

HPG Working Paper

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

Progress in Rwanda

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Acronyms

CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EAC	East African Community
EUTF for Africa	European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IDA	International Development Association
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MIDIMAR	Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs
MINEMA	Ministry in charge of Emergency Management
NGO	non-governmental organisation
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VUP	Vision Umerenge Program
WFP	World Food Programme

1 Introduction

1.1 Methodology

This study is part of an IKEA Foundation-commissioned research project by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at ODI. The overall objective is to contribute towards realising the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The research takes stock of current progress towards reaching CRRF goals in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kenya and Uganda, with an emphasis on refugee self-reliance in each country.

This paper on Rwanda is one of four country papers, which together inform an overall thematic paper on the CRRF. It draws on an in-depth literature review of published and grey literature as well as 26 interviews with key stakeholders, including from national and

donor governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private sector actors.

1.2 Outline of the report

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the CRRF and the GCR. Rwanda's refugee-hosting model and the factors that influence it are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 examines the status of the CRRF in Rwanda. It explores the CRRF process and application; the degree to which the objectives and principles of the CRRF are being applied in practice; challenges to CRRF implementation; and responsibility for the CRRF. Refugee livelihoods and the prospects for refugee self-reliance in Rwanda are discussed in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 suggests possible entry points for donors and others advocates of the CRRF approach to support refugee inclusion in Rwanda.

2 The Global Compact on Refugees and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

On 19 September 2016, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) unanimously adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, reaffirming the importance of international refugee rights and committing to strengthen protection and support for people on the move (UNGA, 2016). The Declaration focuses on supporting those countries and communities that host large numbers of refugees and promoting refugee inclusion, ensuring the involvement of development actors from an early stage and bringing together national and local authorities, regional and international financial institutions, donor agencies and private and civil society sectors to generate a ‘whole of society’ approach to refugee responses (UNHCR, 2018a). Many of these concepts are not new. However, the adoption of the New York Declaration is viewed as a welcome sign of continued global solidarity and commitment to comprehensive responses to refugee protection at a time of unprecedented displacement and retrenchment from multilateralism.

The New York Declaration called upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to develop and initiate the application of a CRRF in specific situations that featured large-scale movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations, with four key objectives:

1. Ease pressure on host countries.
2. Enhance refugee self-reliance.
3. Expand access to third-country solutions.
4. Support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

On 17 December 2018, UNGA affirmed the non-binding GCR, following two years of consultations (UNGA, 2018). The GCR is a framework for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, in recognition that

solutions to refugee situations require international cooperation. The CRRF is incorporated into the GCR and the two frameworks share the same four objectives (identified above).

The GCR sets out a ‘programme of action’ with concrete measures to meet its objectives. This includes arrangements to share responsibilities – mainly through a Global Refugee Forum (every four years, with the first in December 2019) and support for specific situations as well as arrangements for review through the Global Refugee Forum and other mechanisms.

Commentators have highlighted numerous challenges associated with the CRRF and GCR. Critical among them are the exclusion of key actors (such as communities and local authorities), insufficient financial support from the international community and the limited engagement of the private sector (Montemurro and Wendt, 2017; Thomas, 2017; ICVA, 2018). Commentators have noted, along with the other shortcomings, that the CRRF lacks a monitoring framework even though it had been foreseen in the GCR (Huang et al., 2018). In 2018, UNHCR presented a Global Dashboard to assess five outcome areas charting progress towards the CRRF objectives, but noted that it will only be possible to measure this several years after the CRRF’s implementation (UNHCR, 2018c). However, with the first Global Refugee Forum scheduled for December 2019, there is interest among many stakeholders to capture progress under the CRRF.

As one of the 15 original roll-out countries for the CRRF, Rwanda’s experience provides a unique perspective on how a country can adopt and shape the CRRF in ways that are consistent with national priorities, while still moving towards its overall commitment to the objectives of the GCR.

3 Rwanda in brief: refugee hosting and its impacts

3.1 Rwanda's refugee model

Rwanda has hosted refugees for more than two decades since opening its first camp (Kiziba) in 1996 to accommodate tens of thousands of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Today, the Congolese refugee population has grown to 75,912, spread across five camps (Gihembe, Kigeme, Kiziba, Mugombwa and Nyabiheke), plus around 1,100 in urban areas (see Figure 1 and Table 1; UNHCR Rwanda, 2019). In 2015, Rwanda experienced another influx of refugees due to election-related violence in Burundi, prompting the opening of a new camp (Mahama) and the granting of prima facie status to Burundian refugees (UNHCR, 2019a). Mahama is now by far Rwanda's largest refugee camp, hosting around 60,000 of the 70,807 Burundian refugees in the country, while the remainder reside in cities such as Kigali and Huye. In total, 9% of Rwanda's refugees are reported to live in urban areas; this is a reduction from 19% in 2016 and can be attributed to refugees struggling to make a living in cities and relocating to camps (MINEMA, 2019; UNHCR, 2019a). The gender balance of the refugee population is roughly equal (51% women and 49% men), with minors (under the age of 18) making up half (50%) of all refugees. Rwanda has traditionally implemented relatively progressive policies towards refugees (Bilgili and Loschmann, 2018). National legislation grants refugees 'the rights and liberties provided for by international instruments on refugees ratified by Rwanda', which include – among others – freedom of movement and the rights to work, establish a business, hire employees, lease land and own property (Government of Rwanda, 2014; MIDIMAR-UNHCR, 2016). Rwanda's refugee-hosting model views refugees in a positive light, as potential 'self-reliant members of Rwandan society who contribute to the economic development of their host districts' (MIDIMAR-UNHCR, 2016: 3). This model is largely articulated within a camp-based framework, with an expectation of eventually transforming refugee camps into self-sustaining

