



SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

This report reviews the challenges facing returning refugees and internally displaced persons after protracted conflict, questioning the common wisdom that the solution to displacement is, in almost all cases, to bring those uprooted to their places of origin, regardless of changes in the political, economic, psychological, and physical landscapes. While affirming the right to return, the report underscores insecurity, lack of economic opportunities, and poor services generally available in areas of recent conflict where people are expected to rebuild their lives, documenting cases of seriously flawed return efforts. Greater flexibility in determining the best solutions to displacement and more investment in alternative forms of reintegration for those who have been displaced is needed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patricia Weiss Fagen is a Jennings Randolph fellow at USIP. Her project analyzes forms of reintegration of war-affected populations, particularly returning refugees and internally displaced persons, contending that successful reintegration of the victims of conflict is an important bellwether of war-to-peace transitions. She has devoted years to studies on refugees and return, most recently as a member of the faculty at Georgetown University. She has also played a role in reintegration programs while serving as a senior official at UNHCR. Thanks for major assistance in the preparation of this report go to Manuel Fonseca Soares. Likewise, the helpful comments and critical readings by the Jennings Randolph Fellowship officers, Chantal de Jonge Oudraat and Elizabeth Cole, were important to its completion.

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APRIL 2011

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Refugees and IDPs after Conflict

Why They Do Not Go Home

Summary

- Programs to return refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes after conflict, implemented by national authorities with international support, frequently leave far too many without viable futures. The measures are often inadequate for three reasons: a widely shared but flawed assumption that the need to create a future for returnees is satisfied by restoring them to their prior lives; a lack of long-term engagement by implementing authorities; and a focus on rural reintegration when many refugees and IDPs are returning to urban areas. These arguments are illustrated in four country cases—Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Burundi.
- In each case, the places that refugees and IDPs were forced to flee have been greatly reshaped. They often lack security and economic opportunities; governance is weak and services are inadequate. Returnees have made choices about their futures in large part on the basis of these factors.
- While reclaiming land or receiving compensation for losses is important, the challenge for many returnees is to settle where they can maintain sustainable livelihoods; find peaceful living conditions; have access to health care, education, and employment opportunities; and enjoy full rights of citizenship. This may mean a move from rural to urban areas and a change in the source of income generation that has to be accounted for in the design of reintegration programs.
- Returning refugees and IDPs should be assisted for a sufficient amount of time to determine which location and livelihood will suit them best. For international organizations, this may involve greater creativity and flexibility in supporting returnees in urban settings.
- To accommodate inflows of returnees and their general mobility, national and local governments should develop urban planning strategies to manage the growth of their cities, coupled with regional development plans in rural areas that may involve investment in

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commercial agriculture. Linking rural and urban areas by strengthening government institutions can also provide returnees with more livelihood options and promote development.

Forced displacement is a tragedy for those who experience it. Whether it happens from natural disaster, environmental degradation, political fiat, or conflict, losing one's home also means losing identity, family history, livelihood, and community. This report considers the challenges facing war-affected people who have lived for decades as refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) and seek reintegration into a national fabric that has changed vastly during their absence. The end of conflict makes it possible for refugees and IDPs to contemplate returning to their geographic origins or settling elsewhere, but to go where and to live by what means is far from established. Because of their displacement, refugees and IDPs can lose their basic right of citizenship and the protections that come with it. If hundreds of thousands—or millions—of people find themselves without durable security, stability, and economic self-sufficiency, it affects the long-term recovery and security of the nation overall. National authorities, with international support, have been implementing programs to repatriate refugees and return IDPs to their homes, but they leave far too many without viable futures. This report examines three underlying reasons why this is so.

First, there is a widely shared but flawed assumption among national and international authorities that creating a future for returning refugees and IDPs is satisfied by restoring them to their past—that is, to their places of origin and former livelihoods—even when conditions are not conducive for returning to these places. This assumption should be seriously questioned. People who have been displaced may not necessarily want to return to their homes, and international and national efforts need not be devoted overwhelmingly to making this possible. Refugees and IDPs, along with national authorities and international organizations, are devoting important resources to trying to transform former war zones into productive and peaceful environments where returnees can thrive. Desirable as this concept may appear, its flaws become quickly apparent when displacement is of long duration and physical, political, and economic landscapes have significantly changed, nationally and locally.

The refugees described in these pages either did not return to their places of origin or did so only to find that, international benefits notwithstanding, they lacked safety, economic opportunities, and essential services. IDPs may continue to live as strangers and second-class citizens even when they return to their original homes. Building on past and recent research conducted by numerous analysts in a number of countries, this report contends that the combined effects of protracted conflict and displacement all but preclude homecoming as a solution for a very large number of people and, consequently, other scenarios for reintegrating displaced populations must be taken more seriously.

Second, overseeing and supporting returnees in their homes and investing in semirural or urban venues of integration require long-term engagement. Governments and international agencies treat large-scale displacements as humanitarian emergencies, for which international relief is mobilized. This is a short-term exercise: The purpose of humanitarian assistance is to help people survive and receive basic services until the emergency is over. It is now clear to all concerned that the problems of displacement due to conflict do not end even when a peace agreement is signed, and humanitarian assistance is not enough to support the durable reintegration of massive numbers of rootless individuals and families.

When repatriations have returned refugees to their homes in rural areas, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) gives food and tools (e.g., farm implements, seeds, basic household equipment) to the returnees; it may also rebuild infrastructure, secure sources of water, prepare agricultural land (e.g., plowing, removing rocks, setting up irrigation), and install income generation projects. Repatriates remain “of concern” until UNHCR

considers them able to lead stable and secure lives. Other donor projects target broader segments of war-affected groups. For such investments in humanitarian relief and early recovery to produce lasting effects, however, governments, with international assistance, must restore lost documentation, create schools and health clinics, restore communications, establish conflict adjudication mechanisms, and importantly, link former areas of conflict with national structures of governance. UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies generally depart before such work can begin, leaving it to national governments with few resources and other major priorities. Within UNHCR and among several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), it has always been difficult to determine how much preparation is needed for returnees to be able to rebuild livelihoods, what degree of governance and rule of law has to be in place, and what essential tasks must be completed before the returnees arrive.

