

## Refugee Livelihoods Network (RLN) January 2005

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### Refugee Livelihoods upon Return

This January 2005 edition focuses on refugee livelihoods upon return. Repatriation efforts have received increasing attention by the international community, and many initiatives have developed to stimulate the voluntary return of refugees. Large-scale return operations are underway, but it is clear that such operations create many challenges for the livelihoods of all those involved. Reintegration of returnees and IDPs is a very complex issue, as they have lost most of their local assets, often have no proof of their claims, and will return to an area where the infrastructure may have been destroyed completely or is severely damaged. Stayees on the other hand could feel the burden of large groups of people returning to the area from the region. Furthermore, their livelihood options may be affected both positively and negatively by the return of smaller numbers of fellow countrymen from the diaspora. This RLN issue analyses some of the factors influencing (sustainable) return. For returnees, feeling a sense of belonging is very important, but especially in the initial phase of return this process is closely linked to people's ability to rebuild their livelihoods. This ability is related to the various types of capital that returnees bring with them, enabling their access to local as well as transnational resources. As such, the current integration - return dichotomy may no longer be accurate, as new livelihood options develop. Examples of projects and programming in these fields are also provided.

During the January Conference organized by the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM), both issues of return and refugee livelihoods were important focus points. Richard Black organized three panels on 'Transnationalism and the Sustainability of Return'. These panels provided an introduction into the topic and case studies from the Balkans, Near East, Asia, Latin America and Africa. Carrie Conway, the previous RLN moderator, organized two panels on livelihoods that provided interesting insights. The papers presented clearly indicated that refugees have a very strong wish to gain self-sufficiency, and their attempts are often based on existing qualities and skills. The aim to obtain self-reliance includes the responsibility to take care of others; even if those others do not live in the same locality. A number of presenters noted that policies often ignore or have insufficient knowledge about refugees' capacities and responsibilities, leading to a situation where they effectively frustrate refugee livelihood strategies; e.g. by expecting refugees to live in camps. Refugees' initiatives to improve their livelihoods thus often seem to 'go against' existing policies, but it is important to grasp the reasons for decisions made. However, some of the presenters added a cautious note to the debate by stressing that despite all this, refugee livelihoods mostly remain very marginal, dangerous and illegal. Thus, policy initiatives to assist refugees in rebuilding their livelihoods should be based on a greater understanding of refugee livelihoods and the constraints they face, while not ignoring the most marginal groups.

[Click here for UNHCR Return Updates](#)

### Key publications and reports:

Understanding Voluntary Return - R. Black, K. Koser et al.

This report sets out the findings of a study commissioned by the UK Home Office to explore the factors influencing the decisions

of refugees and asylum seekers from Bosnia and Kosovo to return voluntarily to their countries of origin, as well as enhance understanding of the sustainability of this return. The study also seeks to assess the role of incentives and reintegration packages. Existing literature suggests that non-economic factors generally weigh more heavily on the decision to return than economic factors, and that pull factors are more important than push factors. The study supports this, and states that restricting employment or granting permanent resident status in the UK does not necessarily lead to increased / decreased return. Then, a series of definitions of 'sustainability' of return are explored, taking into account the physical, socio-economic and political security aspects, considering these from the subjective perception of the returnee, the objective condition of individual returnees, and the aggregate conditions in the home country. When these aspects are taken into account, return proves not to be sustainable. However, the socio-economic status of returnees did not appear to be significantly worse than amongst those who never left Bosnia or Kosovo.

[Click here to link to this Home Office Online Report](#)

### **This place will become home**

How do communities grapple with the challenges of reconstruction after conflicts? In one of the first in-depth ethnographic accounts of refugee repatriation anywhere in the world, Laura C. Hammond follows the story of Ada Bai, a returnee settlement with a population of some 7,500 people. Drawing on her fieldwork from 1993 to 1995 and regular shorter periods since, Hammond describes the process by which a place is made meaningful through everyday practice and social interaction. This Place Will Become Home provides insight into how people cope with extreme economic hardship, food insecurity, and limited access to international humanitarian or development assistance in their struggle to attain economic self-sufficiency.

