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In Search of a Durable Solution

Examining the Factors Influencing Postconflict Refugee Returns

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About This Report

There are over 80 million forcibly displaced people globally, the highest number of displacements on record. Yet, returns have not kept pace with displacement. The status quo is a growing global population of displaced people, living in limbo without full citizenship rights, and with their host countries under ever-greater strains of hosting them. The need to find new solutions to facilitate safe refugee return has become ever more urgent. This report considers several factors that have shaped the return of refugees and displaced persons: historical pace of refugee returns, including determinants and patterns; interplay among stakeholders in facilitating refugee returns; push-and-pull factors that shape refugees' decisions to return to their home countries; factors required for sustainable returns and successful reintegration; and experiences and outcomes from cases of forced displacement and return. The methods used to address this issue include a literature review and key informant interviews with experts and stakeholders; an analysis of displacement and return trends globally; and case studies of the three displacement contexts of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and the Kurdistan Region–Iraq. The report includes an analysis of commonalities and differences across the cases, as well as both achievements and constraints in terms of returns as one of the durable solutions. The report concludes with recommendations.

RAND National Security Research Division

Acknowledgments

Contents

Figures

Tables and Boxes

Tables

Boxes

Summary

There are three traditional durable solutions targeted toward refugees who number roughly 30 million of the over 80 million people displaced globally: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement. The preferred durable solution for the majority of refugee situations in United Nations (UN) documents and in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees remains that of voluntary return in safety and dignity. Moreover, many (though not all) refugees similarly harbor dreams of returning to their homes. Yet, over the past few decades, returns have not kept pace with displacement, highlighting the scale of the problem as well as the protracted nature of decades in displacement. The result is a growing global population of refugees living in limbo without full citizenship rights in host countries that are under ever-increasing strain from hosting them.

There is an urgent need to find durable solutions for displaced populations, both refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). This report, commissioned by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, aims to address this need by examining barriers to, and facilitators of, the safe and sustained return of refugees when conditions allow—that is, consistent with non-refoulement and UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Guiding Principles noted above of returns with safety and dignity. Though this report is focused on refugee returns, our analysis also includes some comparison with IDP returns, as their needs and circumstances overlap.

To carry out the study, we examined evidence from the literature, conducted interviews with global experts on displacement as well as with government and multilateral officials who oversee the affairs of displaced populations, and examined data on cross-national trends in displacement and returns over the past 30 years. We analyzed UNHCR data on 53 postconflict return cases, developing a new way of measuring returns. We also conducted case studies in the Western Balkan countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo, as well as the Kurdistan Region–Iraq (KRI). The case studies included focus groups and discussions with 105 returnees, refugees, and IDPs; and interviews with other stakeholders, including government officials, representatives of multilateral organizations, and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) based in the case study locations.

Only One in Three Refugees Returns Home Within Ten Years

Despite voluntary return being the preferred policy solution for refugee situations when conditions permit, we found that returns happen in a minority of refugee cases. In Figure S.1, our analysis of UNHCR data captures refugee returns ten years after the end of a conflict for all conflicts ending between 1989 and 2008. It reveals that, on average, only about a third of refugees return after ten years; the median is 21.0 percent.

While multiple legal, policy, and technical documents lay out principles and steps for return, these are not specific enough to create clear conditions for consistent policymaking promoting effective and sustainable refugee returns. In addition, despite this wealth of documents, the concept of *success in return* remains ambiguous, reflecting conflicting goals and values and impeding consistent policymaking. A key theme from our interviews is that *there is little consensus on what successful return is, therefore making it difficult to plan and measure*. Another challenge is unclear goals for return—that is, whether successful return means crossing a border or achieving sustainable integration; returning to a community of origin or having new opportunities in urban areas; or returning home to the level of prosperity expected in the host country or to that experienced when the person left the home country. Other unresolved issues include the extent to which return efforts restore a community to its prior ethnic distribution and the need for clearer definitions, principles, and criteria for the voluntariness of return.

FIGURE S.1

Boxplot of Proportion of Refugees Returned, by Year After Conflict Ends
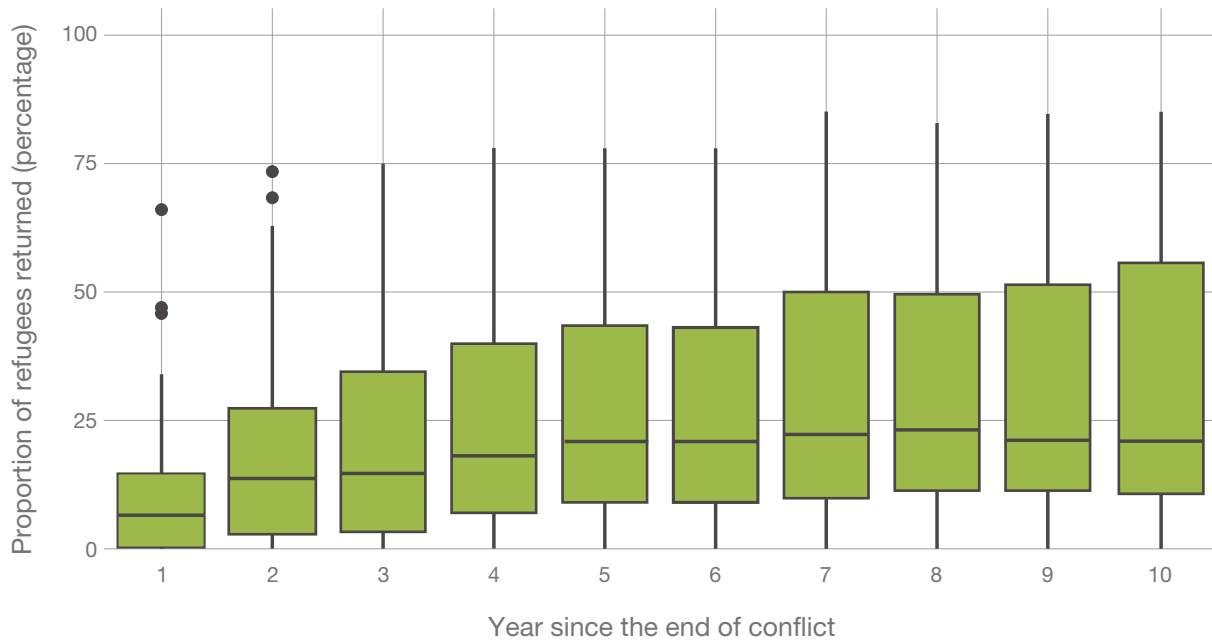
SOURCE: Authors' calculations from UNHCR Population Statistics data.

NOTE: Each boxplot displays the data for one year. The line inside the box is the fiftieth percentile, the top of the box is the seventy-fifth percentile, the bottom of the box is the twenty-fifth percentile, and the whiskers extend to the highest and lowest points, respectively, that fall within 1.5 times the interquartile range (the distance between the seventy-fifth and twenty-fifth percentiles); all other points are plotted individually as outliers.

A Framework for Evaluating Returns

Research to date has assessed the salience of a variety of factors in return decisionmaking. Researchers have classified these factors as *structural* (conditions in host and home countries), *individual* (demographic and social attributes), and *policy- and governance-related* (incentives and disincentives).

Building from this construct, we posit a four-part framework of refugee return that incorporates characteristics of returnees and their households, conditions in the home country (or country of origin), conditions in the host country, and activities of governments and multilaterals that likely interact with conditions in both the home and host countries (Figure S.2).

Findings point to individual-level drivers of refugee return, including age and gender. Younger members of displaced populations may feel less tied to the home country than do their parents and grandparents, especially under protracted displacement circumstances. Women and children and other vulnerable populations may place greater emphasis on access to services that are crucial to their well-being, such as education and health care, before deciding to return.

Evidence from the literature also suggests that voluntary, safe, and sustained return of refugees is more likely if refugee perceptions of conditions in the home country meet minimum expectations regarding security, employment, and provision of public services. Security is arguably the most important of these "pull" factors. Other drivers of return include an improving economic situation, a mechanism for property restitution and access to basic services such as education and health care, and personal ties and social networks in the home country, including reliable sources of information about conditions in the home country.