Third, that the learning curve for repatriation and IDP solutions has been adapted primarily in and for rural settings is a limitation. When returnees are originally from urban areas, as is the case for many Iraqis and Bosnians, the aid responses must be different. Property restoration involves homes and apartments, people of urban origin are used to urban services, and professionals and artisans often have lost licenses to practice their professions or trades. Unfortunately, there is little international experience in this area. The more frequent occurrence is that refugees and IDPs have been effectively urbanized during their exile and are no longer well suited for rural lives. Returning to a rural area thus proves unsustainable, and returnees leave again to find a place in the already crowded cities, where they rarely receive attention outside of what is available to other urban poor. Their particular reintegration needs, derived from consequences of their forced displacement and losses, are neither recognized nor addressed, leaving them vulnerable to abuse, subject to violence, and feeling that they have suffered injustice.

This report outlines the experiences of four countries of significant international concern. Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Burundi have all made progress (albeit uneven) toward peace but have largely failed to meet the daunting challenge of reintegrating refugees and IDPs satisfactorily. The four countries' experiences illustrate how the same obstacles emerge repeatedly in different settings. It is hoped that a better understanding of the flaws and inadequacies in these countries' efforts to reintegrate refugees and IDPs will lead to more realistic preparations for future return scenarios—for example, as Sudanese refugees return to Sudan, or if Somalis can again find their places in their homeland when the nightmare in Somalia abates. Return programs can and should be improved with more comprehensive, systematic, and long-term attention; at the same time, they can be made more flexible. Returnees do not necessarily surrender the right or desire to return, but they often prefer to postpone returning because they recognize that the institutional conditions needed to facilitate genuinely sustainable returns will probably be lacking for many years. When people postpone or reject returning to their geographic homes, it by no means indicates a failure to integrate. To the contrary, such choices may create valuable opportunities for war-affected civilians to escape poverty and discrimination, opening doors to new forms of economic, political, and social participation. But this will occur only if protection and assistance for the formerly displaced are well targeted to their actual needs.

Cases

Bosnia

The 1992–95 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was a consequence of the dismemberment of the formerly multiethnic Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the largest segment of which became the state of Serbia. Slovenia, relatively homogeneous and unified, easily

fought for and won independence (1990–91). Croatia's succession struggle (1991–95) was bitterly contested. In the previously ethnically integrated BiH Serbs, Croats, and Bosniak Muslims fought a devastating civil war (1992–95) that, with international intervention, produced an independent Bosnia.

The conflict entailed unprecedented campaigns of ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, and bloody ethnic conflict, and the fighting in Bosnia resulted in far greater ethnic homogeneity in the component parts of the new entity. Approximately 100,000 people were killed, 1 million became refugees, and half the population was displaced.⁴ The conflict was ended by the General Framework for Peace, referred to as the Dayton Accord, which was internationally imposed and left the root causes of the conflict, going back centuries, largely unresolved. Although the accord created two ethnically defined entities, thereby recognizing the demographic transformation caused by the war, the primary objective was to reverse the ethnic cleansing that had taken place. Annex VII of the accord affirmed the absolute right of all affected groups to return to the places where they had previously lived and held property. The premise of Annex VII was that restoring BiH's multiethnic character would undermine the aims of the nationalist warlords who used violence to achieve ethnic uniformity. In this view, reintegrating victims in their places of origin, particularly in areas where they would constitute a minority population, would be the single most important aspect of the peacebuilding process.

Dayton also created a structure that enabled international actors to intercede in virtually every sphere covered by the accords. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) and UNHCR assumed joint responsibility for the promotion, management, and oversight related to the return policies. Nearly every donor targeted assistance to one or another aspect of the return process. Contrary to many previous and subsequent international operations, donors, peacekeepers, and international agencies remained in Bosnia for over a decade, though contributions to Bosnian peacebuilding operations declined after 2000 as the authority of Bosnian officials increased. Nevertheless, the more intense period of international involvement, between 1996 and 2000, brought in funds for infrastructure, refugee return, economic and structural reforms, and peacekeeping operations that, taken together, accounted for at least \$15 billion worth of assistance.⁵

When the parties signed the peace agreement, 90 percent of Bosnian Serb and 95 percent of Bosnian Croat and Bosniak prewar populations had left their areas of origin. They had fled to other countries or were living as displaced persons in one of the two new entities created by the Dayton Accord: a multiethnic Federation of BiH and the Republika Srpska (RS). The leadership in the latter intended it to be monoethnic.⁶ Those who wished to return to their original homes were thwarted by the huge amount of housing that had been destroyed, the forced ethnically determined movements that had caused thousands of displaced persons to occupy the homes of other displaced persons and, not least, local hostility to any returns that undermined the ethnic uniformity created during the conflict. Refugees and displaced persons who were ethnic minorities in their places of origin had good reasons for being reluctant to return. The refugees living outside of BiH were largely in this category and well understood the risks of returning.

After the conflict, however, Bosnian refugees in neighboring countries were under pressure to return to the new Bosnian entity and most had little choice but to comply. Muslims who originated from what had become the RS constituted the majority of the returned refugees and a large portion of the IDPs. Both groups initially remained as IDPs in the Federation.⁷ Ultimately the efforts and investments in facilitating—in reality, obliging—return appeared to pay off. As internationally offered incentives for return increased, along with more protection and gradually diminishing local hostility, refugees and IDP returns grew in number. Incentives were offered not only to potential returnees, but also to local municipi-

policies that received and accommodated them. The major boosts to minority returns came after 1998 when the OHR more aggressively detained local warlords for criminal activities. In 1999, the High Representative pushed through stronger security measures and property laws intended to support return to minority areas. Consequently, over 90 percent of the claims filed for the restitution of property under these laws were addressed.⁸ By 2006, UNHCR and OHR offices affirmed that over a million people who had been displaced by conflict and ethnic cleansing could reclaim property and, theoretically, return to their original residences or to newly constructed buildings nearby. The international actors claimed that about half the returns were to minority areas—that is, undertaken by people who were reclaiming property in places where the majority population was a different ethnicity. These and related achievements are unquestionably a product of the substantial international investment in the Bosnian peace process.

