



PANEL DISCUSSION AND LAUNCH OF THE REPORT

Political participation of refugees: bridging the gaps

26 April 2018, 08:30 – 13:00

Protea Hotel, Conference hall

4 Elgon Terrace, Kololo, Kampala, Uganda

Background

With the global refugee population reaching an estimated 22.5 million by mid-2017, compared to 10.4 million in 2011, the world is seeing an unprecedented increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers. More than half of the global refugee population comes from only three countries: Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan, while 84% of refugees worldwide are hosted by countries of the Global South. Hosting an estimated 1.3 million refugees mainly from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Uganda has become Africa's major destination of refugees and one of the top five worldwide. While ongoing debates are largely focusing on the humanitarian, socioeconomic and security implications of large refugee flows, issues related to refugees' civic and political inclusion and their potential to participate in political life and decision-making processes in their host countries and their countries of origin have not been adequately explored.

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". In the same vein, the Zero Draft of the UNHCR Global Compact on Refugees which was developed in follow up to the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants refers to the granting of permanent residence or naturalization for refugees as durable solutions in those cases where repatriation or resettlement is not an option. It also calls states and other relevant stakeholders to "include refugees, particularly women and youth, in key fora, institutions, and decision-making processes" and to "support consultative processes that enable refugees and host communities to assess their own needs and help to design appropriate responses". Furthermore, the Zero Draft of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration recognizes political participation of migrants as an important component of migrants' integration into the host society, acknowledging that "fully integrated migrants are better positioned to contribute to prosperity" (Objective 16(d)).

At the same time, the engagement of refugees in political activities related to their countries of origin has the potential to affect significantly peace and democracy-building efforts back home. Diasporas can mobilise to raise awareness and advocate for democratic reforms in their origin countries, participate in post-conflict elections as voters, candidates, or supporters of political parties, and establish civil society organizations and transnational networks. In addition, by facilitating refugees' engagement in post-

conflict reconstruction, these groups are more likely to see themselves as stakeholders in the peacebuilding and democracy-building processes. This in turn is likely to lead to more sustainable repatriation and return, as refugees are both recognized and recognize themselves to be equal citizens in their country of origin. In this regard, the Zero Draft of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (Objective 19 (g)) calls for states to “enable political participation and engagement of migrants in their countries of origin, including in peace and reconciliation processes, in elections and political reforms, by establishing voting registries for citizens abroad, and by parliamentary representation”. Furthermore, the Zero Draft of the Global Compact on Refugees recognizes the importance of reconciliation and confidence-building measures to prevent origin countries from relapsing into conflict through “facilitating the participation of refugees and returnees (notably women and youth) in relevant processes and decision-making, including peacebuilding activities” (UNHCR 2018).

Recognizing the dual role of refugees as political actors in both their host and origin countries, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) with the support of the Robert Bosch Stiftung, gathered comparative knowledge on the various formal and non-formal mechanisms of political participation of refugees in their host and origin countries, and presents the report “*Political participation of refugees: bridging the gaps*”.

The report is based on case studies carried out through interviews and focus group discussions with refugees and key informants in 8 host countries with high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, including Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Germany, Sweden, the UK, Turkey, and Lebanon. It offers cross-country insights into the experiences of refugee communities originating from 5 of the largest source countries: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Objectives

The event aims to fulfil the following objectives:

- Present and discuss the key findings of the report “*Political participation of refugees: bridging the gaps*”
- Discuss from a comparative perspective the challenges and good practices related to formal and non-formal political participation of refugees with a particular focus on the cases of South Sudanese and Congolese refugees in Uganda, Kenya and South Africa.
- Enhance dialogue and cooperation among refugees, policy makers and practitioners working on issues relevant to the political participation of refugees in the host and origin countries.

Format

The report “*Political participation of refugees: bridging the gaps*” and the case studies will be presented in a panel discussion format, fostering engagement with the topic among the audience of Ugandan policy-makers, practitioners and refugee representatives. After the welcoming remarks by the International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI), International IDEA will present the key findings of the report. Then, two panels of experts and practitioners will discuss the challenges and good practices with regards to refugees’ formal and non-formal political participation in host countries, as well as the role of the Congolese and South Sudanese refugee diasporas in peace and democracy-building in the origin countries. Both panels will also highlight how regional and national actors can work to address these challenges. The audience is encouraged to engage with questions, comments and reflections during the discussion.

Target audience

- Policy makers and representatives of authorities working on refugee issues in Uganda.
- Civil society organizations and practitioners who are implementing programmes related to civic and political participation of refugees in Uganda.
- Representatives of refugee communities and diaspora organizations.
- Organizations working on issues relevant to the contribution of diasporas in peace and democracy-building in their countries of origin.

For more information and **RSVPs**, please, contact Ms. Tigranna Zakaryan at tigranna.zakaryan@refugee-rights.org

PROGRAMME

Time	Sessions
08:30 - 09:00	Registration of participants <i>(welcome coffee/tea will be available)</i>
09:00 - 09:15	Welcome and introductory remarks
09:15 - 09:45	Presentation of the Report “Political participation of refugees: bridging the gaps”
09:45 - 11:00	Presentation of comparative case studies: Uganda, Kenya, South Africa
11:00 - 11:30	Coffee Break <i>(coffee/tea and snacks will be available)</i>
11:30 - 12:45	Perspectives on refugees’ political participation in host and origin countries
12:45 - 13:00	Closing Remarks