[Click here to view Laura Hammond's book](#)

### **Between homes: post-war return, emplacement and the negotiation of belonging in Lebanon**

Chapter 3 of this paper by Marianne Holm Pedersen deals specifically with 'place and resources'. According to Holm Pedersen, post-war return to Lebanon necessitates an active process of re-integration and emplacement, in which individuals face challenges not only in having to re-build everyday life, but also in relating to the conditions of life in Lebanon. The initial challenge of return concerns the establishment of a material base of living. 'Returnees' are not a homogeneous group, but differ according to class and various kinds of acquired capital (economic, social, cultural / educational and symbolic) in their access to resources. The making of a material home is limited or enabled by access to local and transnational resources; where the last function as a frame of reference but also as a means of achieving security through past achievements and present links.

[Click here to access 'New Issues in Refugee Research' Working Paper No. 79](#)

## **Transnational refugees. Understanding integration and return**

International understanding of repatriation is based on the assumption that populations tend to seek integration in one primary place of residence. Is there evidence of an alternative to the return or non-return of displaced people? The case of post-conflict Mozambican return from South Africa demonstrates how this assumption ignores the growing phenomenon of transnationality in which life strategies are actually based on developing deep social ties and economic activity in multiple locations, often in different countries. Such life strategies imply that return and non-return may not be mutually exclusive options – a possibility that the governments and international agencies and organisations that formulate and implement refugee policy generally have not considered. Transnationality is arguably one of the most effective of the range of risk-diversification strategies available to displaced populations under these conditions. However, it is also important to note that such novel risk diversification strategies may not work equally well for all segments of society and may even create new forms of vulnerability.

[This research by Stephen Lubkemann can be accessed here](#)

## **Learning and Good Practice: Education for Repatriation**

UNHCR currently provides protection and assistance to some 350,000 Burundian refugees distributed in 10 camps in western Tanzania. The assistance includes educational activities. The paper concerns the evaluation of ongoing skills training programmes, with a view to expanding them into a wider programme based in the refugee camps. The proposed training programme would be based on the concept of education for repatriation, with the aim of extending skills that will be of use on return to Burundi.

[Click here to read more about this UNHCR programme](#)

## **Goteborgs Initiativet Repatriation Projects**

Göteborgs INITIATIVET is an NGO working on integration, voluntary repatriation and aid projects, with branches in Sweden, Bosnia and Somalia. The Gothenburg Initiative is responsible for the municipal repatriation efforts and offers an open dialog about staying in Sweden or repatriating to the home country. The NGO acts as dialog partner, and supplies news and information for potential returnees and other interested parties. They also arrange specially designed projects to support voluntary repatriation. Aim is to prepare people for a new life in the home country, which often means having to become self-sufficient over a short time period under harsh conditions. Many refugees or immigrants consider the possibility to return, but this is a large, important and difficult question for the individual. The decision is determined by security and other conditions as well as a yearning to go back. The Gothenburg Initiative only supports repatriation based on the returnee's free will.

[Click here to learn more about this NGO's repatriation projects](#)

## Forthcoming Events

Livelihoods panel during Forced Migration Conference, 11 & 12 February 2005, Tufts University, Medford MA:  
"Surviving or Thriving? The Challenging Pursuit of a Sustainable Livelihood"

The ability to secure a sustainable livelihood is a primary concern for persons who are forced to flee from their homes. Forced migrants face many challenges in finding work, and maintaining and developing new skills while striving to support themselves and their families. In addition, basic human rights such as the right to work and freedom of movement can be difficult for forced migrants to realize in transitional or temporary settlements. The livelihood strategies employed by forced migrants as an adaptation to new environments often impact existing social structures and concepts of identity. In light of these issues, international organizations, aid agencies and advocates must carefully assess how they can best assist forced migrants in securing sustainable livelihoods.

[Click here for information about the Inter-University Forced Migration Conference at the Fletcher School](#)

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The Refugee Livelihoods Network is an initiative of UNHCR's Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit. (EPAU) The views expressed by contributors to the Network and in documents electronically linked to the Network are not those of UNHCR. For issues other than refugee livelihoods, EPAU can be contacted by e-mail at [hqep00@unhcr.org](mailto:hqep00@unhcr.org)