How important to the peace process was the emphasis on defending the right to return? Here, the evidence is decidedly mixed. In no other postconflict country have resources been so generously channeled to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes, but even so, tens of thousands of families have found it difficult, if not impossible, to go home and have not done so for both political and economic reasons. When refugees and IDPs have returned (with the early exception of Brcko, a city in northern BiH), the efforts devoted to enable displaced minorities to recover their homes and reintegrate have not recreated the ethnic diversity of the past.⁹ The combined effects of dismal economic conditions and continuing discrimination have reinforced ethnic cohesiveness in working and social arrangements, access to social services and, ultimately, residential choices.

Several communities and neighborhoods accepted incentives but remained extremely hostile to ethnic mixing and made life unbearable for the returnees. In both RS and the Federation, state institutions and access to public services have continued to reflect ethnic divisions. Even today, children of different ethnicities attend the same schools but often have separate classrooms and an ethnically biased curriculum. Minority returnees have reported limited access to public services, credit, and police protection. Employment is still less likely to be offered to people of different ethnicities. In the Federation, and particularly the RS, unemployment rates remain high.

In housing, within a short time a widespread pattern developed—acknowledged but not documented in numbers—of returnees reclaiming property, accessing the available benefits, and later renting or selling the property. Sometimes heads of households left family members behind in the restored home, generally in the RS, and departed to seek work in the Federation. Thus, the reintegration of BiH along former mixed ethnic lines did not take place to a meaningful degree, leaving the massive displacement incompletely solved. As of 2008, there were 125,000 IDPs still living in camps in the Federation, and the majority of the ethnic minority population forced to flee was ultimately integrated in different places, inside or outside of Bosnia, but not in their original homes.

Given how the Dayton Accord was imposed on the warring parties and the intensity with which many powerful elements—especially in the Serbian leadership—resisted it, it is perhaps remarkable that peace in BiH has endured to this date. While nobody would characterize the present political or social structures as harmonious, the population is in no mood for conflict and the conditions for coexistence are in place. This alone lends support to the sustained international pressure for reintegration. Nevertheless, the outcomes in Bosnia show that the internationally promoted policy to return Bosnians to their places of origin was somewhat misguided. Even with an international presence and support for return for a longer period than has been typical in more recent postconflict transitions, most Bosnians chose not to come back to places where they were made to feel unwelcome, and when they did, could not find economically viable futures there.

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Afghanistan

Since the 1980s, at least half of the Afghan population suffered from conflict and some form of displacement and it is estimated that one-third left the country for short or long periods of time.¹⁰ Armed resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and tribal conflict during the 1980s first uprooted the population, creating both refugees and IDPs. Approximately 6 million people fled to internationally assisted camps along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, or to Iran, where they were allowed to settle and work in urban areas but received little to no international assistance. Some 2 million Afghan refugees returned in the early 1990s following the defeat of Soviet forces. But as Afghans were returning to the country and to their places of origin, fighting broke out again in the predominantly Pashtun south, as factions in the Northern Alliance fought each other and eventually the Taliban. Well over 200,000 people fled their homes in the war zones, again becoming refugees or IDPs in nearby towns and cities. Emerging in 1994, the Taliban in the next few years gained control of Kabul and extended to parts of the north. Their intolerant religious and social policies drove many of the relatively small urban-based educated professionals to seek refuge in other countries. A major drought that began in the latter part of the 1990s greatly exacerbated the rural exodus.¹¹ As the need to flee increased, Afghans wishing to cross the border found themselves far less welcome in Pakistan and faced almost insurmountable obstacles to entering Iran; only a small number were able to successfully migrate to other areas (e.g., the United States, Western Europe, Australia, and the Gulf States).

The U.S. invasion of October 2001 and overthrow of the Taliban produced further displacement but far more returns. Some 1.7 million people returned to the country between March and September 2002 and returns reached over 5 million by 2005.¹² This was likely a combined result of renewed hope among exiles and increasingly difficult conditions in their countries of first asylum, especially Iran and Pakistan. The international community and the media also disseminated information to encourage Afghans to return, promising economic assistance and investments and, after 2001, an effective legitimate government. These promises have been largely unfulfilled.

Afghan returnees in the early 1990s and after 2002 received short-term resettlement packages from UNHCR, which, along with NGOs, also mounted agricultural and community reconstruction projects to improve rural infrastructure and living conditions. These investments, however, were woefully short of Afghanistan's needs, which were systemic and long term. Afghans, returnees and others, have faced seriously deteriorating security conditions, lack of housing, lack of arable land, weak infrastructure, tensions over land ownership, and utterly inadequate income-generating opportunities.¹³ New investment was, and still is, impeded by a lack of security and Afghanistan's decentralized and highly corrupt political economy. The most profitable rural enterprise is cultivation of poppies for heroin. Massive flight and return has not only uprooted the population repeatedly since the 1980s, but has also undermined the rural economy on which most Afghans long depended. Agricultural infrastructure and marketing networks have been destroyed by decades of conflict. In short, Afghanistan's traditionally rural lifestyle has been permanently transformed.