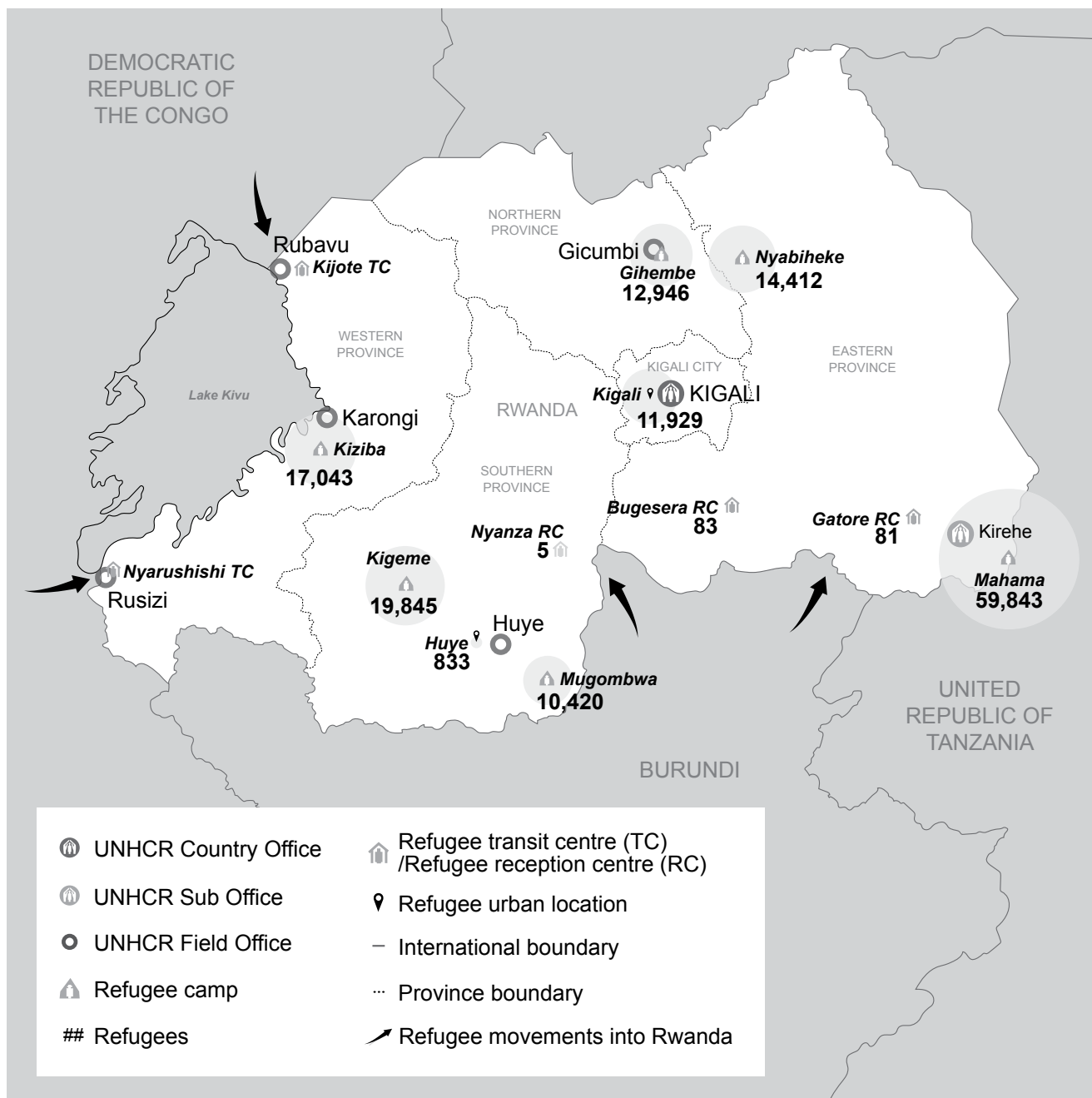
market economies, engaging both refugees and local Rwandans in vibrant markets, shops, restaurants and industries. Currently, the Ministry in charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA) and UNHCR manage the refugee camps and coordinate the provision of assistance to all camp-based refugees, but they envision a reduced role for themselves in the future as self-reliance grows among refugees (MIDIMAR-UNHCR, 2016).

3.2 Real and practical restrictions on mobility and the right to work

Despite Rwanda's progressive legislation and ambitious vision of self-reliance, in practice most refugees remain highly dependent on humanitarian assistance and access to rights and opportunities has been slow to materialise (Bilgili and Loschmann, 2018; Downen, 2018; UNHCR, 2019a). For example, despite having full freedom of movement under Rwandan law, most refugees face severe practical constraints to mobility because humanitarian assistance is tied to camp residency. As noted above, this has even encouraged city-based refugees to move to the camps. Within camps, refugees are officially subject to a 6pm curfew and must apply for permission to leave for extended periods; an absence of longer than three months results in an elimination of humanitarian assistance (Downen, 2018; UNHCR, 2019a). Due to long delays in the authorisation process, it is reportedly common for refugees to leave the camps without official permission, at risk of arrest and detention (UNHCR, 2019a). According to key informants in Kigali, however, informal movement in and out of the camps is widespread and often unofficially tolerated by the authorities.

An absence of documentation and a lack of clarity and awareness on refugee rights have reduced the ability of refugees in camps and urban areas to access jobs and services. Until recently, refugees had not been issued ID cards, typically required by banks and businesses to access financial services and employment

Figure 1: Refugees and asylum-seekers in Rwanda, by camp



Source: UNHCR Rwanda (2019)

(UNHCR Rwanda, 2017; Collins et al., 2018). Even when refugees have the proper documentation, Rwandans are often unaware of refugees’ right to work or give preference to Rwandan citizens for employment and business opportunities (UNHCR Rwanda, 2017; Downen, 2018).

