In other cases, returnees do not fit in because their own families are too poor to help them integrate. The best options offered to them are to integrate in...IDP settlements, at the margin of society. Common trends include:

- Being an outsider. “You studied in Kenya, you should go back to Kenya”. Numerous accounts of minority clan members, of youth with no ‘godfather’ support, and Somalis seen as having become too Kenyan in their behaviour, speech or education, are rejected upon return to Somalia.

I know of a friend who went back to Somalia then returned to Kenya. He looked for a job but no one would employ him because he had lived too long in Kenya. He no longer had contacts in Somalia. He had a university degree. But employers prefer to higher those who live in Somalia (Shukri, 38).

- Vulnerable networks with few coping mechanisms. I was received by a friend who took us to their house...which was in an IDP settlement (Kaltumo, 33)
- Settling for blue-collared jobs. Few have sufficient skills to land a job. They become more realistic upon return, aiming for unskilled or low-skilled jobs, part-time jobs, jobs that can help them cover their basic needs. *I just wake up every morning to look for a casual job. I am now happy with this reality. I have to be patient and work on daily jobs. (Nurullah, 25, IDP settlement, Mogadishu).*
- Remaining idle vs. expectations of a stable job: at odds with reality. *I am used to work so idleness kills me now (Abdifitah Hassan, 25, Mogadishu).* Returnees often voice their discontent as they did not find what was expected in Somalia: first, on security; second, on job opportunities and a much lower income than envisioned – they cannot cover their basic needs upon return.

No home? From a refugee camp to an IDP settlement – the Returnee-IDP nexus.

Some of our respondents intending to return expected to access land or shelter either by being given assistance by aid organisations and the government or being received by family. Others own land they have left which they hoped to access upon their return. Unassisted returnees end up at IDP settlements, highlighting one of the key challenges faced towards achieving a durable solution: how to address their needs when populations are mixed?

No more land? Lacking official mechanisms to resolve land disputes

In Somalia, I was farming. I have my own land in Kismayo. If I go back, I will start working on my own land. (Hassan, 30, lived 17 years in Dadaab) How feasible are these expectations of regaining lands left almost two decades earlier? While our own research has not included people who have returned to their own lands or farms – a study by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) shows that returnees face specific challenges related to land restoration and other properties, especially those who have left their land unattended. It is said that occupied houses and land left behind are difficult to regain while no official mechanism exists to solve land disputes.^{xxv}

Box 7. Protection issues and the Returnee-IDP Nexus The case of Dalxiiska, Lower Juba, Somalia

Returning refugees from Kenya reported being given free plots of land in Dalxiiska, home to one of the main IDP settlements near Kismayo.

Recent reports show targeted attacks on civilians and aid workers in settlements where internally displaced people reside as a rising issue of concern. In 2014, over 30 direct armed attacks were recorded against displaced people. Media coverage links physical vulnerability to return to newly recovered areas near Kismayo, and *en route* to their areas of origin due to unauthorized checkpoints along major access routes and rural roads (RBC Radio, December 8, Kismayo).

Whether violence linked to aid delivery in Dalxiiska or violence on the return route (with a humanitarian worker killed in northern Galkayo in October after registering voluntary returns among the displaced), the returnee – IDP nexus raises particular protection concerns about the safety of unassisted returnees.

Links between protection through land and protection issues raised on the land have to be discussed in more detail for programming purposes.

Farmers but no accessible farmland: Starting from scratch

Returnees accept that life has to be started again, from scratch, looking ahead to the future and not dwelling on the past. My former land is under the control of Al-Shabaab and cannot be accessed. But Kismayo is a growing town, I hope I will be have opportunities here (Ahmed, 28); “I have to re-establish my farm, my plots, and all my assets that I lost in the conflict” (Abdirizak, 34, 4 years in Kenya).

From assisted refugees to regular citizens: Level of food and aid upon return

Perceptions of aid before and after return are at two opposite extremes.

Somali refugees in Kenya believed that better food and better quality aid is awaiting them upon return while returnees in Somalia deem the quality of assistance received in Kenya superior especially on access to healthcare and education.

Refugees know that education and health care in Somalia will not be free. But they think it will be affordable and within their financial capacity. Most believed that since they will be able to work, they will be able to afford education for their children and healthcare for all.

The majority of spontaneous returnees in Somalia outside IDP settlements have no access to any kind of aid even though some expected to receive aid upon their return. Part of the problem is that returnees not only lack information as to what aid is available for them but also how to find it.

Unavailability of basic services

A 2013 study on Durable Solutions by the Danish Refugee Council shows that refugees' decision to repatriate is not solely based on long-lasting stability and security but rests mainly on other factors including access to education and health care, livelihood opportunities and whether humanitarian assistance would be provided upon return.^{xxvi} As such, the perception that aid is available is central to the returns process and the return decision.

To ensure the sustainability of return, the availability of services to refugees must be improved. The availability of education and better health facilities in Kenya will continue to attract returnees back to the camps as many assess and re-consider their future.

Tying aid to settlements: freedom to resettle curtailed

Returnees feel they have to make a choice – either live in settlements where NGOs are present, or return to their locations of origin and do without aid. Feedback from refugees who returned unassisted in 2013 and 2014 highlights three issues:

I would advise them to stay calm in Kenya till Somalia gains complete peace and stability and then agencies can easily provide aid without any sort of fear –

Abdirahman Aweis 26, Mogadishu

1. Return should be encouraged only once stability is sufficiently present to allow for agencies to deliver aid – without fear. This is not currently the case as reports of threats and attacks on humanitarian workers continue.
2. NGOs should be more closely supervised – returnees complain of the corruption and inefficiency of NGOs in Somalia compared to those in Kenya. Returnees blame the lack of aid on corruption within NGOs.
3. Aid should not be tied to settlements – those who decide to return to their homes will receive less assistance than those who live in IDP settlements. Aid impacts the settlement decision-making process as a result.