Returnees who recover their rural homes maintain themselves by regularly sending family members elsewhere to earn income, with the result that villages are supported by refugees and migrants. Afghan families living in rural isolation have become mobile and dependent on networks of relatives and tribal contacts across the country and the world. Urban centers throughout the country—Herat, Jalalabad, Kunduz, Mazar i Sharif, and Kabul—are full beyond capacity as people leave rural areas to seek employment and income, much of which is sent back to where they came from. Kabul's population expanded from 1.5 million to 4.5 million between 2001 and 2008,¹⁴ with newcomers settling in makeshift camps lacking

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sanitation, public services, and adequate shelter. Although urban projects have expanded, there is still too little investment, international or national, in urban infrastructure.¹⁵ Kabul is deemed among the most rapidly growing cities in the world,¹⁶ and the country overall is urbanizing; yet urban planning is all but absent.

Meanwhile, using income from refugees and migrants to sustain the rural economy in Afghanistan is becoming more difficult as legal opportunities for cross-border migration to neighboring countries are greatly reduced. Family members who wish to migrate have not been able to do so easily for a number of years due to growing resistance to Afghan entries. However, one way or another, Afghan migration persists. Presently, long-term Afghan residents of Pakistan and Iran are under severe pressure to leave (though they will resist doing so). Inside Afghanistan, increased fighting with the Taliban adds to rural misery. Without a restoration of peaceful conditions, significant investment in agriculture, and improved regional receptivity to Afghan migrants, even more Afghanistan's population will concentrate in urban areas, which at present cannot absorb them.

As of 2009, UNHCR and Brookings-Bern estimated a total of 1.78 million refugees registered outside Afghanistan. Many Afghans living elsewhere—particularly in Pakistan and Iran—do not have refugee status.¹⁷ In 2010, the Afghan National IDP Taskforce, cochaired by UNHCR and the Afghanistan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, identified 240,000 IDPs,¹⁸ two-thirds of whom were already displaced before the 2001 invasion.¹⁹ The long-term exiles do not necessarily have land or houses in Afghanistan to support or recover. A Norwegian Refugee Council survey of Afghan families still outside Afghanistan found almost 90 percent of its respondents claiming to have no land in the country.²⁰ Few of these informants expressed an intention to return to their original home villages. The vast majority of the displaced population has lived outside Afghanistan for over twenty years, and half of them were born in exile.²¹

Afghan observers increasingly cite the effects of continual migration on rural Afghan society. There is widespread agreement that while the Afghan government and donors to Afghanistan should plan for growing numbers of returnees, they will not necessarily be returning permanently, if at all, to their places of rural origin. Mobility has become a fundamental coping mechanism, and Afghans will continue to use their widespread family networks for economic survival and security.²² Urban centers will inevitably expand as both places of choice for returnees and safety valves for rural Afghan family members. Greater attention and support, from the government and donors, must be channeled to urban planning and shelter construction. In both rural and urban settings, more income-generation projects are needed.

Iraq

Iraqis were forcibly displaced and fled their country in large numbers during the years of Saddam Hussein's regime. The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 produced less displacement than initially anticipated, but the wave of ethnic violence, wanton criminality, and lawlessness that followed almost immediately pushed tens of thousands of Iraqis from their homes and communities. The present displacement and refugee crisis is far larger in scale than those that occurred previously and is transformative. By far the largest took place in a two-year period from 2006 to 2007, in the wake of reprisals related to the bombing of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra in February 2006. Approximately 1.55 million to 1.68 million people—5.5 percent of the population—were displaced during those two years. At present, at least 1 million Iraqis are living as refugees in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, and other countries in the region. They are tolerated, but for the most part, are without firm legal status or means of livelihood.²³ About one-third of the IDPs are concentrated in slums in

the larger cities of Baghdad, Diyala, and Salah ad-Din.²⁴ Among the IDPs are a number of refugee returnees from Syria, identified by Refugees International in 2010, who could not recover homes or land and found security to be too precarious in their home villages. They opted for the urban slums instead.

The dramatically improved security situation over the past two years in Iraq is undeniably good news. Although the relative calm is tragically broken on almost a daily basis somewhere in the country, Iraqi citizens everywhere are finally able to venture out for activities associated with normal life. It is thus reasonable to suppose that there should be an increase in the number of refugees who are returning or contemplating returning to their homes in Iraq. However, the refugees in neighboring countries have barely responded to the clearly more peaceful conditions, and those who have returned—about 127,000 since 2006, according to UNHCR data²⁵—affirm that they were more driven by their dire living conditions outside the country than attracted by the potential opportunities of rebuilding their lives in Iraq. IDPs were returning to their original homes in larger numbers in 2007 and 2008, but current International Organization for Migration (IOM) surveys have found smaller rather than larger numbers seeking return in 2009 and 2010, despite improved security.²⁶ The obstacles and deterrents to homecoming are sometimes monumental. The IOM reported in 2009 that while nearly half the Iraqi IDPs expressed the wish to return to their geographic homes, 43 percent of the IDPs lacked access to their homes.²⁷ These and others would not return for a variety of reasons.

The massive ethnically driven flights from locations across the country have created religiously homogeneous neighborhoods and towns.

First, while security has improved measurably if one counts incidents of assassinations, bombings, and other forms of armed violence toward civilians, families are still afraid to return to the places they were forced to leave. This fear, understandable in and of itself, also has a strong logical basis: The massive ethnically driven flights from locations across the country have created religiously homogeneous neighborhoods and towns. This forced homogeneity is undoubtedly a factor in present stability, and people going back to places where they would constitute a religious minority might well generate violent responses. Of course, the opposite logic may also prevail, but many are unwilling to gamble on it. Moreover, insecurity in Baghdad and other cities leads some urban families to settle in more rural areas despite fewer economic opportunities.²⁸

Second, throughout the country, Iraqis encounter lack of food, water, health care, sanitation, and electricity. Conditions for the displaced are likely to be no better in their places of origin than in the places where they have found shelter, and access to employment and services in the more remote home communities tends to be worse. Employment is a first priority. Lacking the expectation of an improved quality of life and still concerned about insecurity, refugees and IDPs are not strongly motivated to rebuild their lives in the communities they have long since abandoned. Whether they return or try to build their lives elsewhere, the IDP populations desperately need continued humanitarian aid—food assistance in particular—that the Iraqi government has provided in painfully low amounts.²⁹ The lack of adequate government response, according to Refugees International, has led sectarian groups such as the Sadrist movement to rise to the occasion and help families of their own persuasion with basic needs.³⁰ This phenomenon does not bode well for minority returns and sectarian harmony.