Since mid-2018, however, and as part of its commitments under the CRRF (discussed further below), the government has taken significant steps to rectify the problem of national ID cards, hoping to ease refugees’ access to jobs and services and possibly encourage greater mobility. A refugee verification exercise undertaken in concert with the issuance of government ID cards to all

refugees over 16 years of age is on the verge of completion (as of June 2019). The government has also started an information campaign to ensure that refugees and Rwandan nationals and businesses are aware of refugees’ right to work, open bank accounts, etc. The government is optimistic that refugees holding ID cards – together with a re-affirmed right to work – will be more likely seek formal employment outside the camps. The newly issued IDs, in combination with Convention Travel Documents, may also allow refugees belonging to the East African Community (EAC) to move freely within the region.

While the government is making important strides in formalising refugee rights around protection and the right

to work, there are fundamental structural and economic barriers that raise questions about the potential for long-term self-reliance within the current camp-based model (Bilgili and Loschmann, 2018; Collins et al., 2018). These are reviewed in detail below.

3.3 Factors influencing Rwanda’s approach

Four significant dimensions influence Rwanda’s refugee-hosting model. The first is the notable sociocultural similarities between refugees and their Rwandan hosts. The joint government-UNHCR livelihoods strategy asserts that Rwanda’s ‘unique enabling environment’ for refugee livelihoods is partly attributable to the fact that ‘95% of refugees have a shared sociocultural background with Rwandans. Almost all refugees speak the local language (Kinyarwanda), [and] have shared cultural norms’ (MIDIMAR-UNHCR, 2016: 7). This sociocultural overlap helps to facilitate refugees’ integration and contributes to the low levels of conflict between refugees and locals. However, it also seems to have led to an overestimation of refugees’ ability to seamlessly rebuild their lives in the country, as the conclusion that refugees ‘are in many ways indistinct from Rwandans’ fails to recognise the bureaucratic, social and spatial barriers preventing refugees from achieving self-reliance. (MIDIMAR-UNHCR, 2016: 7).

The second dimension shaping Rwanda’s refugee-hosting approach is the country’s exceptionally high population density and land scarcity. The government and UNHCR openly acknowledge that these constraints prohibit Rwanda from promoting refugees’ access to agricultural

livelihoods as other countries with bigger surface areas and lower population density have done (MIDIMAR-UNHCR, 2016). In practice, there is some flexibility around agricultural livelihood opportunities, although restrictive land issues and sensitivity around land do shape government self-reliance strategies for refugees.

Related to hesitancy around promoting agricultural livelihoods is the third dimension shaping Rwanda’s refugee approach: its national vision for economic growth. Rwanda has been relentlessly – and successfully – working to transform from a low-income agricultural economy to a knowledge-based, service-oriented, middle-income economy – initially expected to be achieved by 2020 and now extended to 2035 (World Bank, 2019c).¹ Engagement with the private sector and social enterprises and the country’s strategy to use business engagement to transform refugee camps into prosperous market economies with flourishing cottage industries is wholly aligned with its broader development approach.

From the perspective of international agencies, the emphasis on self-reliance through market-based livelihoods interventions and private sector linkages has partly emerged out of practical necessity. Continuous funding shortages for the refugee response in Rwanda and the wider East African region have resulted in limited budgets both for humanitarian assistance and development-oriented livelihoods activities (Easton-Calabria, 2019). Acknowledging these limitations, UNHCR has sought innovative ways to support refugees’ self-reliance, engaging new actors and providing seed funding to facilitate partners’ access to additional investment (Downen, 2018).

Table 1: Refugees and asylum-seekers in Rwanda, by country of origin

Country of origin	Number of refugees and asylum-seekers	Percentage of refugee and asylum-seeker population
DRC	75,912	52%
Burundi	70,807	48%
Others	50	0%
Total	146,769	100%

Source: UNHCR Rwanda (2019)

¹ While the 2020 target has not been met, economic growth and socioeconomic gains (e.g. achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)) have been impressive over the past 15 years.

4 CRRF in-country: state of play and opportunities

The CRRF in Rwanda is, for the moment, circumscribed by a series of commitments made by the government at the 2016 Leaders' Summit. This section outlines how expectations for a more ambitious CRRF process in Rwanda – possibly expanding on the original commitments – have been tempered and a pragmatic, realistic approach has been adopted.

4.1 The CRRF in Rwanda: timelines and strategies

Rwanda is a relatively recent adopter of the CRRF, officially signing on to the framework on 14 February 2018. This decision followed a November 2017 multi-stakeholder workshop, in which various national ministries, local government officials, UN agencies, the World Bank and other partners came together to explore the potential for applying the CRRF in the Rwandan context (Global CRRF Digital Portal, 2019).

Rwanda's CRRF participation flows directly from a set of pledges that the Government of Rwanda made in the spirit of the Framework at the 2016 Leaders' Summit on Refugees, one day after the CRRF's global launch (Global CRRF Digital Portal, 2019). In these pledges, the Government committed: (1) to promote refugees' inclusion through a joint livelihoods strategy with UNHCR; (2) to provide all refugees with national identity cards and Convention Travel Documents; (3) to give all urban refugees access to buy national health insurance; and (4) to integrate 35,000 refugee secondary school students and 18,000 refugee primary school students into the national education system. Shortly after these pledges, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs (MIDIMAR) and UNHCR released their 2016–2020 joint livelihoods strategy, 'Economic inclusion of refugees in Rwanda', in accordance with the first summit pledge. This strategy focused on graduating 18,000 camp-based refugees out of assistance programmes, increasing access to formal employment opportunities for 60,000 refugees and enabling access to banking services for 58,000 refugees, all

by mid-2018. Rwanda's refugee approach was thus clearly aligned with CRRF principles well before the government's official adoption of the framework.