Transition out of poverty?

Assessing the economic status of returnees and whether they have transitioned out of poverty since their arrival to Somalia is a fundamental window into durable solutions.

Demand for livelihood opportunities was cited in the top three main drivers of return.

1. Group 1: A minority is self-reliant – living better in return than in exile. A few of our respondents have been able to achieve a level of self-reliance by setting up businesses (operating small shops) or tailoring and having strong family networks to rely on. For this group of returnees, they are more self-reliant than previously in Kenya and are in better conditions. This is the case for a minority only.
2. Group 2: On the path to self-reliance – a window out of poverty. A second group of returnees earns a living through activities such a manual labour and is involved in seasonal labour or episodic activities. They are on the path towards self-reliance.
3. Group 3: No livelihood strategies – no transition out of poverty. The vast majority of our respondents are not engaged in any income generating activity and has not developed strategies/activities that have contributed to self-reliance or sustainable livelihoods. Lack of livelihood opportunities and limited personal connections are key impediments to re-integration. Moreover, they are in worse conditions that they were in Kenya given that they either do not have access to any aid or very little access.

Re-integration Indicators

The reality on the ground shows that the level of re-integration of returnees fails to meet the recognised standards (UNHCR 's Standard Indicator Guidelines for return Areas) thus undermining the potential for durable solutions. Although our study does not provide statistical projections on the degree of returnee's level of re-integration, our qualitative work highlights trends and observations.

Table 5: UNHCR Standards and Indicator Guidelines/Return Area in Context

Indicator	UNHCR Description	Findings - Data
Social Integration		
Water	Returnees have equal rights to achieving improved level of water and sanitation services, as aimed for by the Millennium Development Goals. To assess how far such improvements have been achieved, all returnees should have access to an adequate level of water provision service.	The majority does not having access to adequate water provisions. Fresh water is either too expensive to buy (20 litres jar of water cost 10,000 Somali Shilling - 0.5 USD) or not available within close proximity of dwelling.

Shelter – living in adequate dwellings	To assess if all families have shelters of an adequate nature so that they are protected against the elements, can live in a dignified manner and are subject to reduced rates of communicable disease spread.	The majority of returnees in Kismayo and Mogadishu end up either in over-crowded IDP settlements, or in rented apartments with no security of tenure.
Education	Percentage of school-aged population in returnee area (RA) living within reasonable distance from primary school.	Most respondents are unable to send their children to school due to high school costs. This adds an additional challenge: as families separate leaving their school-aged children behind in Kenya in order for them to continue their education, this practice exposes children to protection risks when adult care is not available.
Health	The health care service is considered accessible if access is provided to all without discrimination, if it is within physical reach and if it is affordable.	Most respondents have no access to health services either because of lack of free health care or the lack of facilities around their area. Some do have access to free health care around IDP settlements but they claim it lacks adequate medical facilities.
Economic Security		
Returnees below the poverty line	To measure the minimum level considered sufficient to sustain a family in terms of food, housing, clothing, medical needs, and education	The majority lives below the poverty line unable to sustain a family in terms of basic needs, food, housing, clothing, medical needs, and education. As a result, they engage in high-risk coping strategies such as child labour.
Returnees with access to land for agricultural purposes	To measure the accessibility of households to arable agricultural land.	Limited or no access to land under temporary crops, meadows, or kitchen gardens.
Returnees (of working age) employed or engaged in IGAs	To measure the percentage of returnees who have access to income to meet basic individual/household needs, and are on the path towards self-reliance.	The majority of our respondents are not employed or engaged in income generating activities.

3.2. OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS TO DURABLE SOLUTIONS

Missed opportunities: The other durable solutions: Local integration and resettlement

Voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement are the three possible durable solutions that enable refugees to secure the political, economic, legal and social conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity.

Local integration is desirable by refugees but as a result of the encampment policy in Kenya, restricting refugees' freedom of movement and access to labour markets, local integration is, politically, not a viable option in Kenya. However, a number of refugees have settled in urban areas with the local population and have found ways to integrate either formally or informally to the economy. Nairobi's Eastleigh neighbourhood is a prime example of the thriving business and entrepreneurial culture.

While repatriation is the preferred durable solution for the government of Kenya, it is far from being the optimal solution for the vast majority of refugees. Conditions in Somalia are not currently conducive for a large-scale sustainable repatriation. While there has been political change in south-central Somalia and greater stability with the presidential elections in August 2012, stability remains volatile. Lack of stability is not the only impediment for durable solutions – but lack facilities, social services and infrastructure to fully re-integrate Somalis.

As this study shows, the majority of returnees are facing serious obstacles re-integrating into their country of origin. Currently, return entails losses for refugees in educational opportunities and access to basic services. The main gains are in terms of livelihood opportunities, greater freedom of movement and access to land for those who have access. From the viewpoint of refugees, repatriation would be sustainable if their gains are greater than their losses.

Uncertain of what the future may hold, unassisted returnees interviewed maintain their Somali passports along with their refugee status – with the hope that they will be accepted in resettlement programmes in the future.