Third, sorting out property claims has proven extremely difficult, even where there is good will and no corruption. Government instruments, one of which involves the Iraqi army, have been created for this purpose, but they do not operate in a uniform manner and their effectiveness is dubious.³¹ In addition to current property disputes, some claims go back to the Baathist period, and it will take years of judicial improvement to rule fairly on multiple situations in which people are occupying homes and land belonging to others and titles

are poorly documented. Problems obtaining restitution and compensation impede property owners from achieving integration elsewhere.³²

The international community has invested heavily in reconstruction projects and improvements are visible, especially in infrastructure. The international contributions that affect IDPs and returning refugees have been targeted primarily to build national ministries and assist the vulnerable. Both forms of assistance are needed, but as the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) concludes, “Clearly defined and agreed upon strategic goals and intended outcomes for reintegration have not been specifically developed.”³³

The newly installed government of Iraq has pledged to prioritize making it possible for refugees and IDPs to return and recover property or receive compensation. Verbally at least, the government recognizes that it is urgent to help the vast number of Iraqis living miserably in ad hoc arrangements, both inside and outside Iraq. Because their problems are widely shared throughout the country, it is hoped that resources will flow to social and economic improvements across the board. At the same time, the IDPs and returning refugees must have access to viable mechanisms for restitution and compensation for losses.

Burundi

Burundi declared independence in 1962 and joined the United Nations, but experienced continuing ethnic violence between the majority Hutu population and the Tutsi-dominated government and military. Massacres and political instability led to massive flight involving both ethnic groups in 1965, 1972, 1988, and 1993; the major events took place in 1972 and during a protracted civil conflict that began in 1993. In 1972 Hutu rebels attacked and massacred a large number of ethnic Tutsis. The military responded with even greater brutality against much larger numbers of Hutus. In 1993 the first Hutu head of state was elected and then assassinated by the military. He was followed by another Hutu president who was shot down in 1994—the plane that also killed the Hutu ruler of Rwanda—greatly fueling ethnic violence. In 1972 and after 1993, Burundian refugees, primarily Hutus, fled to Tanzania and neighboring countries—some 150,000 refugees from the events of 1972 and another 400,000 in 1993 and after. Tutsis, under siege from Hutu-led insurgent groups, tended to take refuge in locations near Burundian military barracks, swelling the ranks of the internally displaced. Internal displacements had mounted to 800,000 by 1993. Although the groups were by no means homogeneous, most of the refugees were Hutu and most of the IDPs were Tutsi.

The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, signed in August 2000 after prolonged negotiations, resolved the conflict, but only in 2003 did a cease-fire finally end the ongoing insurgency. After the cease-fire took effect, repatriation and returns increased but fell off again soon afterward due to renewed fighting, land tensions, and dire economic conditions.³⁴ Protocol IV of the Arusha Agreement, dealing with reconstruction and development, created a national commission for the rehabilitation of the displaced (the word *sinistres* used to refer to refugees and displaced persons). The protocol included provisions to restore rights and property. The combined achievement of the peace agreement and the creation of a national commission on land and other property in 2007 increased pressures from Tanzania and other refugee-receiving countries to repatriate Burundi refugees. UNHCR adopted innovative aid and assistance measures that featured more cash grants as opposed to assistance packages given in places of origin, helping to revive the return movements. The so-called 1972 refugees, who had been in Tanzania the longest, were the most reluctant to leave. The camps in Tanzania were closed in 2009 and the few remaining refugees were given a choice to remain. As of 2008 about 1 million Burundians displaced by the conflicts had yet to be reintegrated; approximately half of these were refugee returnees.³⁵

All the challenges that make reintegration difficult in countries emerging from prolonged conflict are present in Burundi. By far the most troublesome of these, however, is to resolve tensions over land. Food insecurity, inability to access services, and urban bloat can all be related to unsatisfactory decisions affecting both landowners and those without land. That said, it is encouraging that ethnic hostility is less prominent in the current tensions than one might suppose, given that the land problem emerged as a direct outcome of the country's ethnically induced civil strife.

The refugees who left in 1972 were largely small landholders who farmed the hillsides. Burundian law gives the state the right to expropriate land that is unused over time, and on this ground—contested in international law—the state sold the refugees' land to new owners while the refugees were gone.³⁶ This created two groups of legitimate owners vying for small plots of land. Moreover, the dual owners often were former adversaries, giving rise to fear of renewed armed confrontations. Sometimes the new owners were family members, but the conflicts were no less bitter. Recognizing the claims of both the returnees and those who purchased the land in their absence, the government of Burundi proposes to share disputed land between claimants, using the land commission for mediation. The advantage of this arrangement is that none of the title holders are left empty handed, but there are obvious disadvantages. The plots are already too small for families; the idea of unrelated families sharing land may prove untenable—or worse, if the families have been former adversaries; and there are problems associated with credit, infrastructure improvements, and other factors. Growing tensions are a serious concern and seen as threatening to the peaceful transition underway.³⁷

The government has expressed support for establishing decentralized towns where agriculture can be combined with productivity. To this end, it created an ad hoc commission for return and reintegration in the Ministry of National Solidarity in 2008, with support from UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).³⁸ For the many Burundi returnees who do not have land titles, those for whom the sharing arrangements will not work, and vulnerable groups generally, the government had created so-called peace villages, which allowed IDP and returnee families to leave transit camps for small-scale urban settings where they could also farm. Years of exile and displacement had prepared Burundians to live in closer quarters than was their tradition, but the peace village concept was criticized as only a transitional solution. Responding to the criticism, the government, with international support, has been working on establishing integrated rural villages that would reduce land conflict, bring ethnicities together, and support more sustainable development. In March 2010, the government adopted a general reintegration strategy for the people affected by the conflict. It is clear that the country has too little arable land to satisfy a population almost uniquely devoted to subsistence agriculture and that this cannot be the sole aim of return policies. Land tensions threaten peace arrangements in Burundi and the country's stable development depends on more innovative arrangements that include local integration with villages as hubs for development.

