Borders, Mobility, and Livelihoods

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Refugee Economies

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In September 2021, we began a new phase of the Refugee Economies Programme thanks to a new three-year funding agreement with the IKEA Foundation. This new phase builds on our previous research on the socio-economic inclusion of refugees in camps and cities in East Africa.

The Politics of Socio-Economic Rights

Why do some states provide refugees with socio-economic rights and opportunities, while others do not?

Borders, Mobility, and Livelihoods

What are the patterns and drivers for refugees' mobility, and how do these movements shape refugees' livelihood strategies, opportunities for self-reliance, and socio-economic outcomes?

Shocks, Vulnerability, and Livelihoods

What are the main coping strategies used by refugee households in case of negative shocks, and how can they be strengthened?

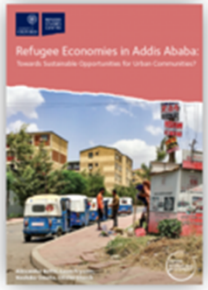
Refugee-Led Research Hub

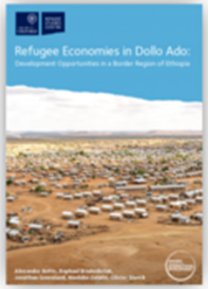
Supporting scholars and researchers from displaced communities to be leaders in knowledge production and decision making in the field of Forced Migration Studies and humanitarian research.

Refugee Stories

How can we bring representative quantitative data to life through the collection of qualitative human stories?

Publications





Project Overview

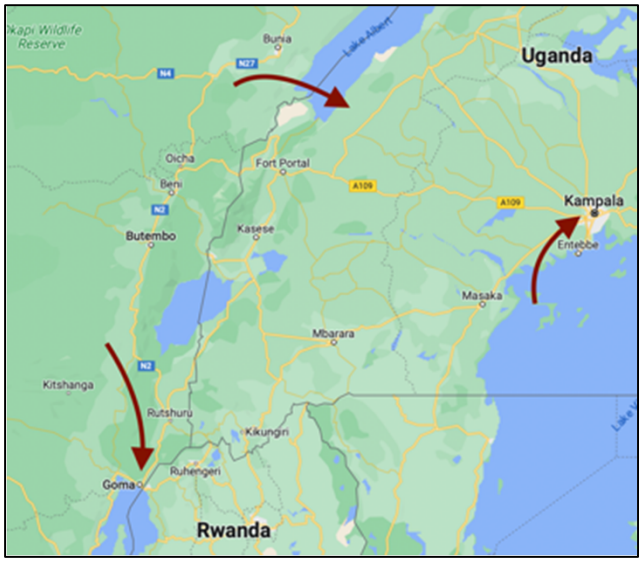
- **Scope**: Understanding the role of refugees' mobility for their socio-economic life.
- **Research sites**: '5 countries and 3 borders'
  - **Uganda**: South Sudanese and Congolese refugees.
  - **Rwanda**: Burundian refugees.
- **Methodology**: Qualitative research methods and quantitative mobility survey (in Uganda).

Uganda–South Sudan

- Fieldwork in Pagirinya settlement with the support of Youth Empowerment Foundation, a local RLO, and in Juba, with the support of the Bridge Network, a local research group.