Opportunities ahead: The next generation of teachers – Towards an education strategy for Somalia

UNHCR is working towards a global and regional framework to address the education of Somali refugees. A key feedback from Somali refugee youth in Kenya is the belief that their exile has allowed them to gain access to an education that is not available in Somalia – and their capacity to contribute to the reconstruction of their homeland through education. This means – in other words – tapping into the potential of refugee youth to create and train a supply of qualified teachers, responding at the dual challenge of youth employment and children's education, as a contribution to durable solutions upon return.

“University graduates like us cannot work here – and people in Somalia do not have our level of education, they are mostly illiterate. There is something we can do there for them.” – Kamal 25,

*Urban refugee youth,
Nairobi*

Threats: Gendered vulnerabilities

For Somali refugees living in Kenya, return is a not-so-distant reality. Whether Kenya's harsh new security laws, UNHCR's pilot program to assist spontaneous returns or a fatigue of living in exile, trends point to a push for returns to Somalia.

Yet, return is a daunting reality and a risky undertaking for many – especially women, who are among the most vulnerable before, during and after return. What are the protection challenges that women face during and upon return? A cross-border study with 200 respondents highlights three conclusions:

1. The return journey is a daunting and dangerous process for Somali refugee women: getting from point A to point B is a fear-filled journey for them.
2. The burden of planning for return falls on Somali refugee women who become de facto female heads of household in the absence of their husbands – leaving all administrative and logistical issues to women to handle, adding stress to an already vulnerable status.
3. Split families expose women to new vulnerabilities before, during and after return – men require women to join them in Somalia but leave their children behind in Kenya; in other cases women are asked to care for families in the absence of men, who leave them behind.

The violent physical, emotional and psychological transitions women are exposed to are an obstacle to durable solutions upon return. These protection issues have to be highlighted, as return is becoming a reality for many – and a violent transition with gendered vulnerabilities.

Threats: Cross-border transnational living

One threat to spontaneous return is the nature of mobility for Somali refugees: cross-border mobility describes the nature of the movement more precisely than return as a one-way process. Complex migration stories abound – one respondent embodied such mobile realities: having first migrated to Dadaab in 1992, he returned once in 1993, returning to Dadaab in 2006 and now preparing to return under the UNHCR pilot scheme, in 2015. He will be “returning” to Somalia for the second time.

“This is not my first time in Dadaab”

I was part of the first Somalis to arrive in Dagahaley in 1992. I requested to return in 1993 – at that time there was no government but a peacekeeping mission. Then 15 years later, with the renewal of conflict I left again. This is the second time that I come to Dadaab – I have been here since 2006.

“I expect, I hope, this will be the last time”

My first repatriation program: life was better at that time because there was a peacekeeping mission. A lot of UN agencies were providing aid. Do you know now if there are agencies giving aid now? The information we have been given is that there will be agencies giving help and support.

3.3 FUTURE INTENTIONS

Border crossing or return? Temporality of life in Somalia and an escape route: Keeping refugee status and a foothold in Kenya

How do returnees view their return? Are they intending to stay or come back to Kenya? A durable solution can only be achieved if returnees are planning to remain in their area of return. Although a majority expresses the desire to stay in Somalia, none of the spontaneous returnees have given up their refugee cards upon return. Some left their card with relatives or friends in Kenya fearing it might be lost or stolen during the journey. This highlights the very temporal nature of return – even for those who want to stay in Somalia, keeping their refugee status is essential as an exit strategy: it is their last resort coping strategy.

I'm leaving my property here. I'm going with some clothes but leaving some clothes here too. I've heard about the help desk but I want to go on my own because I do not want to be de-activated from the system. I want to leave my house here in case I decide to come back. I want to be able to come back anytime I want. (Dadaab).

Some refugees forego of UNHCR's return assistance and the financial incentives that accompany it aware of the consequences of losing one's refugee status. These returnees have decided to return on their own while keeping their property in the settlement.

When I told my family the situation of Somalia they are also in dilemma whether to come back to the country or stay where they are at right now despite the worse life in the settlement. (Mogadishu)

As one the respondents states: *In case of violence starts, the things that made people flee in the first place, will make people*

I am in dilemma situation and only God knows where I will be and my will be the next five years. I don't think whether it will stay in Somalia or leave it again. I am in fifty, fifty situation. (Mogadishu)

come back. But if it is a peaceful place, return will be permanent.

While security is a main concern for many refugee returnees who will return to Kenya if violence erupts again, their decision to stay is not solely based on security stability but also rests on a number of other factors including access to education and health care and livelihood opportunities. Many returnees are in a dilemma situation as to whether to stay or go back to Somalia. Some arrived to Somalia with the intention of bringing their families upon finding work and shelter. However, for many who are unable to fulfil their needs and no networks of support, would they stay in Somalia or go back to the camps? For some the answer is not so clear as they assess their options.

“Going back? No one knows if it can be permanent, for now it would be temporary” Today I won't go. But tomorrow, yes. Al Shabaab is getting weaker in Somalia, UN agencies and NGOs are growing. (Mogadishu)

For others, Somalia is seen as transitory space until a more durable solution is found for them - whether to re-return to Kenya or travel to Yemen or Qatar if they manage to find a

When my brother reached Somalia, he said Somalia is worse. He cried. The way he dresses is different from other people. Everyone has guns. He was afraid and fearful. Men are target. He stayed 2-3 weeks only and came back. Youth, Mogadishu

livelihood opportunity. In these sense, Somalia is perceived as transitory space offering a temporary base.

For youth, return to Somalia, a country they have never visited or lived in is a complicated story. Many arrive to Somalia with high hopes of finding better livelihood opportunities but often lack the networks and support they need upon arrival. Youth are more exposed to protection risks and re-integration challenges as there is often not enough educational or employment opportunities for them. As such, the majority of youth interviewed in Somalia want to return to Kenya.