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Findings

The same theme arises repeatedly when refugees and internally displaced persons have been away from their places of origin for long periods: The places they were forced to flee have been transformed, in security, property allocation, economic viability, governance, and services. These factors are decisive in choosing where and how returnees can be reintegrated and assisted.

It goes without saying that people who have been forcibly displaced by conflict usually postpone return until peaceful conditions are restored.³⁹ The formal end of a conflict,

however, does not resolve all its manifestations. Armed parties may manage to keep their weapons even if there has been a disarmament process. The previous structures of past leadership that threatened those who left are still in place locally, if not nationally. Local violence adds to the general insecurity. The conflicts may leave behind intentionally created ethnically or religiously monolithic societies, as in Bosnia and Iraq. Thus, returning minorities may feel at risk, and rightly so. Security in the long run depends greatly on the rule of law to uphold individual rights, the ability of civilian leadership to control security forces—both police and military—and, the elimination of economic strangleholds held by local strongmen who reemerge in positions of power. In none of the cases examined in this report could early returnees rely on strong state institutions and professional security forces to protect them.

Property Recovery

Tensions over property are common to all the cases. Persons displaced by conflict associate going home with recovering what they left behind. In every instance, they lost their property or control over it when state authorities, commercial producers, their adversaries in conflict, criminals, or even family members appropriated land and home, or when land mines rendered their land inaccessible. In rural areas, typically, documentation of ownership either has never existed or has long since been lost. In Bosnia, a massive and expensive effort to restore property allowed tens of thousands to reclaim their homes, but having done so, they did not necessarily live there. Drug lords or commercial producers have consolidated and taken over small farms in Colombia. In Burundi, returnees equate restoration of citizenship with restoration of land and are angry about the obstacles preventing them from recovering it. The war-to-peace transitions in Burundi, as well as in Liberia and Sierra Leone, are fragile because land continues to be contested and adjudication mechanisms are weak. Homes and land are contested in almost every governorate of Iraq, and resolving these disputes requires accounting for the massive numbers of sectarian-based relocations in the country.

In all the countries, recovering rural property is infinitely more difficult for women, who are less able than men both to establish ownership and manage the farming alone. Where women have few rights—as in Afghanistan and Iraq—they may encounter problems recovering urban properties, as well. If, after decades of displacement and migration, refugees, IDPs, and their families lose the land and property they once have claimed, they have little choice but to look for wage work.

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Economically Viable Livelihoods

Forced displacement entails losses of livelihood, which, in turn, causes families to rely on the hospitality of relatives, remittances from family members who have become refugees or labor migrants, or humanitarian assistance from international and national sources. But these cannot be counted on as sustainable sources of income, and for IDPs and numerous returning refugees, the decision to return to their places of origin is tied to whether or not they consider it possible to survive economically over the long term. Aid agencies debate endlessly about how long humanitarian aid should be made available to returnees, and the extent to which it should be allocated to meet individual family or broader community needs. Persons displaced by conflict are almost invariably mobile afterward, and the usual assumptions about community-based assistance often do not hold. When UNHCR brings refugees home to their places of origin, the repatriation includes aid packages intended to support the returning families pending their ability to be productive. In far more cases than not, these packages are inadequate to open the way for sustained economic activity and

development is postponed. More humanitarian assistance is then needed. Meanwhile, IDP returns are erratically supported, if at all.

More broadly, however, the question of restoring livelihoods for returnees is linked to both security conditions and development strategies. The returnees need instant solutions, but countries recovering from conflict need years or even decades to rebuild and restore—or create new—institutions for economic development. At best, development goals can be met in the decades yet to come. In the meantime, to avoid the tragic waste of human capital, the victims of conflict and forced displacement should have options for decent livelihoods, even if these are still transitional solutions pending eventual restitution and possible return.

Housing and Services

Among the laments most often heard from people who have been forced to leave their homes, is the longing to return to that home or have a similar one. Owning a residence very often defines stability for people who have lost what they once had, and clearly, preparations for returns must take housing into account. But the wisdom of investing in housing per se is widely questioned. Donor agencies have determined that often it is best not to furnish housing directly to returnees, outside of vulnerable groups; rather returnees should receive subsidies or cash grants that allow them to determine how they want to live and where.

Social services have also assumed growing importance for refugee and IDP populations, as access to health and education has long-term value for their own, and their children's, future. Among the reasons most often heard for refugees' and IDPs' rejecting the option to return to their places of origin is that families do not want to lose the access to education and health care they had as refugees and urbanized IDPs, and which many have come to consider as important as income generation opportunities. Returnees to remote rural villages find very limited opportunities to school their children, and while building schools, health clinics, and installing public works may be on their government's future agenda, their lack in the present sharply deters return.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

That refugees and IDPs have the right to return is still understood to mean, as it should, the right to return to their places of origin if they so choose. This paper contends that national and international programs devoted to this purpose have fallen well short of creating conditions for durable returns, leaving returnees to face hardships and insecurity. Restoring refugees and IDPs to past livelihoods that may no longer be viable denies them a real place in the new nation. Returnees may or may not wish to return to their past lifestyles, but above all, they need a viable future. They, like the rest of the nation, must be able to move forward.

Prior to voluntary repatriation, refugees are encouraged to return for visits to determine for themselves the potential threats to their security and whether they can survive economically. They are not encouraged to explore alternative options for reintegration and economic sustainability. UNHCR and humanitarian agencies help returnee communities by building roads and communications, clearing the land for agriculture, and funding short-term income-generating projects. But returnees are inadequately prepared for the long-term challenges they confront when humanitarian assistance ends.

