



Roundtable on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Democracy

5 – 6 September 2017
International IDEA, Stockholm, Sweden
Strömsborg, Democracy Room (2nd floor)

This Roundtable is organized in the context of the “[Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Democracy](#)” project which is implemented by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), with funding from the Robert Bosch Foundation.

Refugees have the potential to make an impact on political life of both their host and origin countries, as they often maintain transnational links with their homelands while at the same time they become part of the host society. Recognizing the dual role of refugees and asylum seekers as political actors in both their host and origin countries, the “Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Democracy” project aims to generate comparative knowledge on the impact of refugees and asylum seekers on political life through formal and informal means of political participation. The project will produce a report based on the findings of case studies carried out in eight host countries, offering cross-country insights into the experiences of refugee and asylum seeker communities originating from five of the largest source countries as specified in the table below:

Host countries	Origin countries
1. Kenya	Somalia South Sudan
2. Sweden	Somalia Syria
3. Germany	Syria Afghanistan
4. Uganda	South Sudan Congo, DRC
5. Turkey	Syria
6. Lebanon	Syria
7. United Kingdom	Afghanistan
8. South Africa	Congo, DRC

The Roundtable will bring together the case study authors and experts working on issues relevant to the civic and political participation of refugees and asylum seekers. The objectives of the Roundtable are to:

- (1) Discuss the case study findings from a comparative perspective;
- (2) Identify the key challenges and good practices with regards to civic and political participation of refugees and asylum seekers in the host and origin countries covered in the case studies;
- (3) Share lessons learnt between the case study authors and external experts; and
- (4) Formulate policy recommendations in relation to the civic and political participation of refugees and asylum seekers in host and origin countries.

In preparation to the Roundtable, each participant will receive the drafts of the case studies and will be requested to comment on 2 case studies relevant to their work and expertise. Written comments shall be submitted to Lina Antara (l.antara@idea.int) by **Monday, 11 September 2017**.

The outcome of the Roundtable discussions will be used as an input for the development of the “Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Democracy” report to be produced by International IDEA.

PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 5 September 2017

09:00 – 09:15

Welcoming remarks

Nathalie Ebead – Head of Democracy Assessment, Analysis and Advisory (DAAA) Unit, International IDEA

Ana Bojajdievska – Senior Project Manager, Robert Bosch Foundation

09:15 – 09:30

“Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Democracy” Project Overview and introduction of participants

Lina Antara – Programme Officer, DAAA Unit, International IDEA

09:30 – 10:45

Formal political participation of refugees in host countries

- Tarig Adan – Sweden case study
- Shoab Sharifi – UK case study

Background:

The extent to which refugees can participate in decision-making through formal democratic processes such as local and national elections is related to the rights, which flow from their legal status in the host country. In most countries, the acquisition of the right to vote and stand for elections is closely tied to citizenship. However, more and more countries have adopted policies that open the door to electoral rights for resident non-citizens, including residents with a refugee background. Furthermore, the requirements for political party membership differ significantly among parties, including those requiring their members to have full voting rights and those, which are open to non-citizens. This session will discuss the participation of refugees in elections and political parties in their host countries.

10:45 – 11:15 **Coffee/Tea break**

11:15 – 12:30

Pathways to citizenship for refugees

- Ezra Mannix – Turkey case study
- Mukondeleli Mpeiwa – South Africa case study

Background:

Article 34 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees requires that the ‘*Contracting States shall as far as possible facilitate the assimilation and naturalization of refugees. They shall in particular make every effort to expedite naturalization proceedings and to reduce as far as possible the charges and costs of such proceedings*’. Access to citizenship of the host country is seen as a key element for refugees’ integration into the host society and - in many cases – a necessary condition for the acquisition of electoral rights. At the same time, the principle of state sovereignty entails that the regulation and complexity of citizenship regimes can vary widely among states. This session will discuss the different obstacles and good practices in relation to naturalization for refugees.

12:30 – 14:00 **Lunch break** - Sheraton 360° Restaurant, Tegelbacken 6, 101 23 Stockholm

14:00 – 15:15

Consultative bodies and non-formal political participation

- Nora Jasmin Ragab – Germany case study
- Tigranna Zakaryan – Uganda case study

Background:

Even when refugees and asylum seekers are excluded from participation in formal political institutions and processes in their host countries, their engagement in consultative bodies, civil society organizations, trade unions and grassroots movements can play an important role in fostering dialogue between refugees and the host communities. Such means of participation can have an important political value and can make an impact in the political life of the host country. This session will focus on presenting examples and identifying the lessons learnt from such initiatives.

15:15 – 15:30 **Coffee/Tea break**

15:30 – 16:30

Focus group discussions

- Formal political participation of refugees in host countries (20 min.)
- Pathways to citizenship for refugees (20 min.)
- Consultative bodies and non-formal political participation (20 min.)

16:30 – 17:00

Report back from focus groups and plenary discussion

In this session, participants will be divided into 3 smaller groups. Drawing from the case studies and the discussions that took place in the previous sessions, each group will be asked to identify 2 key takeaways and formulate 2 policy recommendations per topic. Each group will then report back to the plenary.

Wednesday, 6 September 2017

09:00 – 10:30

Electoral participation of refugees in countries of origin

- Tigranna Zakaryan – The case of South Sudanese & Congolese refugees
- Caleb Opon – The case of Somali refugees

Background:

The participation of refugees in post-conflict or transitional elections is considered an indispensable step towards reconciliation and democracy building in their countries of origin. Effective participation of refugees as voter or candidates in electoral processes of their origin countries can contribute to more inclusive and sustainable democracy building and enhance the legitimacy of post-conflict elections. However, there is no international norm explicitly requiring that countries should enfranchise their citizens abroad. Thus, the mechanisms and requirements for out-of-country voting and registration of candidates with a refugee background can vary among origin countries. This session will examine the particular challenges related to the exercise of electoral rights by refugees and will seek to formulate recommendations for future electoral processes in the origin countries under study.

10:30 – 11:00 **Coffee/Tea break**

11:00 – 12:30

Diaspora politics and transnational networks

- Zeina El Helou – Syrian refugees in Lebanon
- Mukondeleli Mpeiwa – Congolese refugees in South Africa

Background:

Even when excluded from participation in formal political processes, refugee diasporas have the potential to make substantial contributions to peacebuilding and democratization in their countries of origin. This includes participation in civil society and advocacy initiatives, engagement in peace negotiations, and organization of protests as mechanisms to raise awareness among the international community and exercise political pressure to the governments of their origin countries. At the same time, diaspora groups have varying social, cultural and political identities and they can often have competing interests. As a result, transnational political activities can also have the potential to exacerbate conflict or stall peacebuilding efforts. This session will discuss the role of non-formal political participation of refugee diasporas and their impact on political life of their origin countries.

12:30 – 13:45 **Lunch break** – International IDEA, Kitchen area (ground floor)

13:45 – 14:45

Focus group discussions

- Electoral participation of refugees in countries of origin (20 min.)
- Diaspora politics and transnational networks (20 min.)
- The role of host countries and the international community in supporting political participation of refugees and democracy building in countries of origin (20 min)

14:45 – 15:15

Report back from focus groups and plenary discussion

In this session, participants will be divided into 3 smaller groups. Drawing from the case studies and the discussions that took place in the previous sessions, each group will be asked to identify 2 key takeaways and formulate 2 policy recommendations per topic. Each group will then report back to the plenary.

15:15 – 15:30

Closing remarks

Nathalie Ebead – Head of Democracy Assessment, Analysis and Advisory (DAAA) Unit, International IDEA