4.1.1 The CRRF in practice: ambitions curtailed

The CRRF was initially seen as a means for the government to not only implement but also build upon its 2016 Leaders' Summit pledges and reach out to a broad range of partners (Global CRRF Digital Portal, 2019). UNHCR and other international partners such as the World Bank saw the government's formal adoption of the CRRF in February 2018 as a sign of its readiness to be an active and ambitious partner across the range of GCR and CRRF objectives. Instead, government enthusiasm around the 'comprehensive' part of the CRRF appears to have waned and its ambitions are now clearly prescribed within the original 2016 pledges – most of which had fallen behind schedule (MINEMA, 2019).

In March 2019, MIDIMAR's successor, the renamed Ministry in charge of Emergency Management (MINEMA), released a new plan for implementing these pledges over the next five years: the Strategic Plan for Refugee Inclusion (2019–2024) (see Box 1). The strategy makes passing reference to the CRRF in its introduction, stating that it will 'inform the CRRF rollout and operationalization at the country level' (MINEMA, 2019: 3). There are no further CRRF processes or activities underway (or foreseen) in Rwanda, and the Strategic Plan appears to be the closest thing to a national CRRF roadmap, although it covers only elements of the first two global CRRF objectives (easing pressure on host countries and enhancing refugees' self-reliance). An annual Steering Committee, co-chaired by MINEMA and UNHCR, will oversee the plan's implementation, with representation from various key ministries and the World Bank. The implementation of each commitment will be guided by technical committees, which are expected to meet twice yearly. In this light, a revised joint government-UNHCR strategy for the economic inclusion of refugees (due later this year) could be seen as the equivalent of a CRRF's jobs and livelihoods action plan.

The Strategic Plan, prepared by and very much owned by MINEMA, seems to have spurred greater cross-government involvement in refugee inclusion. Government officials from various technical ministries stated they had been consulted on the plan and encouraged to participate in finding solutions for refugee inclusion, which was a first for some of them.² However, the Plan has not formed a broad coalition of support across development, donor and private sector partners. Apart from the World Bank and UNHCR, most international partners and donors are not actively engaged in dialogue with the government around the Strategic Plan or in efforts to revitalise a CRRF approach.³ Bilateral donor engagement around this approach is notably absent, as seen from their marginal financial support (as noted below).

4.1.2 A truncated and stalled mechanism

According to stakeholders interviewed for the study, the origins of the government's decision to sign on as a CRRF roll-out country are unclear, as are the reasons behind its subsequent 'cooling off [of interest] on refugee inclusion ... and on the "comprehensiveness" of the CRRF' after early positive signs in 2018. What is clear is that the government was intent on accessing World Bank financing from its IDA18 sub-window⁴ for Refugees and Host Communities. To meet the requirements for the financing, the government had to prepare an action plan for refugee inclusion, which it did in the form of the Strategic Plan, though it resisted efforts from the World Bank and UNHCR to introduce activities or innovations that went beyond its previously pledged commitments.

Having successfully accessed the IDA18 sub-window, MINEMA's energy is now focused on implementing the World Bank project — possibly having concluded that further CRRF-style efforts and processes (or greater concessions on refugee inclusion) to secure additional resources were unlikely to yield concrete results. Some government officials interviewed seemed to understand the Strategic plan, the CRRF and the World Bank project as one and the same, and there is no discussion of amplifying ambitions or making a concerted effort for additional development funding for refugees and host communities. While a smaller-scale CRRF process may be realistic, there is also some irony in the Rwandan context, given that the

capacity to achieve a more ambitious, nationally-managed CRRF success story is stronger than in its neighbouring refugee-hosting countries.

4.2 CRRF and financing: some funding, but little urgency

The CRRF aims to attract increased funding for refugee-hosting countries, both to ease pressure on those countries and to enhance refugee self-reliance. For Rwanda, the government appears to have calculated that embarking on a far-reaching CRRF process to attract donor money – or with the aim of shifting donor money from humanitarian agencies to government coffers – was unlikely to yield results. Instead, it focused on the most concrete source of new money for CRRF approaches, the World Bank IDA18 sub-window, and succeeded in meeting the criteria to access that pool. Beyond this effort, there does not appear to be an unusual amount of energy being expended by government, donors or aid agencies to advocate for, or raise, additional development resources. Humanitarian financing in Rwanda suffers from perennial shortfalls, typical of long-term displacement operations in contexts of relative stability.

4.2.1 Overall funding: an incomplete picture

There is no systematic global- or national-level tracking of humanitarian and development donor commitments aimed at refugees and refugee-hosting communities. A recent survey by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) estimated that only 5% of 2017 donor commitments to Rwanda in this sector were for development, while 95% were for humanitarian work (Forichon, 2018). The approval of a \$60 million project from the World Bank in 2019 (discussed below) may shift this proportion slightly, but the Rwandan government and donors continue to emphasise humanitarian funding as the means to manage refugee responses, despite a favourable development environment and confidence in the capacity and accountability of national budgeting channels.

2 One exception to this is MINEMA's longstanding work with the Ministry of Education on integrating refugees into the national schooling system.

3 The CRRF features prominently in the latest UN Development Assistance Plan as a means of implementing the humanitarian-development 'nexus', but interviews with stakeholders in Kigali suggested that among development actors only the World Bank is meaningfully engaged with the government on bringing development approaches to ongoing humanitarian assistance activities.

4 IDA18 is the International Development Association's 18th replenishment of funds.

Box 1: Rwanda's Strategic Plan for Refugee Inclusion (2019–2024)

The Strategic Plan outlines the government's proposal for implementing the commitments made at the 2016 Leaders' Summit. The plan has four priority policy actions, which principally reiterate the 2016 pledges:

1. Ensure self-reliance of refugees (through updating and implementing the joint strategy for economic inclusion of refugees).
2. Provide refugees with identification.

Source: MINEMA, 2019

3. Integrate refugees into the national education system.
4. Ensure urban refugees have the opportunity to buy into the national health insurance system.

Each strategic objective identifies priority policy actions and milestones for tracking progress. The required budget is estimated at almost \$11 million, not including the cost of implementing the updated joint strategy for economic inclusion of refugees.