I will not stay in Somalia forever because I am not happy and I did not get the good life I had in Kenya. I will either go to Kenya or Yemen. I know there are refugee settlements in Yemen, like in Kenya. I have a childhood friend in Yemen who sometimes calls me to tell me about his life there. Gudey, 31, Mogadishu

Box 8. Giving up refugee status

Reality prior to the start of the Pilot program in December 2014

Returnees have not given up their refugee status in Kenya – UNHCR has not recorded any Voluntary Repatriation Forms (VRF) on returns to Somalia. This calls for a better understanding of this group of returnees or perhaps better described as ‘refugee returnees’ trying to re-integrate in Somalia yet wanting to keep their options open due to the volatility of the situation in South-Central Somalia. As such, ‘voluntary return’ has to be understood as a transitional phase for most refugees crossing the borders rather than a one way return movement.

Further migration abroad: Migrant destinations

Refugee-returnees are vulnerable to taking part in mixed migration movements to other destinations – notably to Yemen, and from there, possibly to destinations in the West.

Somalis arriving in Yemen are automatically recognized as refugees by the authorities, giving them prima facie refugee status.

If returnees take part in the returns program to Somalia, they will be required by UNHCR and the Government of Kenya to forego of their refugee status in Kenya, and as a result, are de-activated. If return to Somalia fails, returning to Kenya is a difficult option.

Another option is for them to migrate to Yemen, a historical transit hub for Somalis. Many Somalis have contacts of relatives or friends living in Yemen. They are told of an existing refugee camp and other refugee communities in urban camps in Yemen where they can be hosted. In 2013, UNHCR reported that Yemen hosted over 230,000 Somali refugees. Yemen remains a destination where Somalis can obtain prima facie refugee status. It raises key protection issues as the journey remains a perilous boat journey organized by smugglers – involving risks of death, abuse, abduction and trafficking along the way.

As reported in previous studies, future travel plans from Yemen include migration to European and American destinations. According to a 2010 study^{xxvii}, in Yemen, over one third of Somalis planned to leave within six months. The refugee to returnee transition then involves a layering of migration experiences, with the addition of irregular migration, with what it entails in terms of legal and protection issues.

CONCLUSION

Expectations about return and the reality of return to Somalia are often at odds. That is not, in and of itself, a condition for durable solutions to fail. Yet the mismatch – whether labour/skills mismatch that endanger livelihoods, assistance gaps that highlight dependency on aid and the lack of self-reliance – remains a key obstacle to achieving durable solutions.

Threats to durable solutions in this chapter highlight the fact that transnational networks and cross-border transnational living remains one of the key impediments to durable solutions. Somalis are prepared for a temporary return, if expectations are not met. This means continuing the migration cycle: the refugee-returnee transition then becomes a refugee-returnee-refugee transition, or possibly, a refugee-returnee-migrant transition, as Somali refugees find themselves caught in mixed migration flows back to Kenya, or further out to Yemen, and the West. Each step in the migration cycle is accompanied by its own set of protection challenges.

Yet, if the environment and nature of returns is properly understood and capitalized on, transnational living can become an opportunity in the long return, allowing for higher mobility that supports livelihoods and education, for instance. Transnational networks and transnational living can therefore be turned from a constraint to durable solutions into an opportunity for programming and policy options that can build on the existing cross-border exchanges and turning them into opportunities for refugees, and returnees.



4.

RETURN IN SAFETY AND DIGNITY

CONCLUSIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Having reviewed the decision-making process of refugees (chapter 1), protection issues faced in Kenya and Somalia and their impact on re-integration (chapter 2), and the potential for durable solutions (chapter 3), this section concludes on lessons learned and recommendations for UNHCR's pilot assisted return program.

This study sheds light on the spontaneous returns from Kenya to Somalia by looking at the extent to which returns are voluntary, safe and dignified – building on refugees and returnees' own perspective to learn about their challenges.

Returns are spontaneous in that they are happening without UNHCR impetus. Yet, how can UNHCR enhance the conditions for a voluntary, safe and dignified return and re-integration, and assist Somali refugees in their transition to becoming returnees?

Conclusions and recommendations presented in this chapter take into consideration the start of UNHCR's Pilot program in December 2014, which marks a new era for UNHCR in assisting spontaneous returns. For Somalis, return is voluntary, safe and dignified if it is conditional, temporary, and secure – three key requirements. This conclusion will highlight certain tensions and recommend ways to minimize these. Notably, this conclusion and its recommendations support the need for a stronger protection outlook by supporting spontaneous returns and address protection issues flagged in this report.

The uniqueness of assisting spontaneous returns: a new UNHCR pilot program

UNHCR's mandate does not normally support spontaneous returns. Yet, recognizing that UNHCR is not in a position to assist the mass return of refugees to Somalia, it has designated three return areas in Somalia – Kismayo, Baidoa and Luuq, noting that: “the situation in those districts remains overall less than conducive for large-scale voluntary return. While the present and immediately expected environment does not meet all conditions or safeguards for large-scale return, there are reasonable opportunities that allow spontaneous small-scale returns of IDPs and refugees to be successful”⁵. These three locations are now the focus of returns – under an agreement between UNHCR and the two governments. They are the focus of return intentions: out of the 2,674 active refugees registered by UNHCR in Dadaab, 1,043 are intending to return to Kismayo, 750 to Baidoa and 263 to Luuq. The majority – 2,463 – are intending to return within three months. Given the on-going nature of this program (which began on December 8, 2014), what lessons can be drawn from those who have returned spontaneously without UNHCR's help?