FIGURE S.2

Four-Component Framework for Evaluating Refugee Returns
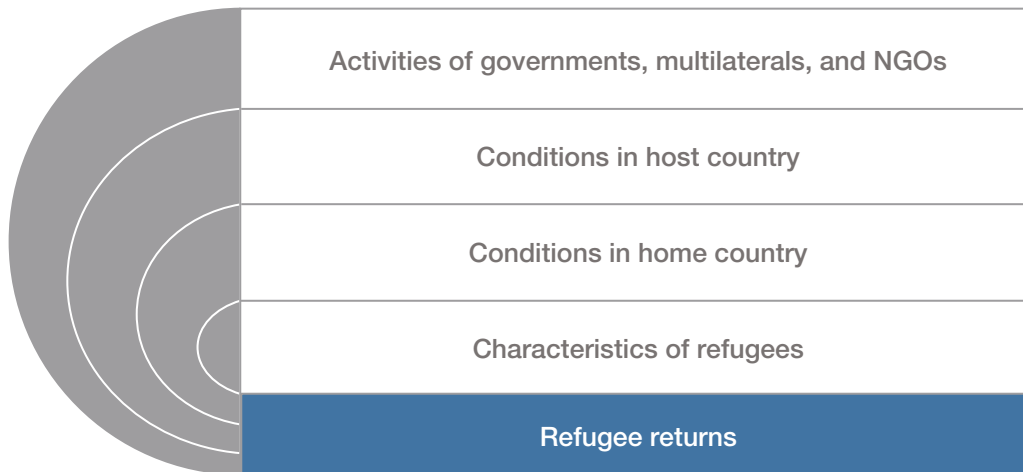
Conditions in the host country may drive people to return. These "push" factors include lack of stability and security in the host country, limited economic opportunities, and perceptions of being less welcome in the host country. Being in host countries that are geographically close to the home country make it easier to return home if conditions allow. On the other hand, other studies have shown that conditions in the host country appear not to be the main factor in terms of the decision to return, as in the case of a study on the mobility of Syrian refugees.

Finally, refugee return is influenced by the role of national and international organizations in promoting policies and programs to facilitate return. International organizations can be crucial for ensuring security and stability in postconflict contexts and can help prevent returned refugees from facing violence and fleeing again.

Case Studies

To understand the role of the four drivers of return, we conducted three case studies (Table S.1), which included in-depth interviews and focus groups with displaced persons and returnees, and interviews with other stakeholders.

Below we highlight common themes across the case studies, which are organized in relation to the four components of the framework shown in Figure S.2. To illustrate these points, we include brief examples from the case studies and quotations from displaced persons and returnees. A detailed discussion of each case study is included in Chapters Four, Five, and Six of the main report.

Personal and Family Ties Were Important Drivers of Return

Individual characteristics and personal ties were frequent motivators of return across the case studies. Returnees' ethnicity could influence where they returned, with some choosing to return to ethnic enclaves where their community was the majority. Returnees noted that their connection to the homeland—including ties of emotion and heritage to the home country, family members who remained in the home country, a life-changing event that precipitated the return home, or other personal connection—was a strong driver of return. For example, 10 of the 24 interview subjects who had returned to the KRI made at least one remark about wanting to return home to relatives, former houses, jobs, or businesses; almost half of the participants

TABLE S.1

Case Study Countries

Country	Nature of Conflict(s)	Displaced Population(s)
BiH	The war in BiH began in April 1992 and ended in December 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA). This war was the most destructive and violent of the Yugoslav wars, with an estimated 250,000 casualties.	• Approximately half (2 million) of the country's 4.3 million prewar residents were displaced. • By the end of the war in 1995, there were close to 770,000 refugees and 1.1 million IDPs. • According to UNHCR, as of 1995, the largest number of refugees were hosted by Germany (320,000), Croatia (200,000), and Serbia and Kosovo (85,000). • As of 2021, there are fewer than 20,000 refugees and 96,421 IDPs.
Kosovo	By the spring of 1999, the ongoing military campaign between the Serbian military and the Kosovo Liberation Army had escalated to open war. The conflict had ended by the summer of 1999, but tensions remained; and the violent riots in 2004 directed against minorities, particularly the Serbian population, precipitated another wave of displacement.	• By the spring of 1999, roughly 900,000 ethnic Albanians had fled toward the borders with Albania and Macedonia, a large share seeking refuge beyond the borders of Kosovo, but some also internally displaced. • During a subsequent wave of displacement, 200,000 mostly ethnic Serbs and Roma fled toward the border with Serbia and Montenegro. • As of 2016, UNHCR estimated that around 90,000 vulnerable individuals continue to have displacement-related needs and require durable solutions, while the official number of displaced people from Kosovo in Serbia is around 200,000. • The vast majority of displaced persons reside in Serbia, with around 16,000 residing internally in Kosovo.
KRI	Iraq has been one of the world's largest sources of civilian displacement in recent decades from multiple wars, with multiple large waves of both displacement and returns since the 1970s. It has also hosted refugees from Syria. Our case study focuses on three groups of displaced people in the KRI: (1) Kurds from northern Iraq, who fled persecution from Saddam Hussein, became refugees in Iran, and later returned to Iraq; (2) internally displaced Iraqi minorities who fled from the Islamic State (also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS) and the military operations against it to live in the KRI, where they remain; and (3) ethnically Kurdish Syrian refugees, living in the KRI.	• In 2019, 345,000 Iraqi refugees lived in other countries, down from 1.7 million in 2010. • From 2010 to 2019, over 800,000 Iraqis applied for asylum in another country. • From 2010 to 2019, 260,000 refugees returned to Iraq. • In 2021, Iraq had 1.2 million IDPs, down from 5.7 million after the defeat of ISIS in 2017. • Iraq has the second-largest number of IDP returns from 2010 to 2019, returning 5 million people. • Iraq hosts 274,000 refugees from Syria.

who had returned mentioned missing family (including the need to care for sick relatives) as a reason to return. In the BiH case study, ethnic Bosniaks and Serbs talked about their connection to their village or town, using phrases such as "everyone is pulled . . . there is no place like the one you were born in" or "the homeland was calling."

Conditions in the Host Country Were Not a Strong Driver of Returns in Most Cases

While conditions in host countries varied considerably, they were rarely a predominant driver of returns. However, our interviews and focus groups revealed that extended periods of displacement sometimes led to increased tensions with the host communities over time. One man said, "Since we were never considered Iranians, we did not have a future there. . . . I could not stand it anymore." Iraqi Kurds who had been displaced to Iran in the 1980s and 1990s noted some pressure from Iranian authorities to return home as

security in the region improved; they also noted lack of access to higher education for their children or the right to own property. Overall, however, it was not so much the conditions in Iran but the pull factor of a connection to their Iraqi Kurdish homeland, in combination with a perception of improved security, that compelled people to return.

Improved Conditions in the Home Country Could Facilitate the Decision to Return, Though Most People Continued to Face Challenges After Returning Home

Our case studies confirmed that conditions in the home country were important factors contributing to the decision to return. These include safety and security; the potential for reconciliation among different populations; the status of economic, social, and political institutions; and the possibility of property restitution and reconstruction. However, conditions in all these areas varied among the case study countries, and many issues remained unresolved in all these areas, which can be important in *sustaining* displaced persons' return.

The end of armed conflict did not always create the conditions of peace and security necessary for sustainable returns. For example, unresolved security issues in Iraq and Kosovo led to renewed conflict that posed threats to Iraq's, and to a much lesser degree, Kosovo's security and stability. Across all three cases, we found a disconnect between national-level efforts to promote return rights and a local-level will to enforce the law. In Kosovo, for example, ethnically motivated incidents were not effectively pursued and prosecuted by law enforcement and the courts. In the absence of effective law enforcement and justice, locating in an area where one is in the majority may serve as a proxy for safety and security.

Across the three case studies, reconciliation efforts and results were uneven. For example, Kurds displaced from Iraq in the 1980s noted that the Iraqi government's formal "declaration of amnesty" precipitated their choice to return; at the same time, tensions remain between the KRI and federal Iraq, culminating in the failed 2017 Kurdish referendum for independence from Iraq. Iraqi minorities and Syrian refugees expressed a strong desire to remain in the KRI owing to their distrust of the ethnic majority communities, militias, or governments in the areas they were displaced from. The situation in the KRI is further complicated by questions about whether and how to integrate former ISIS adherents, or those perceived to be affiliated with them, such as ISIS families residing in the camps.

Each of the cases we studied struggled to rebuild its economic, social, and political institutions, which had been undermined by conflict, in order to facilitate and support sustained returns. Weak economies translated to difficulties for returnees in finding and securing a job. In addition to the economic considerations, social institutions, including education and health care, also needed to be restored. Across all three cases, struggling education and health systems deterred returns and made the transition back to normal life for returnees more difficult. Schools and health facilities lacked resources and personnel, and in some cases classroom instruction and health services were only available in the language of the majority community. Mechanisms to recognize and certify degrees earned abroad also remained an issue affecting the return of young people who completed their studies outside the home country.