The World Bank's Socio-economic Inclusion of Refugees and Host Communities in Rwanda Project (approved April 2019, with disbursement scheduled for 2020–2025) represents the only sizeable funding commitment to emerge from Rwanda's signing on to the CRRF. The \$60 million project consists of a \$35 million loan (of which \$25 million is from the IDA18 sub-window) and a \$25 million grant.⁵ It will fund the following components:

1. Access to basic services (education, health, water supply – \$24 million) and socioeconomic investments (road upgrades/rehabilitation, market infrastructure – \$15 million) = \$39 million.
2. Economic opportunity (access to finance for refugees and Rwandan entrepreneurs) = \$9 million.
3. Environmental management (rehabilitation and environmental sustainability review) = \$9 million
4. Project management, measurement and evaluation = \$3 million.

The project should benefit two million people in six refugee-hosting communities and 135,000 refugees and will serve as one of the government's main tools for fulfilling its 2019–2024 Strategic Plan commitments (World Bank, 2019b). Among some government officials and other refugee-sector actors in Kigali, the World Bank project and the Strategic plan are described interchangeably.

Several smaller, recently approved or planned projects may also signal a slight shift towards a more developmental approach to refugee management and inclusion. The German development agency, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

(GIZ), is launching a five-year, €7.5million project to promote economic inclusion of refugees and host communities, focusing on Mahama, Mugombwa and Kigeme camps, and Kigali and Huye (World Bank, 2019b). The European Union Emergency Trust Fund for stability and addressing the root causes of irregular migration and displaced persons in Africa (EUTF for Africa) has announced €9 million for the Great Lakes region to work on better solutions for displaced people and host communities in Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania and the DRC. A number of UN agencies and international non-governmental organisation (INGO) implementing partners (e.g. United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the American Refugee Committee) are launching the inception phases of self-reliance projects, hoping to leverage smaller private sector donations into longer-term financing for refugee and host community livelihood interventions.

Finally, UNHCR receives some support for self-reliance projects (e.g. from the US Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration and the Danish International Development Agency (Danida)) and leverages this funding (\$2.3 million between 2016–2020) by providing seed money to partner organisations who then seek more and longer-term funds for their self-reliance initiatives (Downen, 2018). This UNHCR funding, though, is generally from short-term donor humanitarian budgets, which are unsuitable for longer-term livelihoods initiatives. According to interviews for this study, UNHCR would prefer that longer-term development funding be channelled to government or agencies that operate on longer planning and implementation cycles.

⁵ Tapping into the IDA18 sub-window for the project brings \$25 million more in financing to the Rwandan government than would have been obtained through a regular IDA operation.

Table 2: Timeline of key milestones in the Rwandan CRRF process

2016	September	Signing of the New York Declaration/Adoption of CRRF globally
		Refugee integration and inclusion pledges made by Government of Rwanda at the New York Leaders' Summit on Refugees
		UNHCR and MIDIMAR publish joint strategy on economic inclusion of refugees in Rwanda (2016–2020)
2017	November	Exploratory workshop on CRRF in Rwanda held
2018	February	Rwanda signs on to the CRRF
	March	Verification of refugees commences (ongoing)
	May	Joint World Bank–UNHCR mission to explore funding opportunities under the IDA18 sub-window for refugees
	June	Government workshop to initiate detailed planning of CRRF roadmap
	December	Signing of the Global Compact for Refugees
2019	February	MINEMA publish Strategic Plan for Refugee Inclusion (2019–2024)
	April	World Bank approves \$60 million for the Socio-Economic Inclusion of Refugees and Host Communities in Rwanda Project
	September	Updated strategy on economic inclusion of refugees due out
Yet to be completed		Publication of CRRF roadmap
		Establishment of CRRF Secretariat

4.2.2 Humanitarian work: underfunded and under pressure to achieve 'graduation' from assistance

The overall Refugee Response Plan for Rwanda seeks \$140.9 million for 2019, of which just 17% had been resourced as of August 2019 (UNHCR 2019a) – a reflection of the perennial budget pressures felt by humanitarian actors, particularly in longer-term crises. Over the past five years, UNHCR has on average received just 38% of its requested annual budget requirement and has struggled to maintain basic services and protection for refugees in Rwanda (UNHCR, 2019b). The uncertainty about future operations – and the need to constantly juggle funds to prioritise life-saving humanitarian interventions over self-reliance or 'nexus' investments – is clear from UNHCR's February 2019 status report that only 2% of requirements for the year (\$92.7 million) had been secured (UNHCR, 2019c). The World Food Programme (WFP) has likewise suffered from shortfalls and irregular funding, resulting in ration cuts over the years. From November 2017 to June

2018, WFP was forced to cut rations by 10–25% across the board, leading to increased negative coping mechanisms among refugees and prompting protests in one camp that led to the deaths of at least 12 refugees by the hands of Rwandan security forces (Amnesty International, 2019). As of June 2019, according to staff interviewed for this report, WFP had received only enough funding to cover its cash-based food assistance (its primary transfer programme) for an additional two months in 2019.

In the case of both UNHCR and WFP, budget pressures are one element in a more determined push to achieve 'graduation' or self-reliance among refugees. WFP is planning to move towards a needs-based, rather than status-based, targeting approach in part, according to one informant, 'because if resources are shrinking, we have to move that way'. UNHCR staff suggest that the target of 18,000 refugees being 'graduated' from assistance by 2020⁶ is not unreasonable, despite one informant's acknowledgment that the MIDIMAR–UNHCR 2016 joint strategy did little to reduce

6 The government's Strategic Plan (2019–2024) reiterates the 18,000 target originally made in the joint UNHCR–MIDIMAR strategy on economic inclusion (2016–2020).

humanitarian needs. In any case, the global (and country) narrative around the CRRF may tempt cash-strapped donors and agencies to prematurely cut still-essential humanitarian funding.