Nations emerging from years of conflict cannot at once ensure continuing security, access to services and the rule of law; it will take time for infrastructure to be rebuilt and local institutions established. A 2009, the UNHCR mission to Burundi concluded that the

recent repatriation and reintegration of returnees to their rural areas of origin had been “satisfactory” but “possibilities of its being durable were extremely low.” Cash, the report concluded, had proved to be a more efficient and flexible tool in promoting reintegration than food or other material assistance.⁴⁰ The report also noted that the same conclusions had been reached in other country operations. It is unquestionably costly to achieve viable and durable integration for returnees and other war affected populations—in their original homes or elsewhere—but these costs are valid investments in a nation’s future. Such investment, for returnees, yields better and more lasting results than perpetual humanitarian assistance, reduces insecurity, and avoids many of the direct and indirect costs of poverty. With this in mind, the following recommendations are offered.

- Poorly educated subsistence farmers who are forced to flee often acquire broader horizons and new skills as a result of their experiences as refugees and IDPs. Without surrendering their hopes of an eventual return to their original homes, such returnees probably will accept alternative locations if conditions are favorable. This is more likely if they are treated justly and are able to receive some form of compensation for their losses.
- Flexibility is essential in designing and implementing return projects. The problem thus far has not been inflexibility on the part of returnees so much as the ad hoc, unplanned, and unacceptable options offered to them, some of which are described here. As reflected in the U.S. GAO report on Iraq, integration efforts require both definition and coherent strategies.⁴¹
- Going home and reestablishing rights to land matters a great deal to some of the returnees and IDPs, but for many others, the challenge is to settle where they can maintain decent livelihoods, find peaceful conditions, have access to health care and education, and enjoy the full rights of citizenship. Understanding that more creativity and flexibility are needed, UNHCR programs in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Timor Leste, and Burundi allocated cash grants to returnees to allow them to take care of their material needs as they see fit and make their homes where they choose. For returnees to make informed choices, it is important that assistance cover them for a sufficient time to determine which of the choices will work best.
- Among forced migrants, youth quickly adapt to and adopt urban lifestyles, for better or worse, but suffer extremely high levels of unemployment. Meanwhile, women endure hardships as IDPs and refugees, and frequently suffer the consequences of being unprotected. They have more difficulty recovering properties and engaging in some form of agriculture. On the positive side, women refugees and urban IDPs may have access to education, live less isolated lives and, in many instances, come to value themselves to a greater extent. To some degree in the countries reviewed here, women have adapted well to new lives and have been especially eager to ensure that their children are better educated and safe. Assistance agencies should not simply point to the multiple ways in which women have been victimized, but also capitalize on their resilience and invest in it.
- International agencies have decades of experience restoring the displaced and refugees to rural lives, but very little experience in either preparing appropriate projects for people of rural origin in urban settings or resolving problems of refugees and IDPs who originate from urban areas. Channeling resources to returnees so that they can establish reasonable urban lifestyles may prove cost effective, durable, and willingly accepted by the would-be beneficiaries. The presently swollen capital cities in countries recently at war have become places of entrenched poverty and widespread crime. If these cities continue to grow at their present rates and without planning, the future for the returnees settled there will be even more problematic.

- National planners should also consider further investment in regional development in the areas where the refugees and IDPs originated. This could mean more investment in commercial agriculture—done with great care to avoid exploitation—and rural nonfarm economic endeavors. It could also mean channeling resources and promoting institutional strengthening in small and medium size cities so that these can become poles of development, linking rural and urban development in countries emerging from conflict. In this scenario, returnees could make use of acquired skills, rather than resuming subsistence agriculture. This alternative warrants more attention.

