

Charting the CRRF in Ethiopia

Where we stand and proposed way forward

1. Background

Ethiopia has a long standing history of hosting refugees. In 2004, a national Refugee Proclamation was enacted based on the international and regional refugee conventions to which Ethiopia is a party (1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention). The Government of Ethiopia (GoE) currently provides protection to over 830,000 refugees, from 19 countries, with the majority originating from South Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea and Sudan respectively.

Despite growing challenges of its own, including continuous drought in many Regions, and tensions which led to the current State of Emergency, the GoE maintains open borders for the increasing number of refugees seeking protection in the country. In January 2017, 8,085 newly arrived refugees were registered, 9,834 in February 2017 and 20,515 in March 2017.

During the Leaders' Summit on Refugees which took place on 20 September 2016, the GoE made nine Pledges to provide more opportunities for refugees in the country such as employment, documentation and access to services. These Pledges were made a day after the adoption of the New York Declaration and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

The CRRF represents an unprecedented opportunity through which 193 States committed to strengthen their response to the refugee situations in a comprehensive manner. This encompasses not only the delivery of services and support to host populations from the onset of an emergency, but also the involvement of a broader array of stakeholders to prepare for and facilitate durable solutions in a more effective and prompt manner.

The broad objectives of the CRRF are four: (a) ease pressure on host countries through a whole of society approach, including development partners; (b) increase self-reliance of refugees; and host communities (involve private sector, not only as philanthropists); (c) increase third party solutions, including resettlement and family reunification; and (d) support countries of origin, to create conducive conditions for sustainable voluntary repatriation.

In February 2017, Ethiopia accepted to be considered as a CRRF focus country. As a host to a large Somali refugee population, Ethiopia is also incidentally part of the regional CRRF focusing on the Somali situation.

This note spells out the contents of, and structure to accompany, the roll out of the CRRF in Ethiopia as a CRRF focus country. A set of new and innovative approaches is required to increase the quality of protection and expand protection solutions for refugees in the country. This shall be done through a four-pronged approach: (1) implementing the pledges; (2) strengthening legal and policy components; (3) responding to new and continuous emergencies and (4) reinforcing coordination mechanisms.

2. Implementing the Pledges

The CRRF was adopted in New York a day before the Pledges made by Ethiopia during the Refugees Leaders' Summit. The Pledges made by Ethiopia are in line with the objectives pursued by the international community through the CRRF. The Pledges provide opportunities for increased freedom of movement, explicit recognition of refugee's right to work, as well as possibilities for local integration. The Government of Ethiopia's Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) and UNHCR have worked closely together and drafted the Roadmap to guide the implementation of the Pledges.

On 20 February 2017, the Roadmap was presented to UN organizations, donors, Government entities, and NGOs and was met with great enthusiasm and appreciation to the Government of Ethiopia regarding the way forward. Following the presentation, ARRA and UNHCR received over 20 contributions from the UN, NGO and donor organizations. A team is reviewing the contributions and will ensure that they are incorporated into a revised Roadmap. That revised Roadmap will be finalized, likely in early May 2017.

The CRRF can be regarded as a vehicle to accompany the implementation of the nine pledges made by Ethiopia. This will help to raise the profile of the Ethiopia refugee operation for both refugees and host populations.

3. Strengthening the legal and policy components

UNHCR is closely supporting ARRA and other members of the GoE to ensure that the legal framework governing refugees in Ethiopia reflects the Pledges made in New York.

A consultative meeting was held in Addis Ababa on 27 February 2017 with government line ministries and other stakeholders, to review and provide comments on the draft Refugee Regulation for the 2004 Refugee Proclamation jointly prepared by ARRA and UNHCR. Participants from the following Ministries and Government bodies were represented at the meeting: Attorney General's Office, Ministry of Federal and Pastoralist Affairs, Main Department of Immigration, Federal Vital Events and Registration Agency (F-VERA), Justice and Legal System Research Institute, and Addis Ababa University School of Law.