4.1. The conditionality of voluntary spontaneous returns

Voluntariness is the basis to ensure that returns can take place in safety and dignity. It also safeguards the respect for the principle of *non-refoulement*. Does the return of Somali refugees from Kenya ensure against human rights violations? How can UNHCR play fully its part to ensure that its program is in line with legal protection standards?

⁵ UNHCR 2014, District profiles (TBC).

Return and the challenges of exile

Given the limited options of integration in Kenya, return is becoming the choice of some refugees who seek better livelihood opportunities and better lives or escape the deteriorating security and living conditions in Kenya. The discourse of Somali refugees on return is clear: the inability to find work in Kenya, the failure to access other durable solutions (local integration and resettlement) and growing insecurity in Kenya paint a picture of Somali refugees as the outsiders in Kenya.

Return - a choice of last resort

Return is not just a result of push factors – there are pull factors: perceptions of security, jobs and freedom of movement in Somalia. Return can be seen positively: it offers Somalis the chance of becoming good citizens in Somalia, instead of outsiders or eternal refugees in Kenya. Yet, for most Somali refugees, return is conditional not merely upon finding political stability and security but on access to education and health care. The lack of exposure, networks and information on post-return conditions urges caution.

4.2. Understanding the meanings of return in safety

Those who return without UNHCR assistance face precarious living conditions in Somalia – marked by a lack of livelihoods, basic services and shelter. They have serious concerns about the transition from point A (exile) to point B (area of origin) – the journey is repeatedly at the centre of the fears of women, youth, and children first and foremost. Safety in returns has to be analysed through the prism of dangers faced not just in Somalia, but in the journey from Kenya to Somalia. More needs to be done to safeguard such a journey.

Gap in information and safety threatened – journey and arrival

Although scarcity of information is rarely a barrier to return, there is a clear gap of information regarding conditions upon return (livelihood opportunities and availability of basic services) and the security situation en route. A general sense of confusion regarding rights and status, levels of assistance on shelter and services, and security are common denominators among unassisted returnees.

Return or Cross-border movement?

For the most part, unassisted return is temporary and is a step in the migration cycle of returnees. For youth and for many families, Somalia is seen as a transitory space until they plan their next step – whether to return to Kenya, stay in Somalia or go elsewhere. Safety is ensured through contingency plans – and through mobility as a key coping strategy.

“Return to Kenya” – an escape route

In the absence of proper assistance and reintegration support, return is not unidirectional. Return also means “return to Kenya”. The totality of unassisted spontaneous returnees is keeping refugee status in order to safeguard a possible return to Kenya: keeping all options open. Those who agree to let go of their refugee cards may not fully realize its consequences.

4.3. Assessing the dignity of return

Return – the transition towards more or less vulnerabilities?

Return is a win-win situation for those who are able to reach a level of self-reliance in Somalia. These are often men able to engage in income-generating activities, and men who benefit from strong existing networks. For those able to work, Somalia provides them with a better life, more opportunities, more food and more freedom compared to the restricted refugee life in Kenya. However, for the majority of returnees with no access to land or livelihood opportunities, compromises are being made upon return as many find themselves in worse off conditions than they were in Kenya – no education for their children, poorer health facilities, little or no aid. For those with weak ties and who end up in IDP settlements where resources are scarce, going back to the camps in Kenya is attractive in comparison.

Children face particular challenges upon return given the lack of free or affordable educational provisions in their areas. Most children do not attend school due to the high school fee and instead engage in child labour to help sustain their families. Other families separate leaving school-aged children behind in Kenya in order for them to continue their education – even at the cost of being separated from their nuclear family. This practice exposes children to protection risks when their parent's care is not available.

Youth face re-integration challenges due to the lack of educational provisions, lack of employment opportunities and lack of networks in Somalia. Although youth have expressed the most enthusiasm for return, they are also the quickest to leave. The difference between the expectation and reality of return is very pronounced amongst this group. Other protection challenges faced by this youth include facing police arrests following any insecurity measure.

Durable Solutions the level of re-integration of returnees who returned without UNHCR assistance fails to meet the recognized standards on the re-integration of returnees based on social and economic security indicators such as access to water, adequate shelter, education, health, economic status (employed or engaged in income generation activities/ below or above the poverty line). The lack of re-integration undermines the sustainability of return and the transition to durable solutions.

The findings of this research make a strong case for tailored interventions that address directly:

- 1) **The particular profiles of urban refugee returnees** – this study advocates for a shift to supporting those returning from urban settings in Nairobi, such as Eastleigh, and who face specific challenges upon return to Somalia. This is the case for **urban youth**.
- 2) **The potential and resilience of returnee women** – displacement is known to come with gendered vulnerabilities as well as a potential for empowerment of women
- 3) **The ability to re-unite split families** as a matter of priority given rising trends. Families that are split across borders, that are the main push for return, should be registered and assisted in priority, with specific arrangements to target the most vulnerable
- 4) **The creation of safe spaces upon return** for returnees who often lack a home, a sense of community or networks that can welcome them. Instead of living in IDP settlements, where the overlap of groups and vulnerabilities may be counter-productive, returnees

should have spaces where information can be disseminated, contacts made and confidence re-built.

- 5) Last but not least, **a commitment by governments and UNHCR to provide refugees with more information on the trade-offs of return** – giving more time for the decision to mature into a voluntary decision by returnees to offset criticisms that the financial ‘carrot’ given to refugees is, in and of itself, a trigger for return – a fact that would stand in contradiction with refugee protection laws, and endanger the foundation of UNHCR’s protection work in Kenya and Somalia.