On the other hand, property restitution and reconstruction were important factors in promoting returns in one particular case study, BiH, which was a direct beneficiary of large-scale investment in reconstruction of homes, facilitated by the multicountry agreements in the various frameworks and implementation plans.

Other Governments and Multilaterals Facilitated Returns Through Military Intervention, Stabilization, Humanitarian Action, and Capacity-Building

The most comprehensive international involvement included the full spectrum of military intervention, stabilization, humanitarian action, and development, and this differed by case study. All three cases involved

some level of U.S.-led military intervention; and multilaterals took varying approaches in the scale, coordination, and type of assistance provided. In the KRI, the return of Kurds from Iran was largely not characterized by a comprehensive international approach to meeting humanitarian and development needs, but mainly by individual families repatriating to Iraq on their own or assisted by small-scale and ad hoc efforts by UN agencies, NGOs, or Kurdish political parties. Multilaterals have made a decision not to facilitate Syrian refugee returns for the time being, given conditions in Syria. BiH had a robust international presence that produced the DPA and Annex 7, which laid out a very clear objective for returns as well as subsequent investments through the Regional Housing Program. In all three cases, multilaterals took an active approach in facilitating returns through capacity-building with newly established government institutions to address displacement and implement durable solutions, but with varying degrees of success.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are directed to multiple stakeholders including the international humanitarian community, as well as home country and host country governments and communities. To be serious about increasing voluntary returns, then, current implementation efforts need to be reexamined, and resources and actions need to align with renewed determination. We offer the following recommendations:

- **Expend greater effort on conflict resolution and stabilization to address the root causes of conflict-based displacement, or create the conditions that allow quick return.** The best approach to having people live in their place of origin is preventing mass displacement from occurring. This means reinvesting in and reinvigorating multilateral approaches that already exist at some level to resolve conflicts, preventing them from escalating before mass displacement occurs. For example, the further presence of a neutral, stabilizing, and peacekeeping force can help stem further refugee flows and create the beginning of conditions for refugees to return.
- **Focus on facilitating return during the first five years after a conflict.** Our study has found that the highest rates of return occur soon after the conflict ends, with return levels tapering off over time. Thus, facilitated return efforts might best focus on this narrow yet important window. Donor governments and international agencies could place more resources in these years, including the provision of information, facilitation of return journeys, and rebuilding of communities.
- **Ensure return efforts include local, national, and regional solutions, as well as coordination of international diplomatic, security, humanitarian, and development efforts.** Efforts must coordinate across multiple actors, including national, state or provincial, and local governments; international humanitarian actors; and bilateral development partners. Host countries should be encouraged to play a role, as they are essential partners in this process. In addition, diplomatic efforts directed toward key stakeholders can help solve problems and ensure that those who return do so safely and securely. Assurances and guarantees of safety and security of those considering return are particularly essential given their prominence in our findings. The most significant development initiatives, once security and humanitarian assistance are provided, will require coordination in line with national strategies of both the home and host communities affected by the crisis.
- **Build the capacity of home country governments at the national and local levels to manage returns and security.** This would include training and support at both national and local levels to ministry staff, local government officials, municipal law enforcement, and other community-based organizations as well as support and expertise from local NGOs.
- **Invest in monitoring and accountability systems.** There needs to be a formal, documented commitment to ensure the safety and security of returnees coupled with monitoring mechanisms to support

implementation and track milestones and goals. This will allow for corrective action or enforcement, including finding alternative means of achieving results.

- **Take demographic shifts, natural migration patterns, and personal preferences into account when developing refugee return policies and programs.** Policy efforts should not focus solely on interventions and supports in the original areas of origin; rather, they should be based on supporting where refugees *prefer* to return to.

- **Design return aid and development aid to address structural economic problems and public service inefficiencies.** Investments to restore economies and create jobs after widespread destruction should not only target short-term needs, but also factor in a longer-term economic development horizon for the affected countries. In addition to rebuilding infrastructure, this could include, for example, promotion of entrepreneurship and growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) with supports such as low- or no-interest loans, job training, and a reduction of bureaucratic red tape to spur new business development and growth of the private sector.

- **Update standards, guidelines, and metrics to guide refugee return efforts globally.** An updated UNHCR repatriation handbook is needed to provide a clear definition of successful repatriation, as well as clear metrics to determine what counts as returns and guide data collection. These efforts should build on existing databases maintained by UNHCR and the International Office of Migration, as well as frameworks such as the one by the UN Inter-agency Standing Committee.

- **Target mixed and comprehensive durable and interim solutions in a timely manner—instead of repatriation—as the preferred solution for refugees.** The United Nations should change official policy so that it no longer targets return as the single preferred solution but instead aims to find a combined set of solutions for refugees within a limited period, so that refugees do not spend lifetimes or generations waiting in limbo. Moreover, the State Department should lead a global effort to find all refugees a medium- or long-term solution within ten years of their displacement. This should include providing additional interim solutions consistent with the Global Compact on Refugees, such as work visas. Such solutions should enable self-reliance, reasonable living conditions, and maintenance of human capital of refugee populations.

Abbreviations

BiH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
CRPC	Commission for Real Property Claims
DPA	Dayton Peace Agreement
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EU	European Union
GNI	Gross national income
IDP	internally displaced person
IOM	International Office of Migration
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
ISIS	Islamic State (also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria)
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdistan Region–Iraq
MCR	Ministry of Communities and Returns
MOCRs	Municipal Offices of Communities and Returns
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PRM	U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
RHP	Regional Housing Program
UCDP	Upsala Conflict Data Program
UNHCR	UN Refugee Agency
UN	United Nations

Introduction

There are over 80 million forcibly displaced people around the world, or just over 1 percent of the world population. This figure is the highest number of forcibly displaced people ever recorded and close to double the number of displaced a decade ago (UN Refugee Agency [UNHCR], 2021a). These include refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). This report analyzes lessons learned and best practices for how refugees can return to their homes.

Out of the 82.4 million, close to 30 million are refugees. Four out of five live in developing countries where residents themselves often struggle economically or face political and social instability (UNHCR, 2021a; World Bank 2021a). The typical period of displacement for refugees is estimated to last between 10 and 15 years, although some estimates range as high as 26 years in protracted settings (Devictor and Do, 2016; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017). The global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021 has heightened the already significant challenges associated with displacement and returns.

The preferred solution for refugees in United Nations (UN) documents is voluntary return (UN Secretary-General, 2011), and many (though not all) refugees similarly harbor dreams of returning to their homes (Kibreab, 1999; Long, 2013). Yet, over the past few decades, returns of refugees have not kept pace with displacement. According to UNHCR data, only 300,000 refugees returned home in 2019 and 251,000 returned in 2020, with 2020 dominated by the global pandemic, while returns of IDPs were also low, with 5.3 million returning in 2019 and 3.2 million returning in 2020 (UNHCR, 2021b). In most cases, conditions are not sufficiently safe for refugees to return home; or their home countries continue to lack basic services, including adequate shelter, health care, and education. Women and children, the elderly, and the disabled are also particularly vulnerable. Lack of basic services disproportionately affects the elderly and disabled, who require access to adequate health care, and there are tremendous long-term costs to children who lack access to quality education. Displacement also imposes greater burdens on women, who may bear increased responsibilities to provide for their families by earning a livelihood while simultaneously caring for children and elderly family members.

The result is a growing global population of refugees, living in limbo without full citizenship rights in host countries that are under ever-increasing strain from hosting them. There is an urgent need to find new solutions to facilitate the safe and voluntary return of refugees when conditions allow; this may require a new understanding of what is needed to support sustained return as well as the policies and supporting institutions needed for implementation. At the same time, given the low rates of returns, it is important to recognize that other solutions may merit investment from the international community.

Lessons learned from past experiences with refugee circumstances can help inform efforts to address the problem today (Schwartz, 2018, p. 16; Stefanovic and Loizides, 2017, p. 217; Stefanovic, Loizides, and Parsons, 2015, p. 276). While this study focuses on refugees, our case studies cover both refugee and IDP contexts; and though their official status may differ, there is significant overlap in terms of their circumstances, vulnerabilities, and needs. Existing research on the topic is limited: The serious study of refugee and IDP return began only in the past few years, and scholarship is hampered by a lack of data about both refugees and IDPs, including their preferences and decisionmaking, and official policies that impact return. There

are few cross-case comparisons, which prevents a generalized understanding of the dynamics of return. The scarcity of rigorous, systematic, comparative findings has made it difficult to develop urgently needed policy solutions to help the record-breaking number of forcibly displaced populations.