4.3 CRRF Rwanda: a transactional process with curtailed ambitions

4.3.1 A light-touch bureaucracy and (mostly) measurable outputs

As noted above, some of the ‘comprehensive’ dimensions of the CRRF global framework have stalled in Rwanda, with the government opting instead to frame its medium-term approach to refugees (the Strategic Plan) within a number of commitments that pre-dated its signing of the CRRF. The government has opted out of any CRRF Secretariat model, instead continuing with a project-based approach managed out of MINEMA. The government’s main objective during 2018 and into 2019 was to obtain World Bank financing, which is largely built around the government’s refugee commitments. This transactional ethos means that other donors bringing resources to MINEMA – assuming they are consistent with the government’s Strategic Plan – are likely to find a relatively straightforward, unbureaucratic path to project approval.

Three of the four main government commitments – the provision of national identity cards, the opportunity for urban refugees to buy national health insurance and the integration of refugee students into the national education system – take important and measurable steps that should facilitate self-reliance and move squarely towards the provision of services through government systems. The government believe that the provision of national identity cards will constitute an important step in formalising and easing refugee movement in and out of camps as well as clarifying refugees’ right to employment and financial services – though more will need to be done on communicating these rights to potential Rwandan employers, banks, etc. Similarly, all urban refugees now have the opportunity to buy into the national health insurance system (including camp-based refugee children attending boarding schools) and an estimated 8,000 urban refugees are now signed on to the national health system with their enrolment being paid by UNHCR. The objective of integrating refugee children into national primary and secondary schools (an estimated 18,000 and 35,000 students,

respectively) is also close to being achieved, according to the government. The additional education and health infrastructure required to accommodate the inclusion of refugees in national systems is mostly foreseen in the World Bank project, with an additional \$9.6 million in infrastructure needs identified in the Strategic Plan. The path towards the fourth main target – graduating camp-based refugees out of food and cash-based assistance programmes – is less clear and less measurable. A revised joint government-UNHCR Livelihoods Strategy is due to be completed by September 2019. As with the education targets, the World Bank inclusion project – with its \$9 million economic opportunity component – is seen by the government as the primary means by which this target will be achieved.

4.3.2 Status quo for refugee management

While light on bureaucracy, the Rwanda adaptation of the CRRF is also light on vision and details, and has not built a sense of collective ownership across government or among donors and agencies. The MINEMA-led process to prepare the Strategic Plan included consultations with sectoral ministries and was approved by a cross-ministerial committee, but interviews with other government actors, donors, aid agencies and civil society suggest that ownership, implementation responsibility and accountability for the strategy rest within MINEMA. Likewise, UNHCR remains MINEMA’s main international counterpart, including for the revision of the joint strategy for economic inclusion of refugees in Rwanda. UNHCR recognises its own capacity and expertise shortcomings around livelihoods and has been pushing for greater involvement from donors and other agencies. Nevertheless, there is a business-as-usual feel around the management of refugee and host country issues, with MINEMA and UNHCR still at the centre of coordination and planning, as they always have been.

Efforts or suggestions to broaden the responsibility and ownership of refugee/host community issues to other government entities have generally been resisted. That said, the World Bank was able to wrestle important elements of its financing away from MINEMA. Responsibility for component 1 on socioeconomic infrastructure will be with district governments, ‘supported by MINEMA’. Responsibility for component 2, on economic opportunity, will lie with the Development Bank of Rwanda, while component 3 on environmental management will be with MINEMA alone.

4.3.3 A modest CRRF approach around World Bank financing

Because the government's Strategic Plan adopts a fairly narrow interpretation of the CRRF, it does not offer a means to evaluate progress towards achieving some of the key components of the GCR or the CRRF, such as the extent to which donors are meeting their obligations around 'easing the burden' for the host country. For example, there is no overall, comprehensive plan or budget against which progress on the GCR or on achieving funding targets could be measured. Neither government officials nor donors interviewed by the research team seemed particularly interested or concerned about whether donors were meeting their obligations. There is also no overall budget associated with the Strategic Plan,⁷

which describes itself as a platform for stakeholder participation and envisions a steering group (co-chaired by MINEMA and UNHCR) and technical committees, though these have yet to meet. There was some suggestion by those interviewed in Kigali that the Strategic Plan committees and the World Bank project steering committee and technical committees may be one and the same.

While the government and UNHCR have committed to revising their joint strategy for economic inclusion, the already-financed World Bank project – and not a more expansive and multi-stakeholder plan – is clearly setting the government's agenda and spurring its action around self-reliance for refugees and economic opportunities for host communities.

⁷ This should change, to some extent, with the finalisation of the updated joint Government-UNHCR inclusion strategy, though the current plan provides just a summary \$20m budget.

5 Putting the CRRF into action: livelihoods and refugee self-reliance

Even prior to signing on to the CRRF, Rwanda had a relatively open policy environment for refugees to pursue self-reliance. Refugees are viewed as self-sustaining members of society who contribute to the nation's economy – a framing that is reflected in both the MIDIMAR-UNHCR joint strategy for economic inclusion and in the government's Strategic Plan. Though regulations to better realise these policies (e.g. the issuance of national ID cards) have been somewhat slow to materialise (Downen, 2018), they are now being implemented more convincingly.

While the overall policy and regulatory environment has been positive and is improving, the challenges facing refugees to achieve self-reliance remain substantial, as they do for their host neighbours who also struggle to make a living. A combination of efforts will be needed to fully exploit the potential of Rwanda's progressive refugee regime (e.g. raising awareness of refugees' right to mobility and their legal access to employment and financial services) as well as investments to unlock the economic potential of refugee-hosting districts to benefit hosts and refugees.