RETURNING IN SAFETY AND DIGNITY: RECOMMENDATIONS

A cross-border return and reintegration strategy is needed to take individuals and families through the transition from being assisted refugees (in camps or urban settings) to becoming self-sustained returnees and regular citizens of Somalia. UNHCR and its partners will need to strengthen coordination on cross-border information sharing, livelihoods programming, resilience, protection and reintegration strategies.

1. Informing refugees

Mapping and information programmes in Kenya and Somalia

The study highlighted the lack of information, and at times even misinformation, on returns to Somalia. UNHCR will need to ensure that accurate information is provided to prospective returnees on living conditions in their country of origin and the forms and levels of assistance they can expect to receive on arrival.

Most refugees have only vague and general information about Somalia and the journey, some even travelling without any information or with wrong information based on rumours. These information gaps are alarming as they heighten protection risks and threaten the sustainability of return. As such, accurate information must be communicated to refugees in order to ensure that they have the right information and that their expectations are aligned with the realities on the ground.

All respondents expressed the need for more visibility from UNHCR on conditions upon return to be communicated to refugees: what kind of assistance do people receive upon return? Are those without shelter given access to shelter? What are the availability of health services, water supply system and livelihood opportunities? Questions range the humanitarian and development spectrum – covering the reintegration needs of returnees.

For Somali refugees to take return decision in full light of the availability of services in areas of return:

A mapping of available and planned services in areas of origin should be made available at UNHCR return help desks in Kenya.

The mapping should include:

- Mapping of basic services
- Mapping of stakeholders (UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs present locally)
- Mapping of government activities and public service provision

A mapping of the return itinerary, route conditions and stakeholder presence on the journey to the area of origin – using the latest security assessments and collections of stories and feedback from returnees showcasing protection issues raised, and availability of assistance along the way. The names, contact points and responsibilities of the way station staff should be shared on an information leaflet.

- Documenting the journey
- Mapping route conditions
- Illustrating experiences from point A to point B

Informing refugees in Kenya: Priorities pre-return: Additional information to inform refugees in Kenya should prioritise:

- Presentation of standards of living upon return and presence of mixed populations – IDPs, and local host communities
- The purpose and room available in IDP settlements
- The (limited) provision of shelter – and conditions for assistance
- Provision of basic services – health care, water provision, education
- Employment and livelihoods prospects

Informing Returnees in Somalia: Returnees in Somalia, especially those living outside of IDP settlement face extreme cases of isolation and have no information on whether any aid is available for them or the type of aid available.

- Implement information campaigns in Dadaab – beyond return help desks to ensure returnees are aware of aid and local health services in their area of return and are able to access them.
- Analysing and disseminating data collected from the early rounds of returns – socio-demographic information, location of return, and all ProGres data that can inform beyond numbers on the profiles of returnees to allow for more targeted, balanced approach to return.

2. Building a stronger network and support system

Linking refugees and returnees, Facilitating communication

This could be achieved by facilitating communications between returnees and those intending to return to encourage an information flow on a grass-roots level. At the moment, call costs are an obstacle for communication preventing such a flow of information from returnees to refugees. Hence the need to provide an institutional response to communications on both sides of the border.

One example of an initiative that can be applied to the Kenya-Somalia context for refugees is the **family tracing initiative developed by Refugee Unite**. It enables refugees to use mobile phones to register themselves and search for loved ones – this is particularly relevant to the Somali refugee caseload given the high numbers of split families, as well as multiple episodes of regional and international migration. Relatives are reconnected via an anonymous database, using SMS or mobile internet, as a means to empowering refugees. A similar initiative could be tweaked and tailored to the needs of a population of prospective returnees to Somalia. Refugee Unite has a MoU with UNHCR, is an operational partner of UNHCR, and has a partnership with the Red Cross.

The presence and experience of Refugee Unite in Dadaab can be capitalized on to provide cross-border linkages between refugee families – whether split families or a link between refugee and returnee families through radio and phone. A two-way communication channel will provide **real-time and cross-border supply chain information**.

3. Cross-border livelihoods programming & transferrable skills

Ensuring knowledge of local labour markets

Under the Danish Refugee Council's livelihood programming, UNHCR should support a socio-economic profiling of potential returnees during pre-departure counselling sessions to assess their skills, needs and motivations, coupled with an assessment of the conditions and prospects in the country of return to support the migrant's decision to return. The result of the survey will have to be released publicly and shared with all stakeholders, including prospective returnees in the five camps of Dadaab as well as in Nairobi's Eastleigh neighbourhood.

How to start generating livelihood to avoid the vicious cycle of return? Problems with the Somali job market are not sufficiently well known by returnees. To address this missing link, a **cross border market assessment is needed**, as well as cross border monitoring reports shared with UNHCR.

Creating livelihood opportunities for returnees

The tertiary education program led in Kenya among Somali refugees has contributed to increasing the education and skills of Somali refugee youth.

- Training is on-going in identified sectors
- Trainings need to link up beneficiaries with job opportunities
- A more structured way to securing job opportunities

The next step must be cross-border programming. A livelihood assessment in Dadaab, and DRC's livelihood strategy focus on the returns issue and exploring livelihood opportunities in this regard. The aim is to bridge the gap between being a refugee in Kenya and a citizen of Somalia. There is a gap between of the rush/switch between a refugee and a returnee, between emergency and development. It requires an integrated program with all agencies working together. This programming should focus on how to build resilience.

Our study shows that lack of networks and lack of livelihood opportunities are key factors impeding re-integration. In order to create sustainable conditions for return, employment must be addressed for men, women and youth.