Aim of the Study

This study examines the barriers to, and facilitators of, the safe and sustained return of refugees, although we also include some limited discussion on the return of IDPs, as there is significant overlap of circumstances between these two populations. The study was commissioned by the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). The study considered

- the historical pace of refugee returns, including determinants and patterns
- interplay among stakeholders in facilitating refugee returns
- push-and-pull factors that shape refugees' decisions to return to their home countries
- factors required for sustainable returns and successful reintegration
- experiences and outcomes from cases of forced displacement and return.

Study Methods and Approach

To carry out the study, we (1) examined current evidence from the literature about refugee returns; (2) conducted 15 interviews with global experts on displacement, as well as multilateral officials, national officials, and nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders; (3) examined cross-national trends by compiling and analyzing refugee returns over the past 30 years from 53 case studies; and (4) conducted case studies of refugee returns in the Western Balkan countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo, as well as the Kurdistan Region–Iraq (KRI). The case studies included in-depth interviews and focus groups with 105 returnees, refugees, and IDPs. We focused these discussions on returnees, although in the KRI case study, we included some currently displaced refugees and IDPs because of the mix of populations considered in this case study. Case studies also included interviews with 30 stakeholders including government officials, representatives of multilateral organizations, and local NGOs.

Our choice of case studies reflected several key factors. First, the resources available to carry out the case studies with sufficient depth along with the other project activities limited the number of cases we could choose. Second, the choice of the Western Balkans region reflected PRM's interest in the inclusion of cases where there had been significant humanitarian and development investment in which it was involved, and therefore the desire to take stock and extract lessons learned. Our choice of the KRI represented our in-depth experience and knowledge of the context, and the relative recency and ongoing nature of the consequences of displacement; additionally, our contacts in the region would help facilitate data collection. Third, substantively, these specific cases provided us with sufficient opportunity to explore within-region variation in experiences and outcomes as in the case of BiH and Kosovo in the Western Balkans and the experiences of three groups that differed in the nature, timing, and context of displacement as in the case of the Kurds, Ninewa minorities, and Syrian refugees, the latter two who remain displaced.

For more details on the key informant and case study stakeholder interviews we conducted, see Appendix A; for more information on discussions with returnees, refugees, and IDPs through focus groups and in-depth interviews, see Appendix B; and for more information on our analysis of cross-national trends, see Appendix C.

Organization of This Report

This report synthesizes our findings, striving to strengthen the evidence-based understanding of refugee returns, and providing recommendations targeted to policymaker and practitioner audiences. Based on a review of the evidence and discussions with key stakeholders, the report highlights the conditions and facilitating activities generally associated with substantial and sustained refugee returns. Our intent is that policymakers and practitioners alike will use the findings and recommendations stemming from this research to manage the unprecedented numbers of refugees globally in one of the worst humanitarian crises of modern times. The recommendations are geared toward home and host country governments, international multilateral agencies, and donor agencies.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows:

- Chapter Two provides an overview of global concepts and trends in refugee returns.
- Chapter Three describes a framework for evaluating refugee returns.
- Chapter Four presents our findings about experience with refugee returns from a case study of BiH, Chapter Five presents a case study of Kosovo, and Chapter Six presents a case study of the KRI.
- Chapter Seven provides a synthesis of the main themes across all three case studies.
- Chapter Eight concludes with policy implications and recommendations.

Overview of Global Concepts and Trends in Refugee Returns

While forced displacement has been rapidly growing in recent decades—doubling in the past two decades alone—declining numbers and proportions of people are returning home. This chapter provides an overview of the three durable solutions for refugees as articulated by the UNHCR. We then draw on UNHCR data to present an overview of global trends of refugee returns, looking at returns that occurred between 1989 and 2008. We discuss the reasons for low rates of refugee return based on a review of literature and interviews with global experts on the topic. We then review the evolution of governance structures to manage refugee returns. Finally, we highlight the ambiguities in goals for returns, which make it difficult to develop measures of successful returns and reintegration.

Few Refugees Return or Find Other Durable Solutions

The international humanitarian community aims for one of three "durable" solutions for refugees (UNHCR, 2007):

- **Voluntary repatriation** (what we call *refugee returns* in this report) is when refugees return to their home country with "appropriate measures to ensure that any choice regarding return made by refugees is voluntary," is conducted "in safety and with dignity," and is "sustainable." It can be either "spontaneous" (conducted independently by the refugee without the support of a state or multilateral institution) or "assisted" (conducted with the support of a state or multilateral institution) (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2004).
- **Local integration** is when refugees find permanent settlement and are eventually granted nationality in their current country of asylum.
- **Resettlement** is when a third country that is not a refugee's home country or country of asylum accepts the refugee (typically a developed democracy, such as the United States or countries of the European Union [EU]).

Consistent with UNHCR guiding principles on internal displacement, the United Nations Inter-agency Standing Committee has outlined similar durable solutions for IDPs, including (1) sustainable reintegration into the place of origin (or return); (2) sustainable local integration in areas where IDPs take refuge (local integration); (3) sustainable integration in another part of the country (resettlement) (The Brookings Institution–University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement, 2010, p. 5; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2004).

In the immediate post–World War II years, the most promoted solution for refugees was third-country resettlement. However, as the number of refugees has grown, policy has shifted toward promoting returns (Chimni, 1999). The 2004 United Nations Executive Committee Conclusion states the following:

> Reaffirming that voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement are the traditional solutions for refugees, and that all remain viable and important responses to refugee situations; reiterating that voluntary repatriation, where and when feasible, remains the preferred solution in the majority of refugee situations; and noting that a combination of solutions, taking into account the specific circumstances of each refugee situation, can help achieve lasting solutions. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2004)

And the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees emphasizes that "[v]oluntary repatriation in conditions of safety and dignity remains the preferred solution in the majority of refugee situations" (UNHCR, 2018c).

In addition to the three durable solutions, the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees lays out options for interim solutions. "Complementary pathways" for admission in third countries can include humanitarian visas, educational visas, and labor mobility opportunities. And host countries can grant "interim legal stays" that enable economic, cultural, and social inclusion of refugees in their host communities, such as through visa programs (UNHCR, 2018c).

Despite policy statements defining return as the preferred option for refugees, returns occurred for only a small fraction of the total, although return is much more common than refugee resettlement or local integration (UNHCR, 2021b). From 2010 to 2019, out of a total of 100 million people who had been displaced during that decade, only 3.7 million refugees returned to their home countries. By way of comparison, returns were more common for IDPs, 32 million of whom returned to their homes during that period. A small proportion of refugees benefited from local integration in their countries of asylum, with 322,000 refugees naturalized, and 1.1 million refugees resettled in a third country (UNHCR, 2021g). In sum, only a little over a third of the 100 million total displaced from 2010 to 2019 found *any* "durable solution." The most "durable" solution for refugees has therefore instead been extended exile in limbo.

Our analysis of UNHCR data found that since 1989, annual refugee returns as a percentage of the total refugee population has been 5 percent or less in most years, and under 20 percent in all years but one, as seen in Figure 2.1.

Returns are not keeping up with the pace of growth of the global refugee population, as the protracted nature of many conflicts means that returns are decreasing while displacement is increasing. Figure 2.2 shows refugee numbers since 1989 in comparison with the numbers of refugees returned during that decade. The 1990s were an exception, witnessing net returns.

Global Trends in Postconflict Refugee Returns

The data above illustrate the low rates of refugee returns over time. Below we take a more detailed look based on a novel means of using data to understand refugee return, presenting an original measure of refugee return over time for all major postconflict refugee situations since 1989. We rely on existing data, primarily collected from UNHCR. Our measurement of postconflict refugee return is conceptualized as the percentage of cumulative refugee returns over a ten-year period after the initial end to a conflict. We note that this measures return by total numbers of people who crossed the borders to live again in their countries of origin. It does not measure their levels of reintegration back into their communities upon return, owing to the lack of measures and data regarding refugee return reintegration.