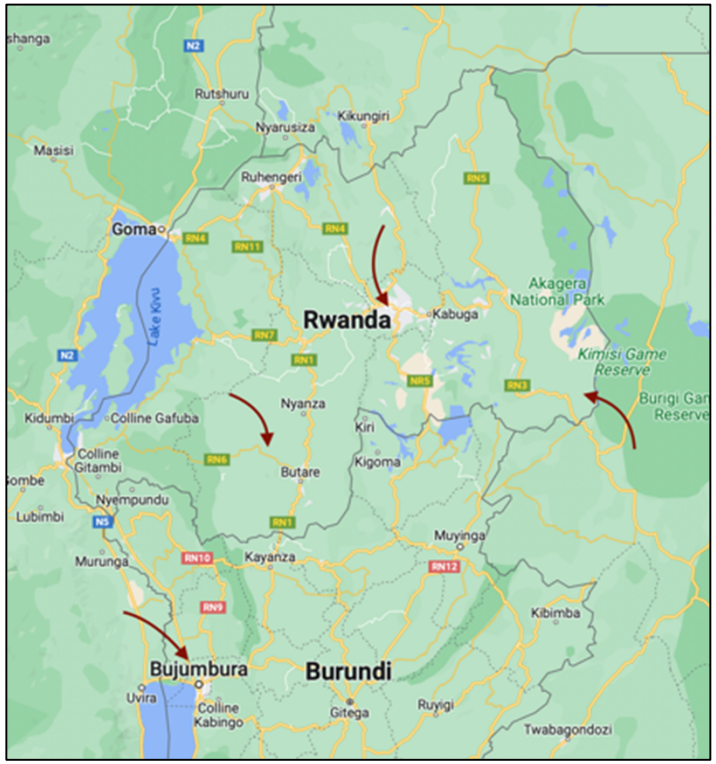
Uganda – DRC

- Fieldwork in Kyangwali settlement, Uganda, with the support of CIYOTA, a local RLO, and in Goma, DRC.



Rwanda–Burundi

- Fieldwork in Mahama and Kigeme refugee camps and Kigali, with the support of Inkomoko, a business development firm operating in the settlements, and in Bujumbura, with the support of REMA Burundi.



RSC Research in Brief 20, September 2023

Refugee entrepreneurship in Rwanda

Authors: **Naohiko Omata** (Associate Professor, RSC) and **Yotam Gidron** (Research Officer, RSC)

Key points

- Entrepreneurship plays a central role in Rwanda's approach to refugee self-reliance and economic integration. In recent years, Rwanda has made significant progress in promoting refugees' freedom of movement, access to documentation, and right to work, thus creating a friendly environment for business development.
- To evaluate the opportunities and challenges of refugee entrepreneurship as a vehicle for self-reliance and economic integration in Rwanda, the Refugee Economies Programme conducted qualitative research with Burundian refugee entrepreneurs and business owners in two sites: Mahama refugee camp and the capital city of Kigali.
- Our research shows that refugees take advantage of the freedom of movement granted to them in Rwanda in order to establish trade networks and engage with the Rwandan economy, while entrepreneurship training and access to credit for business development can enable them to rebuild livelihoods and assets.
- Refugee enterprises in the camp are almost exclusively retail businesses that rely on the purchasing power of refugees, which is mostly determined by the humanitarian support they receive. Urban refugees, on the other hand, also engage in skilled trade and services and do not target refugee customers as such. This renders urban enterprises less dependent on humanitarian aid.
- To enhance the viability of refugee entrepreneurship as an avenue for refugee self-reliance over the long term, it is important to pursue the diversification of the camp economy and camp enterprises and reduce the cost of mobility in and out of camps. In the short term, entrepreneurship programmes should not be considered as a substitute for humanitarian aid or a justification for further reducing the support granted to refugees.

Political context

- Burundi influx (2015)
- CRRF roll-out country

Policy context

- Strategy on Economic Inclusion of Refugees and Host Communities, 2021-2024.
- No legal restrictions on refugee mobility, employment, or self-employment.
- Shift to cash-based assistance, provided via Equity Bank.

Camp entrepreneurship

- Mostly retail businesses selling food and basic household items.
- Mobility is key for sourcing goods and making margins – but it also requires capital.
- Access to credit can enable structural reinvestment, asset creation, and diversification of livelihoods.
- Refugee businesses heavily reliant on purchasing power of refugees, and therefore, indirectly, on aid.

Urban entrepreneurship

- Greater focus on skilled trade and services: value addition, skills and experience are key.
- Do not target refugees as such, and therefore face fewer constraints on growth.
- Face more challenges in accessing credit compared to camp refugees.

Recommendations

- **Diversification of camp economy**: Breaking the over-reliance of camp enterprises on humanitarian grants will require greater emphasis on productive enterprises (for instance, in the agribusiness sector) and the linking of the camp economy to outside markets.

- **Facilitating mobility**: Reducing costs of mobility (e.g., by improving road networks around camps) can have a positive impact by increasing access to markets, especially for camp-based entrepreneurs.

- **Importance of aid**: Until the camp economy is sufficiently diversified, entrepreneurship programmes should *not* be considered a substitute for humanitarian aid.