- Prioritizing support for income-generation and livelihood activities by providing capital for those who want to start business initiatives
- Supporting returnees to develop linkages to employers based on their existing skills in order to help them access the labour market. (Linkages between construction workers and engineers or site managers)
- Implementing programs aimed at bridging the gaps between returnees existing skills and those required to enter the labour market
- Supporting youth returnees to develop linkages to employers by creating a pilot project specifically addressing youth and employers
- Enhancing self-reliance in camps in order to ensure returnees have gained transferable skills to contribute to building their country
- Build capacity in business development skills for artisans in order to equip with skills that will be needed to open a business outside of a camp setting.
- Increasing vocational training and technical skills in Kenyan camps in light of the required needs in Somalia by establishing linkages with training institutions in Somalia.

4. Prioritising and expanding the program's reach in Kenya

Supporting women in camps and youth in urban settings:

Urban youth are the most enthusiastic about returns to Somalia, yet they are not sufficiently well captured in the current pilot program that is tailored to the return of families living in camps. Urban youth want to use the skills and education they gained in Kenya, and put it to better use in Somalia – where they can work, earn an above-average living with key positions being well remunerated by international agencies. They are not prepared to live in camps, and in the current conditions, are unable to live a fulfilled life in urban Nairobi.

The two most active – yet the most left out in terms of programming are to be included in the next phases of the program with a tailored response:

Component 1: Urban youth

For the moment DRC provides 1200 scholarships for full university and colleges. Yet, youth do not know how to use their skills and education, earned in Kenya, to work in Somalia. Most left when they were toddlers or were born in Kenya. Beyond the word of mouth, social networking sites and known job advertisement and online resources, what is the link with their return to Somalia, with what they can do in Somalia? Can youth really achieve what they hope? There needs to be more youth-focused programming. Where is the education – livelihood programming linkage with the pilot program for returns to Somalia?

Component 2: Supporting Women in split families

All the focus is now on how to get there and reunite with husbands who have left earlier or who never left Somalia, considering that groups coming to Dadaab were not always complete families. Women bear the burden of administrative and logistical return. But they do not think what will happen once they get there. What about the capacity to re-integrate in Somalia? Women are little informed of child protection challenges and the risks to their children of returns to Somalia or of remaining on their own in Kenya for their education. The impact of split families can be better managed through a stronger programming focus on split families – with the prime objective of re-uniting them.

Providing a Gender-focused Livelihood programs for returnees

Women are willing to work upon return but are left out of possible jobs – notably in the booming construction sector in Mogadishu, for instance. Linkages should be made with assessments and activities undertaken by the ILO in Somalia to identify opportunities for women – along the value chain, in the construction sector or more traditionally in agriculture – to prepare women, before they return, on the possibilities of work and conditions of work available to them upon return.

Providing Youth-focused Livelihood programs for returnees

A specific youth focus is lacking when addressing returnees needs. UNHCR can act as a mediator to create a bridge between employers and youth. UNHCR does not have a development mandate but durable solutions require a broader planning around socio-economic conditions upon return. As a result, UNHCR will need to partner with actors who can define the reality of the economic market in Somalia in the immediate and longer-term future. These partners will include those who reflect on the actual and potential market for youth:

- IOM's youth, employment and migration initiatives
- ILO's support to cross-border skills and labour market linkages
- UNDP's support to local economic recovery
- Federal Government of Somalia
- New Deal Framework – PSGs 4 and 5 – strengthening durable solutions and resilience within the New Deal and Compact Framework
- Private Actors, that are offering a growing potential for inclusion of youth

Component 1: Reintegration, resilience and coexistence

Access to (free) schooling and health care is highlighted as the main protection concern upon return. The lack of health providers and institutional actors is a main gap identified by all respondents and key informants. Some of the most basic needs and expectations of returnees are not being met, severely questioning any possible transition to durable solutions. Médecins Sans Frontières pulled out of Somalia in 2013 after 22 years of presence, ending its health care provision services. Now returnees are doubting that they can stay if access and quality of education and health care are not improved.

This calls for the **development of coherent reintegration strategy** as the backbone of the pilot program, which can be shared by all relevant UNHCR offices both in Kenya and in Somalia, and with other stakeholders (including government stakeholders and operational partners). This strategy will outline the key activities to be undertaken to achieve the objective of return and the division of labour to be envisaged between all stakeholders. This reintegration strategy (to be updated regularly) will include key information on returnee monitoring, access to basic services, protection monitoring and livelihoods promotion. One such initiative, for children, will need to include the support to community based schools to help improve access to education at primary and secondary levels – as a way to curb child labour reported by respondents. UNHCR Somalia launched a reintegration framework six months ahead of the start of the UNHCR Kenya Pilot returns project. They remain focused on the same three areas of return and can be branched out to better link unassisted spontaneous returns with assistance. Increasingly, unassisted returnees are now seeking assistance upon return. UNHCR Somalia is, at the time of this study, exploring opportunities to link the unassisted with reintegration activities.