FIGURE 2.1

Returned Refugees as a Percentage of Total Refugee Population, 1989–2019
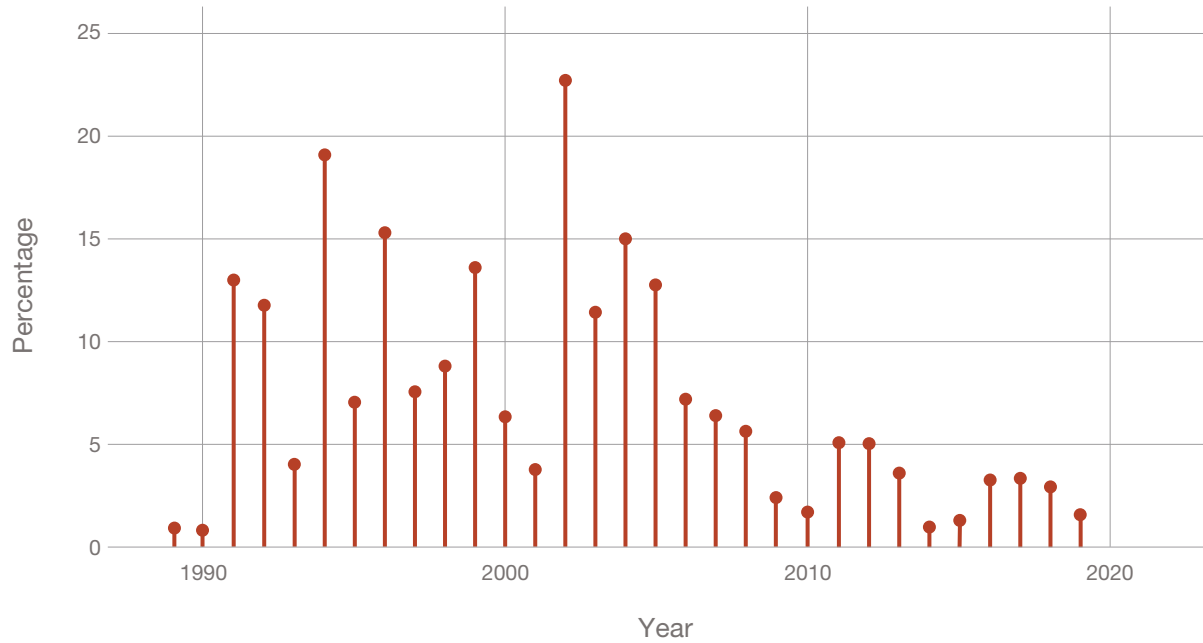
SOURCE: Authors' calculations from UNHCR Population Statistics data.

FIGURE 2.2

Refugees and Returned Refugees Globally, 1989–2019
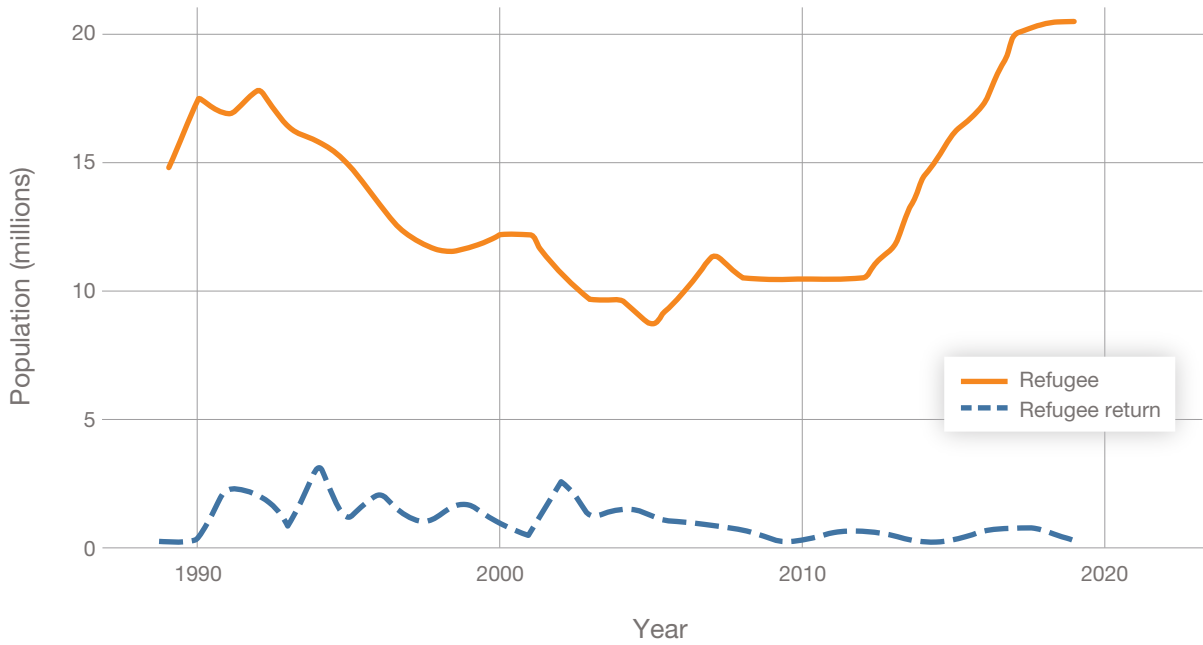
SOURCE: UNHCR Population Statistics.

An Approach to Measuring Postconflict Refugee Return

To measure refugee return after war, we must define three dimensions: the end of conflict, the period for measurement, and the metrics of return.[1]

The end of conflict. For the purposes of this analysis, we define an end to a conflict as *when annual battle-related deaths in a country's territory fall below 1,000 for one year and then remain below 1,000 for the subsequent year*, with the first year considered the formal end of conflict and the second year confirming the end of conflict (Sundberg and Melander, 2013).[2] We assume that a two-year decline in violence, even if violence is not entirely eliminated, is enough time for refugees to consider returning to their country of origin.[3] In many cases, the two-year reduction in fatalities will prove to be temporary, as war resumes later.[4]

The period for measurement. We measure how many refugees have returned *ten years after a conflict ends*. Using UNHCR data from 2018, we therefore include conflicts that ended by the close of 2008 (UNHCR, 2021g).[5] This means that many ongoing refugee situations, such as Syria, Iraq, and South Sudan, are not included in our analysis. We label the year that a conflict ends (the first year of the two-year period when deaths drop below 1,000) as Y_0. The first full year of the postconflict period is Y_1, then Y_2, and so on until Y_{10}, which is the year we measure the outcome. We refer to cases as "Country (Y_0)" since some countries have more than one postconflict period, such as Angola (1994) and Angola (2001).

The metrics of return. We measure postconflict refugee return as the *cumulative percentage of refugees that returned after the end of the conflict*.[6] We use the number of refugees in the year that the conflict ends (Y_0) as the baseline number. We also account for the refugees who exit the country after Y_0 (which can be a sizable number). We measure refugee return using UNHCR's annual data on the number of refugees (including "people in refugee-like situations") and returned refugees for each country in the world (UNHCR, 2021g) from 1989 to 2018.[7] However, UNHCR statistics have several disadvantages, discussed in Appendix C, that limit the scope of our analysis. In particular and as noted previously, UNHCR statistics miss the on-the-ground, dynamic experience of return for individual refugees—for example, successful reintegration,

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[1]   For a more detailed explanation of the data collection and measurement strategy, see Appendix C.

[2]   To measure this, we use the Uppsala Conflict Data Program Georeferenced Event Dataset Global Version 19.1. Sundberg and Melander, 2013.

[3]   We use the two-year consecutive decline in violence criterion to confirm the war ended in the first year the number of deaths dropped below the threshold number. In our formulation, a decline in deaths below the threshold *signals* an end to the war, and a second consecutive year of decline in deaths *confirms* an end to the war. We rely on a quantitative measure because documentation on the official end to a war is likely to be inconsistent and unreliable. Because refugees may choose to return at any time during or after a war, we evaluate voluntary returns as occurring after the official end to the war in the same year that there was a decline in violence. Thus, we want to begin our evaluation of returns during the first full year after the end of the war, provided we *confirm* that it is the end of the war by noting two consecutive years of decline in violence.

[4]   If the number of battle-related deaths in the country's territory rises above 1,000 after a two-year decline, any later two-year decline is considered a separate postconflict episode.

[5]   To maintain our focus on major refugee situations, we excluded cases where the refugee population in the year the conflict ends is fewer than 1,000 or where the cumulative number of refugees in the ten-year postconflict period does not exceed 10,000. UNHCR population statistics are available at UNHCR, 2021g.

[6]   Specifically, refugee return is defined as percent cumulative refugee return (PCRR) $_t$ = [Cumulative refugee returns in Y_1 to Y_t]/[Cumulative refugees in Y_1 to Y_t], where t is the number of years after the end of the conflict. The main measure of interest is taken ten years after the end of conflict, or PCRR$_{10}$ = [Cumulative refugee returns in Y_1 to Y_{10}]/[Cumulative refugees in Y_1 to Y_{10}].

[7]   UNHCR's Refugee Population Statistics Database provides annual data on each country's stock of refugees and flow of refugee returns, which we used to calculate the annual flow of new refugees so that we could calculate the cumulative number of refugees in the period of interest. In calculating the number of new refugees each year, we did not account for refugees who were resettled or locally integrated since they are a very small proportion of the total.

an important factor in measuring sustainability of returns based on our framework—but they do provide a bird's-eye view of national-level macro-trends.