5.1 Current livelihoods strategies

Refugees in Rwanda are allowed to work, though regular employment is scarce. Some form of income is received by 60% of refugees, whether for regular, salaried work (14%); casual labour or self-employment (36%); from agriculture (2%) or in the form of remittances (Collins et al., 2018). The other 40% rely solely on humanitarian assistance,

which is increasingly delivered in the form of cash transfers.⁸ Although the provision of humanitarian assistance is tied to camp residency, regular informal movement out of the camps to local communities for daily unskilled labour is common, despite restrictions on movement (World Bank, 2019a).

There is a range of self-reliance outcomes among urban refugees, most of whom are concentrated in Kigali. Professionals (e.g. doctors, engineers) and some artisans (e.g. mechanics, tailors) are well-integrated, employed and fully self-reliant. Those with fewer qualifications or less social capital, however, have fared less well and receive little or no humanitarian assistance.⁹ Without the benefit of assistance, yet still sharing many of the same barriers to employment as refugees in camps (e.g. low levels of education, low awareness of rights, lack of access to start-up funds, lack of qualifications/equivalency of diplomas from countries of origin), urban refugees are often unable to meet their basic livelihoods needs, and around half have relocated to camps for assistance since 2016 (MIDIMAR-UNHCR, 2016; MINEMA, 2019).

5.2 Constraints to self-reliance in refugee-hosting districts

Employment prospects in the six refugee-hosting areas are poor. Poverty in five of the six districts is higher than the national average, and Mugombwa and Kiziba camps are located in two of the poorest districts in the country, with poverty levels of 56%

8 For example, the WFP is now providing food assistance in cash form in all camps, with only one camp (Mahama) still receiving one basic commodity in-kind. Similarly, UNHCR is providing cash transfers to refugees for the purchase of cooking fuel rather than distributing in-kind fuel.

9 Refugees in camps are eligible for regular cash transfers, while assistance to urban refugees is irregular and limited to a few, smaller NGO-implemented programmes such as mother-child health projects.

and 53% respectively (World Bank, 2019a). Both host and refugee communities have poor education levels, few jobs and subsistence-style agriculture production. Agriculture production dominates economic activity across all six refugee-hosting districts, but significant investments in infrastructure and skills are needed to unlock potential value-chains (World Bank, 2019a).

The lack of land available due to Rwanda's high population density further complicates hopes for refugee inclusion in sustainable, agricultural-based livelihoods activities (UNHCR, 2018b). Other challenges include limited land available to buy or rent for either agriculture or business use, limited space in the camps, insufficient infrastructure (e.g. roads and electricity) and restricted access to raw materials (Downen, 2018).

Even when there are employment opportunities, refugees are less likely to be employed than Rwandan nationals (Bilgili and Loschmann, 2018). Only a 'significant minority of refugees' have employable skills, and most are more suited to 'subsistence farming and other traditional or simple skills that are in over-supply in Rwanda' (MIDIMAR-UNHCR, 2016: 6). For those seeking formal employment (or access to banking services for that matter), the lack of a national identity card has precluded them from obtaining certain types of jobs. In addition, both potential Rwandan employers and refugees themselves are uncertain about the regulations allowing refugees to work. The push to complete a registration verification exercise of refugees and the issuance of national identity cards is expected to help overcome this.

Attention to financial inclusion initiatives among refugees in camps has increased as humanitarian agencies have transitioned to cash transfers – bringing the number of refugees using some form of banking services up to 80%, and likely close to 100% as Mahama camp moves fully to cash (MINEMA, 2019). This indicator, though, is misleading as the banking 'services' referred to are usually simply access to a debit card, which is used solely for cashing out periodic humanitarian transfers and not for saving, borrowing or other financial services. Linking these cards to more holistic financial services that will move refugees towards more sustainable self-reliance would require significant further work.

In recent years, a concerted effort has been made to foster small savings groups or Village Savings and Loan Associations to improve access to financing and

financial services for agriculture-based businesses and small retail and trade activities both in the camps and camp districts. These are mostly small and micro loans for existing small businesses, though loans for new entrepreneurs are sometimes available. Often these schemes are combined with basic financial literacy and business management training. To date, the record of initiatives to build financial inclusion – as a means of fostering entrepreneurship – is disappointing when it comes to borrowers growing their businesses to the point of self-reliance (in the case of refugees) or creating lasting jobs (in the case of both refugees and host communities).¹⁰ One expert interviewed pointed to 'a massive disconnect between the actual size [and] dynamism of the private sector in refugee-hosting districts, which is near non-existent, and the narratives and plans for jobs and businesses'. A further contradiction, he noted, lay between the narrative of a free market, the entrepreneurial atmosphere and the government's heavy involvement in shaping choices for the private sector. Experts also pointed out that start-up businesses in Rwanda that do obtain a certain size and viability are invariably bought out (a sort of 'hostile takeover', often under-compensated) by existing larger business interests with ties to the government – a major disincentive for would-be entrepreneurs.

Finally, interviews with NGO and other staff who work in the camps regularly highlighted concerns about the psychosocial and other specific needs of some refugees – pointing out that many face hurdles beyond economic opportunities to achieving self-reliance. People with special needs (roughly 12% of registered refugees), survivors of sexual and gender-based violence ('one of the biggest protection concerns'), girls and women at risk of exploitation and unaccompanied or neglected children at risk of abuse or exploitation are all examples of refugees whose path towards self-reliance requires greater efforts for a safe environment and who may require indefinite social protection transfers (UNHCR, 2019: 6).

The overall context in which strategies for refugee self-sufficiency focus is one where an 'estimated 96 per cent of rural households [in Rwanda] depend on subsistence agriculture' and employment prospects are poor (UN Rwanda, 2018: 20). While the government acknowledges that 'urbanization needs to be accelerated for its transformational potential and its association with higher productivity, and higher income opportunities' (UN Rwanda, 2018: 5), current strategies continue to have a largely rural focus. Little attention is given, for example in the recently approved World Bank project, to

10 While this entrepreneurship model continues to be a centrepiece of self-reliance strategies, there has yet to be an impact study/evaluation on the experience to date.

urban livelihoods or the steps around refugee mobility that would be required to encourage them to seek jobs in the cities, although the UNHCR-MINEMA joint strategy for economic inclusion is currently being revised with some elements targeted towards urban refugees.