The strategy's main pillar should address a dependency on aid highlighted by respondents interviewed for this study. The type of reintegration strategy developed will have to **identify the type of assistance required to build resilience in Somalia – integrating resilience programming in the cross-border reintegration strategy**. Programming that continues with scholarships, food distribution, medical aid, clothing, will run the risk of creating a dependency syndrome. Instead, resilience programming will pay particular attention to the local context, including the need to integrate clan particularities, conflict sensitivities and disaster risk reduction programming. This may include – among other initiatives – the importance of creating safe spaces or community spaces upon return that will act at multiple levels to:

- ✓ Create an interface between stakeholders and returnees
- ✓ Provide a forum during which information can be shared
- ✓ Be integrated in the youth programming – as youth often miss an adequate and safe space to meet and discuss freely their experiences and challenges
- ✓ Facilitate protection and reintegration monitoring with the ability of better keeping contact with returnees after return

Reintegration planning begins in Kenya, through a participatory process that will involve, beyond the return help desks, information sharing and fora for discussions with refugees. Planning must remain area and community-based with two initial targets: Mogadishu – the most attractive urban hub for returnees, although not a safe return location, secondary displacement trends show internal movements to Mogadishu to benefit from livelihood opportunities; and

Kismayo – the highest return location to date. Reintegration planning continues in Somalia with government authorities as a key component will need to include support at national and local levels to building the capacity of local authorities and local institutions.

Component 2: Return and protection monitoring

Most importantly, post-return and protection monitoring are a central piece that will feed the 5-point cycle of recommendations recommended in this report by providing valuable data for informing refugees and prospective returnees, strengthening networks by linking up willing returnees with prospective ones and by strengthening cross-border livelihoods programming.

With pilot numbers being manageable (with an estimated average of 220 planned returns per week over a period of 6 months) UNHCR will have to lead the way on a commitment to:

- ✓ Protection monitoring
- ✓ Post-return, reintegration monitoring

Protection and post-return reintegration monitoring are core UNHCR activities under Pillar One. This begins at the border and continues in Somalia in areas of origin, and urban areas, to monitor the progress of returnees. UNHCR Somalia has been running a monitoring project since 2006 and it has been re-focused on Protection and Return since 2014 with more than 45 partners and several dozens of monitors. This study calls for an expansion of this initiative in light of the current attention on both assisted and unassisted returns to Somalia.

Training Protection Monitors – expanding in Kenya and Somalia

In December 2014, the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK) had trained 32 Protection monitors (PMs) in settlement and transit routes, exit border points, through a complete full year protection monitoring training and programming. RCK retained monitors in post despite the delay in getting the assisted voluntary returns programme started. In the period of hiatus, PMs shared monthly reports on possible returns to Somalia. They are now also tasked with similar reports on the assisted spontaneous returns. Their role is key in border points between Kenya and Somalia documenting the journey that is so often feared by returnees.

With the launch of the pilot program and reports on protection issues, further Protection Monitors will need to be trained by RCK in North-eastern and urban Kenya, while at the same time, UNHCR will need to identify additional partners that can use similar methods of training and protection monitoring on the Somali side of the border. RCK being limited to Kenya, a ‘sister monitoring agency’ should be identified in Somalia and introduced to RCK, to allow for a cross-border analysis of protection monitoring information collected by both parties to give real-time protection information to UNHCR and its partners, and to intervene effectively when most needed. This will be particularly relevant in light of the needs of the most vulnerable – women, youth and children.

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Danish Refugee Council (2013), *Durable Solutions, Perspective of Somali Refugees living in Kenyan and Ethiopian settlements and Selected communities of Return*, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.
- ^{iv} While only 33,537 Somali refugees are officially registered in Nairobi, the total number is estimated to be significantly higher according to the UNHCR and Kenyan government officials.
- ^v IOM-UNHCR (2014), *Joint Return Intention Survey Report 2014*, p.34
- ^{vi} IOM-UNHCR (2014), *Joint Return Intention Survey Report 2014*, p.24
- ^{vii} IOM-UNHCR (2014), *Joint Return Intention Survey Report 2014*, p.31
- ^{viii} The IOM-UNHCR refugee Intention Survey found that the most common cited source through which respondents obtain general information is the radio, at 89%, followed by the mobile phone at 4.6%. IOM-UNHCR (2014), *Joint Return Intention Survey Report 2014*, p.31
- ^{ix} IOM-UNHCR (2014), *Joint Return Intention Survey Report 2014*, p.33
- ^x IOM-UNHCR (2014), *Joint Return Intention Survey Report 2014*, p.32
- ^{xi} Similar findings were established by the return intention survey although in different order. According to the survey, the primary reason for return is opportunities to earn a living, followed by deteriorating security situation, and finally clan decision and family reunification. Forthcoming, IOM-UNHCR (2015), *Refugees Intention Survey*, p.25.
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- ^{xviii} IOM-UNHCR (2014), *Joint Return Intention Survey Report 2014*
- ^{xix} The UN specifies that refugees originating from south-central Somalia are granted prima facie status on the basis of the existing conflict in the region, while asylum seekers from Somaliland and Puntland are required to show evidence of persecution as per international refugee law (UN 24 Jan. 2011). UNHCR has noted, however, that it is "hugely difficult" to verify the identities and places of origin of Somali asylum seekers.
- ^{xx} Interview with incentive workers and confirmed by UNHCR staff.
- ^{xxi} IDC (2013), *The Dadaab Dilemma*, p.18
- ^{xxii} IDC (2013), *'The Dadaab Dilemma'*, p.14.
- ^{xxiii} Bradley, Megan C. *Return in Dignity: A neglected protection challenge*, <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/working-paper-series/wp40-return-in-dignity-2007.pdf>
- ^{xxiv} Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2010), *Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons*, p. A-1.
- ^{xxv} *Ibid*, p.45.
- ^{xxvi} Danish Refugee Council (2013), *Durable Solutions: Perspectives of Somali Refugees Living in Kenyan and Ethiopian Settlements and Selected Communities of Return*, p. 36.
- ^{xxvii} *Mixed migration flows: Somali and Ethiopia migration to Yemen and Turkey*, May 2010, prepared for the Mixed Migration Task Force, Center for Migration and Refugee Studies, American University in Cairo.

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