Trends in Postconflict Refugee Return in 53 Cases

Figure 2.3 displays the cumulative percentage of refugee returns meeting our criteria for ten years after each conflict termination. Several distinct trajectories emerge in the flow of returnees over the ten-year period of analysis. Some countries, such as Burundi and Somalia, see a steady increase in the percentage of returned refugees over time. A similar but more uneven rise occurs in cases such as Rwanda in both 1998 and 2001. A rapid surge in refugee returns is followed by a plateau in some cases, as in Mozambique and Serbia (1991). Other countries display a rise-and-fall pattern, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1993) and Iraq (1997), which indicates that more refugees fled the country than returned during the ten-year observation window. Finally, several countries, including the Philippines, Russia (1996 and 2004), and Turkey (1999) never increase from 0 percent returned during the entire period.

The overall pattern that emerges from the data, however, is that ten years after a conflict comes to an end, at least temporarily, the majority of refugees have *not* returned to their countries of origin. The data show that only about three in ten refugees return in that time. There are varying levels of success across the cases, but only 15 of the 53 cases are above 50 percent returned (the dashed horizontal line in Figure 2.3) at the ten-year mark. None of the cases even approaches 100 percent returned, with the highest rate of return (Serbia 1991) reaching 84.5 percent. This finding matches the aggregate, global statistics from UNHCR that show that refugee return is a relatively uncommon occurrence (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2) (UNHCR, 2021g).

When the 53 cases displayed in Figure 2.3 are combined, the aggregate data reveal additional patterns, which we display in Figures 2.4 and 2.5.

The combined data show an overall upward trend from the first year after conflict to the tenth year, as more refugees return to their countries of origin in the years after a conflict ends. In the first postconflict year, the average portion returned is 10.5 percent and the median is 6.5 percent. By the tenth year, the average is 30.9 percent and the median is 21.0 percent. Thus, the data demonstrate that return is not an immediate, onetime event but a process that unfolds over many years. Moreover, the process of return is not one of linear progress. As Figure 2.5 shows, the median cumulative percentage of refugee return declines slightly in years 9 and 10.

The overall ascending trend line, however, masks two divergent patterns. We define cases as either successful or unsuccessful. We define "success" as a country that has at least 50 percent of its refugees returned one decade after the conflict ends. This is undoubtedly a low bar for success, but one that only 28 percent of cases meet. What is more, a 50-percent cutoff, while a crude measure, is useful to demonstrate the distinct trends followed by the successful and unsuccessful cases.

Figure 2.6 displays the different trends. It plots the same data as Figure 2.4 but represents successful cases in the right panel and unsuccessful cases in the left panel. The solid trend lines show the moving average of successful and unsuccessful cases. The average unsuccessful case did experience return over time (from 8 percent in Y_0 to 19 percent in Y_{10}), but the pace of return is significantly slower than in the average successful case (which increased from 17 percent to 65 percent in the same period). This pattern among the unsuccessful cases is driven in part by eight cases that never see more than 1-percent return (Algeria 2002, Colombia 2005, Ethiopia 2003, Indonesia 2004, Philippines 2000,[8] Russian Federation 1996 and 2004, and Turkey 1999).

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[8]   As discussed in Appendix C, there are inconsistencies in UNHCR's data for the Philippines. We cannot rule out that similar problems do not exist with other cases.

FIGURE 2.3

Cumulative Percentage of Refugee Returns in 53 Cases, 1989–2006

Proportion of refugees returned (percentage)

Year since the end of conflict
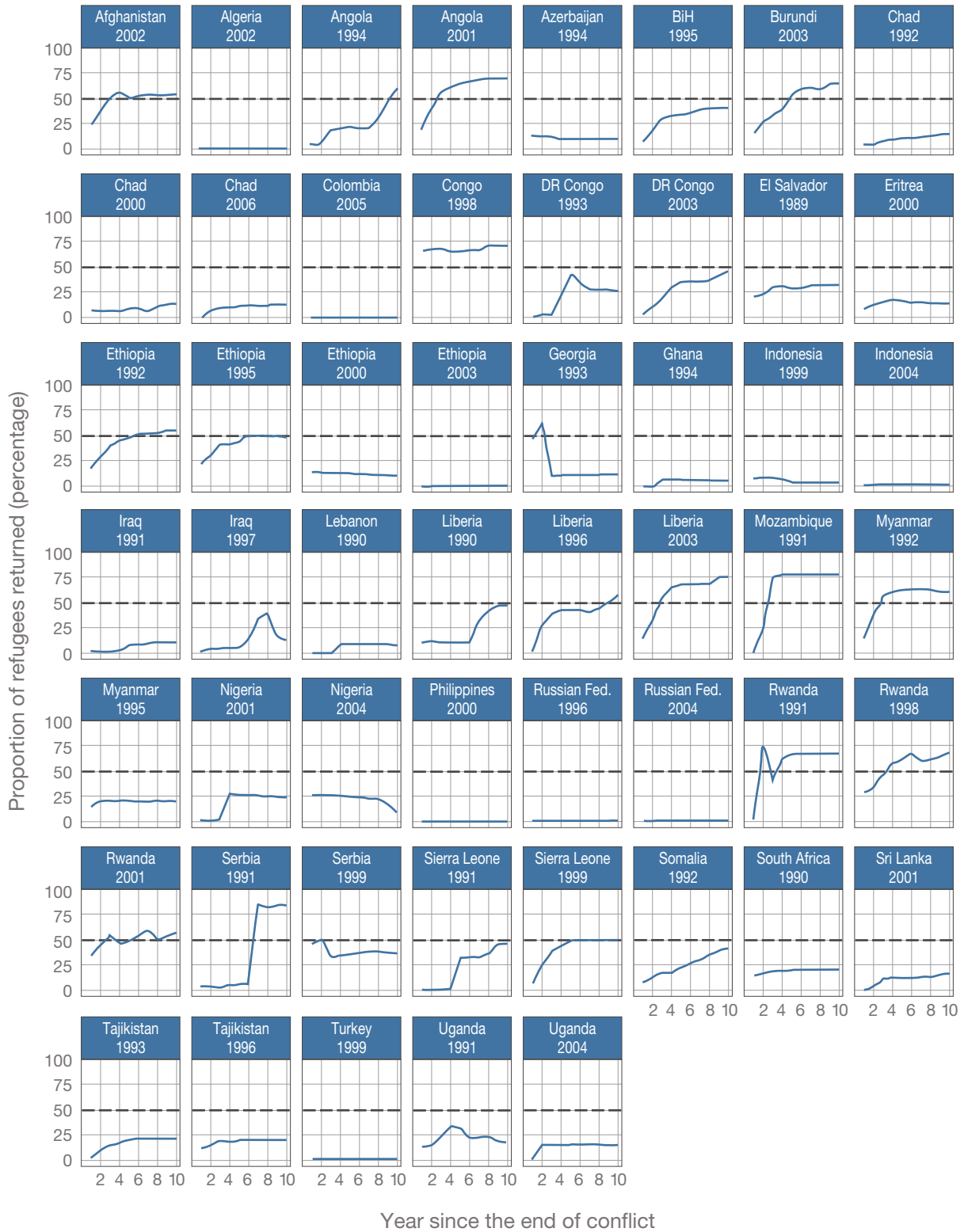
SOURCE: Authors' calculations from UNHCR Population Statistics data.
NOTE: The dashed line displays 50 percent in each plot.