The comments received from these federal entities have been incorporated by UNHCR, ARRA and the Attorney General's Office. Bilateral consultations have followed, with the Ethiopian Investment Commission, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs; and the Main Department of Immigration and Nationality. These consultations have further refined the document presented to over 55 partners and donors on 19 April 2017. During that meeting, co-chaired by UNHCR and ARRA, donors and partners praised the process, raised questions about some of the rights included in the draft legislation, and offered their support. Partners provided written comments which have been carefully considered.

Next steps include submission in early May of the proposed amendment to the

Proclamation and the draft Regulation to ARRA Deputy Director for review and onward submission.

4. Support to host populations

With Ethiopia as a CRRF focus country, ARRA, UNHCR and partners are working to approach refugee responses through the lens of solutions and sustainable host community-refugee relations. Accordingly, UNHCR is strengthening its capacity to gather and analyse data on the host community and service provision, including mapping of development programmes to refugee hosting areas. Efforts are geared to develop responses that, while addressing the immediate needs of refugees through life-saving assistance, also cater to the host community and stimulate a variety of self-reliance approaches to the benefit of both refugees and host communities in the long term.

While the number of continuous arrivals of refugees from Somalia and Eritrea is limited, the ongoing arrivals from South Sudan are large. This large size and the relocation of refugees from Gambella to Gure-Shembola in Benishangul-Gumaz/Oromia Regions offers an opportunity for UNHCR, ARRA and partners to try to respond differently. In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the ongoing response, and plant the seeds for a strengthened peaceful coexistence and social cohesion with the host population, the UNHCR Representation has asked colleagues and partners in the field to collect basic information on the host populations. Line ministries and development partners will be requested to provide support to hosting areas while the relocation is underway.

5. Strengthening coordination mechanisms

With the CRRF, coordination mechanisms will be reinforced to ensure timely and effective implementation.

The current coordination structure for refugees in Ethiopia is based on the Refugee Coordination Model (RCM). This entails the Refugee Task Force (RTF) where Heads of Agencies meet on a monthly basis to discuss strategic and operational issues on all aspects of the refugee operation in Ethiopia. Just below the RTF is the Refugee Protection Working Group (RPWG), which meets on a monthly basis and discusses protection and protection related issues affecting refugees in Ethiopia. Sectoral issues are discussed as part of the sectoral sub-working groups including the Education Sub-Working Group, the Urban Refugees/Kenya Borena Sub-Working Group and the Child Protection/ SGBV Sub-Working Group. And energy and Environment Sub-Working Group is under establishment.

Under the CRRF, this existing framework will be improved. The Office of the Prime Minister is likely to designate the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation or the Ethiopia Investment Commission, ARRA, and UNHCR to act as Co-Chairs of a CRRF Secretariat. The latter will comprise ARRA, UNHCR, representatives from line ministries, representatives from NGOs, the RCO, EIC, representatives from the donor community as well as the World Bank. Five technical committees, organized around “Out of Camp Policy”, Education, Work and livelihoods, Documentation, and Other social and basic services will report to the

Secretariat, and will involve each appropriate line ministries and other stakeholders such as the private sector.

The role of the Secretariat will be to steer the work of the different technical committees to ensure their adherence to the principles and objectives of the CRRF as well as to enable the efficient and timely implementation of the pledges. This will be accomplished in conjunction with a dedicated support unit to the Secretariat.

Two (2) infographics help to visualize the evolution of the coordination structures (see the powerpoint presentation).

A major challenge remains the transitioning/incorporation of the current RCM, and myriad of formal and informal structures, into the proposed CRRF coordination mechanism.

6. Capacity to support and implement the CRRF

As a focus country for CRRF, Ethiopia requires a dedicated team to provide assistance to roll out the new approach. ARRA, the government refugee agency, and UNHCR will require support to better follow and support the new approaches. Both organizations, together with partners forming the Secretariat, require training and ongoing capacity building initiatives to ensure a thorough roll out. Support of the international community is required in order to actualize this process.

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