Notes

1. When displacement is of short duration, as during a disaster or a conflict that is quickly resolved, people can and do return to their places of origin and a reintegration process is not required, as is the case for the Albanians displaced during the brief conflict in Kosovo.
2. The themes briefly elaborated here about the political, economic, and psychological challenges of the returning African refugees have been covered in Tim Allen and Hubert Morsink, eds., *When Refugees Go Home* (Geneva: UNRISD, 1994). They have also been treated in chapters covering several countries in Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfield, eds., *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants, and Those Who Stayed Behind* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
3. Colombia, which has more IDPs than any country in the world save Sudan, and Liberia are important cases to be analyzed.
4. Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John O'Loughlin, "After Ethnic Cleansing: Return Outcomes in Bosnia-Herzegovina a Decade beyond War," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99, no. 5 (2009): 1047.
5. Approximately \$10 billion from the United States, \$1.38 billion from European states and the European Union, and significant contributions from other sources. See U.S. Department of State, "Background Note: Bosnia and Herzegovina," <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2868.htm> (accessed February 15, 2011). See also International Crisis Group, "Ensuring Bosnia's Future: A New International Engagement Strategy," Report no. 180, February 15, 2007, 1. The paper argues against a too-rapid dismantling of the OHR.
6. Huma Haider, "Politicisation of Humanitarian Assistance: Refugee and IDP Policy in Bosnia & Herzegovina," *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* 2, no. 7 (2010), <http://jha.ac/2010/04/26/the-politicisation-of-humanitarian-assistance-refugee-and-idp-policy-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina/> (accessed February 15, 2011).
7. Muslim and other ethnic origin refugees displaced from places of origin in Republika Srpska were more numerous than those displaced from the Federation, and less able to reclaim their homes in the RS areas where they constituted an ethnic minority. See Richard Black, "Return and Reconstruction in Bosnia Herzegovina: Missing Link or Mistaken Priority," *SAIS Review* 21, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2001): 177–99. See also Haider, "Politicisation," 3–5.
8. See Haider, "Politicisation;" Patricia Weiss Fagen, "Post-Conflict Reintegration and Reconstruction: Doing It Right Takes a While," in Niklaus Steiner, Mark Gibney and Gil Loescher, eds., *Problems of Protection: The UNHCR, Refugees and Human Rights* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 213–217; Ó Tuathail and O'Loughlin, "After Ethnic Cleansing;" P.W. Fagen, "Peace Processes and IDP Solutions," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2009): 31–58.
9. Brcko seems to have a stronger record on this score, which may well be due to the serious pressures international parties have exerted to this end. More follow up is needed to assess whether returns have proved durable.
10. Barnett R. Rubin, "The Transformation of the Afghan State," in J Alexander Their, ed., *The Future of Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2009), 17.
11. Peter Marsden, "Afghanistan's Complex Forced Migration," in N. Van Hear and C. McDowell, eds., *Catching Fire: Containing Forced Migration in a Volatile World* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 121.
12. Alpaslan Ozerdem and Abdul Hai Sofizada, "Sustainable Reintegration to Returning Refugees in Post-Taliban Afghanistan: Land and Related Challenges," *Conflict, Security and Development* 6, no. 1 (2006): 75–100.
13. Marsden, "Forced Migration," 115–139.
14. International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan: What Now for Refugees?" Asia Report no. 175, August 31, 2009, 8.
15. Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, *National Return, Displacement, and Reintegration Strategy for the Year 1382*, Kabul, March 2003, 11; International Crisis Group, 2009, 9; See also Marsden, "Forced Migration."
16. Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, "Afghanistan: Armed Conflict Forces Increasing Numbers of Afghans to Flee their Homes." Report, April 15, 2010, [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/CCF9CB64DB61DDEFC1257706003FAE31/\\$file/Afghanistan_Overview_Apr10.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/CCF9CB64DB61DDEFC1257706003FAE31/$file/Afghanistan_Overview_Apr10.pdf) (accessed February 15, 2011).
17. UNHCR, *Afghanistan IDP Populations Statistical Analysis* (Kabul and Geneva: UNHCR, 2010).
18. Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, "Afghanistan," 4.
19. UNHCR, *Afghanistan IDP Populations*.
20. International Crisis Group, "What Now for Refugees?" 7.
21. UNHCR, *Global Appeal 2008–2009*, 1.
22. Katy Long, *Home Alone? A Review of the Relationship between Repatriation, Mobility, and Durable Solutions for Refugees*, PDES/2010/02 (Geneva: UNHCR, 2010), 31–35.
23. Estimates of IDPs and refugees are taken from the regularly issued reports of the IOM, IDMC, and UNHCR, which are cited generally in most of the other sources. See the websites of the IDMC (www.internal-displacement.org), IOM (www.iom.int), and UNHCR (www.unhcr.org/statistics). IDMC estimates 1,630 displaced prior to 2005.
24. International Organization for Migration—Iraq Mission, *Review of Displacement and Return in Iraq*, August 2010, 1, http://www.iomiraq.net/library/IOM_displacement_monitoring_reports/yearly_and_mid_year_reviews/2010/

IOM, *20Iraq.20-.20Review.20of.20Displacement.20and.20Return.20in.20Iraq.20August.202010.pdf* (accessed February 15, 2011); Refugees International, "Iraq: Humanitarian Needs Persist," March 17, 2010, 1, quotes UNHCR figures at 500,000 living as squatters in these three locations.

25. The number of permanent returns is not known.
26. IOM, Review, 4.
27. See U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Integrated International Strategy Needed to Reintegrate Iraq's Internally Displaced and Returning Refugees*, (Washington, DC: GAO, 2009). It reports at considerable length on the obstacles to return and reintegration.
28. IOM, *Emergency Needs Assessments*, October 1, 2009, 1.
29. In several parts of its report to Congress, the GAO underscores the absence of either a government or international strategy for integrating IDPs and returning refugees. It concludes that the Iraqi government support for refugees and IDPs is weak. See GAO, *Integrated International Strategy*, 24–25.
30. Refugees International, "Uprooted and Unstable: Meeting Urgent Humanitarian Needs in Iraq," April 2008, 4–6.
31. *Ibid.*, 15.
32. GAO, *Integrated International Strategy*, 14–15.
33. *Ibid.*, 41.
34. Katherine Haver, Felicien Hatungimana, and Vicky Tenant, *Money Matters: An Evaluation of the Use of Cash Grants in UNHCR's Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration Programme in Burundi*, PDES/2009/02 (Geneva: UNHCR, 2009), 4; Patricia Weiss Fagen, "Peace Processes and IDP Solutions," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2009): 4–5.
35. Judith Vorrath, "From Refugee Crisis to Reintegration Crisis? The Consequences of Repatriation to (Post) Transition Burundi," in Stefaan Marysse, Filip Ruytjies, and Stef Vandeginste, eds., *Annuaire des Grands Lacs 2007–2008* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009), 109–127.
36. International law prohibits dispossessing refugees of their property in their absence.
37. International Refugee Rights Initiative, Rema Ministries, and Social Science Research Council, "Two People Can't Share the Same Pair of Shoes: Citizenship, Land, and the Return of Refugees to Burundi," Citizenship and Forced Migration in the Great Lakes Region, Working Paper no. 2, International Refugee Rights Initiative, New York, November 2009.
38. The process is elaborated in Greta Zeender, "Securing the Right to Stay: Local Integration of IDPs in Burundi," paper prepared for expert seminar on protracted displacement hosted by Brookings-Bern and IDMC, Geneva, January 19–20, 2011.
39. There have been some exceptions, as when refugee returns are organized as part of insurgency strategies. This was the case when Eritrean refugees returned from Sudan during the struggle for independence from Ethiopia and when Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees returned to still-contested parts of those countries during the Central American wars of the 1980s and 1990s.
40. Haver, Hatungimana, and Tenant, "Money Matters," paragraphs 28 and 71.
41. GAO, *Integrated International Strategy*, 51.

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