FIGURE 2.4

Cumulative Percentage of Returned Refugees, by Year After Conflict Ends
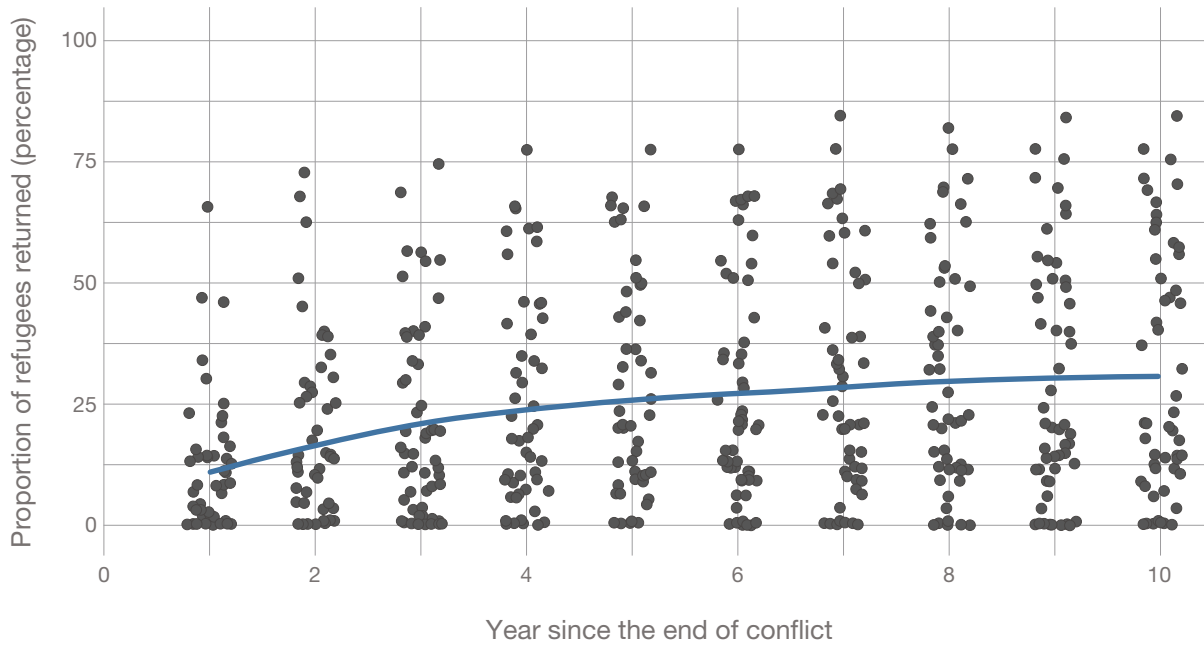
SOURCE: Authors' calculations from UNHCR Population Statistics data.

NOTE: The solid line represents the moving average.

FIGURE 2.5

Boxplot of Proportion of Refugees Returned, by Year After Conflict Ends
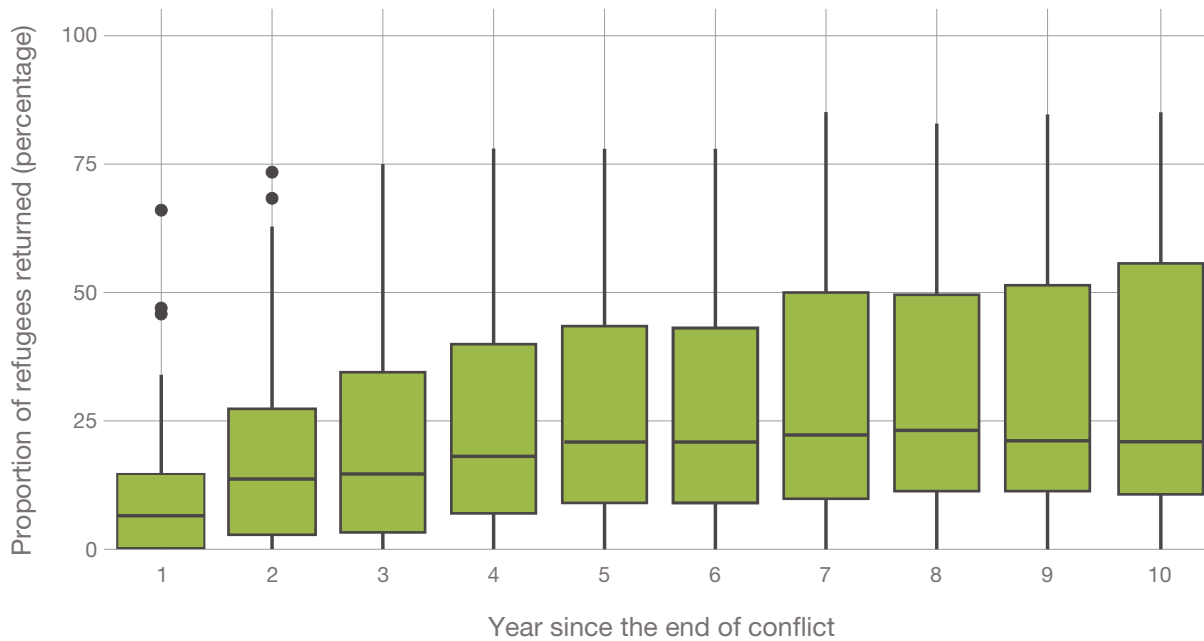
SOURCE: Authors' calculations from UNHCR Population Statistics data.

NOTE: Each boxplot displays the data for one year. The line inside the box is the fiftieth percentile, the top of the box is the seventy-fifth percentile, the bottom of the box is the twenty-fifth percentile, and the whiskers extend to the highest and lowest points, respectively, that fall within 1.5 times the interquartile range (the distance between the seventy-fifth and twenty-fifth percentiles); all other points are plotted individually as outliers.

FIGURE 2.6
Divergent Paths of Successful and Unsuccessful Cases
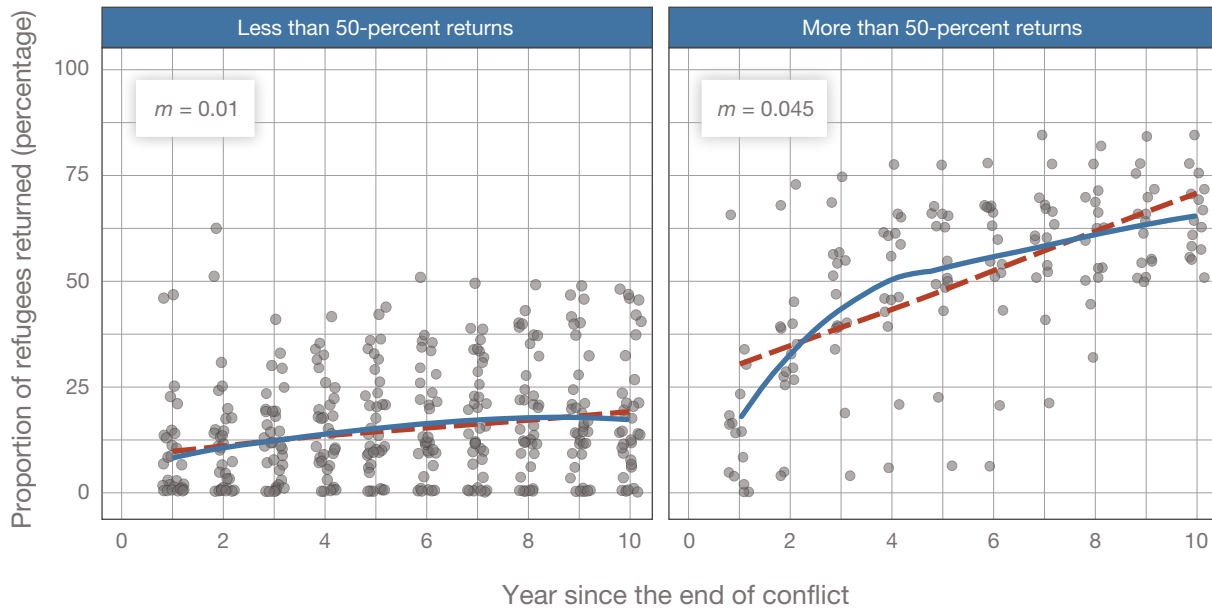
SOURCE: Authors' calculations from UNHCR Population Statistics data.
NOTE: The left panel plots the proportion of refugees returned each year for all cases that have less than 50 percent returned in year 10. The right panel does the same for all cases that have more than 50 percent returned in year 10. The solid line in each panel represents the moving average; the dashed line represents the slope of a linear regression of returns on time or years since the end of the conflict.

Reasons for Low Return Numbers

Our examination of global trends above reveals that only about a third of refugees return home even ten years after a conflict has ended. Moreover, when returns do occur, they occur rapidly in the first few years and then slow down over time. To further investigate the factors driving these trends, we explored correlations between our constructed measure of the percentage of cumulative refugee returns ten years after the end of conflict and measures of security and economic conditions for home and host countries, drawing on UNHCR data as well as other sources such as the Upsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the World Bank. Our preliminary correlational analysis of the explanatory variables suggests that even low levels of sustained conflict in the home country deter returns. Returns are more likely to occur from low-income neighboring host countries, while fewer are likely to return from high-income hosts. On the other hand, more refugees returned from host countries with larger informal economies, where we would expect them to be able to find jobs, and more refugees returned to home countries that are poorer. Our measures of security yielded ambiguous results depending on how we defined security in the home country; this suggests better measures are needed. We also note, however, that our empirical findings were sensitive to specification, and therefore additional analysis with improved measures is needed to ensure confidence in the results. Our analysis was limited to available data, and the quality of the data was inconsistent.