That said, even if future self-reliance for many refugees will be in urban settings, the early

momentum around the CRRF in Rwanda, the government's pledge to meet its commitments and the approval of the World Bank project have all opened space to support potentially viable refugee and host-community self-reliance initiatives in camps and hosting areas. This includes initiatives – such as skills training – that could eventually help refugees find their way in urban settings.

6 Supporting the CRRF: options for donors and advocates

The CRRF is not a priority for the Government of Rwanda or in-country donors. The refugee population is relatively small and stable and there is no sense of urgency that the humanitarian model is failing (or that funding is reaching a critical state, even if commitment figures for humanitarian assistance as of mid-2019 are low). Furthermore, without an identifiable, ongoing CRRF process in Rwanda (e.g. a government-led secretariat, the elaboration of a comprehensive plan, etc.) there is little scope for supporting the CRRF per se. Within this context, though, there are promising developments regarding refugee inclusion in Rwanda that could be spurred on through advocacy and targeted assistance around jobs and livelihoods.

6.1 Towards fully nationalised government refugee management

The government is making steady progress towards a national policy and operational framework that would help realise the overall objectives of the CRRF and could make Rwanda a major international success story for refugee inclusion in the coming years. That the Government of Rwanda enjoys a relatively high degree of trust from donors and the size and complexity of the refugee population is relatively manageable are arguments for efforts to move more intentionally towards nationally delivered (and likely more cost-effective) refugee management.

Policy advocacy towards the government to further the steps it has already taken and embrace some additional responsibilities could be valuable. Policy advocacy towards donors to provide more financing could incentivise the government to expand its responsibilities for refugee management. Finally, policy advocacy to humanitarian agencies to think more creatively about transferring their operations to national systems could yield more cost-effective interventions and a near full handover of operations to national counterparts.

On the advocacy front, a few specific opportunities could be explored:

- On the integration of children into national schools: to encourage the government to emphasise quality as well as access, and specifically to absorb more teachers into schools with refugee children.
- On moves towards eliminating parallel health systems: the inclusion of urban refugees (and boarding students) into the national health insurance system could be extended to all refugees, including those in camps.
- On the delivery of cash or in-kind transfers to refugees: humanitarian transfers to camp residents (for food, fuel, etc.) are increasingly in cash form through bank transfers. These could be gradually transferred to Rwanda's social protection system, the Vision Umerenge Program (VUP). Assessment and needs-based targeting could rely on the national social protection classification system (Ubudehe), modified as necessary for refugees' specific circumstances/vulnerability.
- On mobility: the remoteness of the camps and the anaemic economic environment around them means that longer-term self-reliance for many refugees will likely only be found in urban areas in the coming years. As long as humanitarian transfers continue to be tied to camp life, the government's goal of closing the camps¹¹ will be difficult to achieve. Moving towards a nationally managed social protection approach that includes refugees – and is not tied to camp life – could help resolve this dilemma.

Some of these points are being advocated for by UNHCR, partly in the run-up to the 2019 Global Refugee Forum in December. However, interviews with donors in Kigali suggest that there is little thought being given to providing funding incentives to the government (i.e., 'easing the burden') or to channeling their humanitarian funding to national implementing agencies rather than international

¹¹ The government has stated on some occasions that the camps will be closed by 2030; on other occasions the closure policy or target date is less precise.

agencies. Interviews with aid agencies also suggest that the handover of humanitarian transfer operations to government systems is not being actively pursued.

6.2 Supporting self-reliance activities and/or host community economic opportunities

As in other contexts of protracted displacement, the challenges of achieving self-reliance among refugees in Rwanda are complex and inextricable from the overall development challenges of the country and of the refugee-hosting districts in particular. With agriculture accounting for 85% or more of economic activity across the refugee-hosting districts (World Bank, 2019a), efforts around self-reliance and job creation will focus on activities such as supporting horticulture and higher value crops, agro-processing and improved value chains, as well as linking producers/entrepreneurs with financial services and local, national, regional or international markets. Some agencies and donors that foresee a future urban life for many younger refugees are also supporting skills training for refugees, including higher education or IT skills.

Until now, interventions around refugee and host community economic opportunities have largely been undertaken by INGOs or social enterprises – under the coordination of MINEMA – working on short timeframes with uncertain budgets. This model will continue to be an option for support, since MINEMA does not appear to be shifting away from its project-based, humanitarian-led approach apart from its work

with the World Bank. The forthcoming updated joint UNHCR-MINEMA strategy for economic opportunity of refugees should point to a number of potential areas of support, though a substantial shift towards developmental approaches will be necessary.

The only substantial CRRF intervention currently underway with a longer-term horizon – and with full government buy-in – is the World Bank project, which is often equated with the government's Strategic Plan. For donors and aid agencies, there may be options to partner within the World Bank project framework, especially around entrepreneurship and jobs, in ways that contribute to a more holistic approach to fostering inclusion and economic opportunities. Specifically, a partnership that complements World Bank financing could include:

- Supporting shifts to local government management through district development strategies and local economic development plans for economic opportunities that include refugees.
- Providing support to efforts to identify – and possibly subsidise – viable private sector businesses that could be interested in expansion in refugee-hosting areas.
- Supporting research on the impact of past efforts at entrepreneurship development.
- Supporting research on facilitating or promoting mobility, linked to jobs and opportunities for refugees and migrants in Kigali and other urban areas.
- Supporting government efforts to improve the relevancy of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in refugee-hosting areas, especially on agricultural skills and agro-processing.

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Cover photo: A woman carries grass for her cows through Mahama refugee camp in Kirehe, eastern Rwanda. © Georgina Goodwin/UNHCR