While our preliminary empirical analysis drawing on country data was inconclusive, exploring the relationships between measures of rates of return and driving factors should be further pursued by identifying data sources that better capture measures of stability and security such as the number, if any, of peacekeepers in the home country; levels of other international assistance figures from international indices for human

development, quality of governance, and democratization; as well as more refined measures of economic conditions related to growth and development, and access to basic services.

At the same time, we can draw on our literature review and interviews with stakeholders to delineate three main reasons for the small and declining return numbers: unresolved conflicts; lack of leadership, funding, and programming to implement the return process; and refugee preference for other solutions.

Unresolved Conflicts

A lack of political will and leadership in resolving conflicts was described in our interviews with experts as the "fundamental reason" for low return numbers. Interviewees attributed the increase in displacement and decrease in returns to a "decline in multilateralism," meaning that multilateral institutions and leading states were perceived as no longer actively engaged in problem solving and conflict resolution, and "non-resolution or partial resolution of conflicts."

Lack of Leadership, Funding, and Programming to Implement the Return Process

Lack of political will from both international powers and regional states has meant that leadership has not been in place to drive returns (Crisp, 2019; Duffy Toft, 2007; Özerdem and Sofizada, 2006). One interviewee explained that returns do not happen "if you don't have any major backers to support repatriation, and regional players don't see it in their interests to support repatriation." Implementation of facilitated repatriation is often underfunded, with uncoordinated silos for political processes, humanitarian actors, development aid, the private sector, and security. Several multilateral interviewees noted declines in programming for assisted returns and monitoring, and UNHCR offices in host countries are underfunded to facilitate return and reintegration (Morris and Salomons, 2013). A World Bank assessment described "short attention spans and inadequate assistance," with inconsistent quality and approaches in country return strategy documents and lack of clear targets and data (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015, p. 115). Further, countries of origin may lack the capacity or political will to implement their roles in return (Bradley, 2013b).

Refugee Preference for Other Solutions

Return of refugees by international law is supposed to be voluntary—that is, a choice of the refugee. Many refugees do not want to return to their countries of origin for a variety of reasons, including not wanting to return to places where they experienced, witnessed, or feared violence; and a reluctance to return to uncertainty, lack of jobs, lack of services, and minority status. The prospect of resettlement in a third country (however rare)—often in a wealthy democracy—is a draw for many. Some may feel little connection with their original homes, especially young people who have grown up in the new setting of the host country and have expectations and experiences that are different from those of their parents.

Global Governance of Refugee Returns

Global governance of refugee returns has evolved over time through both international treaties and policy documents that express an international consensus (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015; UNHCR, 1993, p. 16). The most important documents of relevance to refugee returns include the 1950 UNHCR Statute, *The 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees*, the UN General Assembly Resolution 1672 (XVI) of 1961, *1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, *The OAU Convention* (1969), Conclusion 40 (thirty-sixth Session) (UNHCR, 1967; UNHCR, 1974), and the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (UNHCR, 2018c). Multiple UN Executive Committee decisions add additional clarification and details to these (UNHCR, 2009).

Key concepts within these foundational documents are that return should be voluntary, take place in safety and with dignity, engage the country of asylum and the country of origin, be facilitated by UNHCR, and interact with development planning. Countries of origin should provide returned refugees with their full rights and privileges as citizens. UNHCR should lead the negotiation of tripartite agreements that establish conditions for return, involving the country of origin and the country of asylum.

The most recent document, the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, calls for expanded access to third-country solutions, support for conditions in countries of origin for a safe and dignified return, and links between return efforts and development planning in the country of origin. It also describes interim solutions and complementary pathways as detailed above (UNHCR, 2018c). In particular, it aims to "(i) ease pressures on host countries; (ii) enhance refugee self-reliance; (iii) expand access to third county solutions; and (iv) support conditions in country of origin for return in safety and dignity" (UNHCR, 2018c, p. 2). It also establishes the Global Refugee Forum, which brings countries together every four years to share best practices and work toward goals (UNHCR, 2018c, p. 4).[9]

A set of documents from the early 2000s lays out specific policies and procedures for returns. These include the UNHCR Operational Framework for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities of 2000, the Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern 2003, the 1996 UNHCR Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation, and the UNHCR 2004 Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2004). The 2004 Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities is an in-depth document with tools, checklists, and policies; it develops a framework for returns called the "4R's": repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconstruction.

Relatedly, the Joint IDP Profiling Service published the influential 2018 *Durable Solutions Analysis Guide: A Tool to Measure Progress for Durable Solutions for IDPs*, which provides implementation guidance for the *2010 IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons*, with the motivation that durable solutions for IDPs are so complex that they have become "stalled" (Kivela et al., 2018). These documents describe eight criteria areas for durable solutions for IDPs: security, standard of living, livelihoods, housing and compensation, documentation, family reunification, participation in public affairs, and justice. However, these documents are for the particular circumstances of IDPs, and while there is overlap in issues, there is no similar recent document for refugees.

Conflicting Values, Return Concepts, or Goals Regarding Refugee Return

While global legal and policy frameworks exist to manage refugee returns, many of their provisions are aspirational, unclear, or not implemented because they lack detail, resources, and leadership. Crisp, 2019, argues that the UN standards described are under pressure and are often not met, and that their implementation is "patchy." In addition, despite this wealth of documents, the concept of *success in return* remains ambiguous, reflecting conflicting goals and values. A key theme from our interviews is that *there is little consensus on what successful refugee return is, therefore making it difficult to plan and measure*. Studies have argued for a "delinking" between physical return and repatriation that goes beyond just crossing the border back to the country of origin. The reality of repatriation is that it may proceed in stages rather than be a one-off event, or may even proceed on a different timeline than humanitarian programming (Hovil, 2010; Stein and Cuny, 1994).

Our interviews surfaced multiple issues that reflect conflicting values, return concepts, or goals related to how the humanitarian community (in particular, multilaterals) implements return policy. Many of these

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[9] For more information on the Global Refugee Forum, see UNHCR, undated a.

themes are also echoed in the literature. As several of our interviewees described, "what counts as return" is not understood in the same way by different actors in different contexts (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015). Data about returns in different settings rely on different definitions of who has returned, rendering what one termed an "inoperable data set" (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015). These conflicting visions impede coherent and effective return policy and planning. We identified five such conflicts that inhibit developing a clear return policy and discuss these below.

Crossing the Border Versus Sustainable Return

UNHCR counts returns by the number of people who have crossed the border back into their countries of origin. However, some of these returns do not offer a sustainable return to stability or quality of life. In particular, returnees often become internally displaced inside their countries of origin, continuing repeated cycles of displacement (UNHCR, 2020b). One of our multilateral interviewees explained, "We don't measure the situation for people who have gone back. We don't have indicators of socioeconomic integration. . . . We have to look at the quality of returns and how to facilitate return in a way that makes sure that the cycle of conflict doesn't just repeat itself." Another noted, "As soon as they had crossed the border, we viewed it as successful. But we have learned in retrospect that is not true." Furthermore, return can be an "iterative, staggered, or cyclical" process (UNHCR, 2004). Some refugees do not return in full at once, instead returning to test out the situation temporarily before fully deciding to return or sending some family members back but not others. Some may prefer to go back to their countries as visitors rather than live there (UNHCR, 2018c). Some may also go through a "yo-yo" or "gray period" in which some family members make visits or temporary stays in the home country to better understand the situation or help reestablish the household before the full family returns, resulting in families living in separation (Huser et al., 2019).

Returning to an Urban or Other Area in the Home Country Versus Returning to the Original Home or Region

Many returned refugees do not return to their communities of origin but rather to another location, often in urban areas (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015). Some migration to urban areas would have happened even if forced displacement had not occurred, for reasons related to economic opportunities, generational preferences, or rural to urban migration patterns. One interviewee described it as a "generational divide" (UNHCR, 2020b). Young people may not want to return to their places of origin, and those who had refuge in urban areas often do not want to return to rural areas (Bascom, 1996; Butman, 2009; Holt, 1996; Joireman and Meitzner Yoder, 2016; UNHCR, 2018c). Furthermore, when refugees return, they might become displaced once again, measures to determine when someone has moved for economic reasons versus becoming an IDP once more are not clear, and measures to determine when such a person might cease to be an IDP are lacking.

Restoring the Home Country to Its Previous Ethnic Distribution Versus Supporting Minorities in Living Where They Feel Safest

Many returnees do not return to their previous communities but rather congregate in ethnic enclaves. Minorities in particular often feel safest when living in communities of their ethnic group, especially if they had fled because they experienced ethnically motivated violence. As several multilateral officials described, "[W]hat you see is the separation of populations over time," as returning communities to their previous ethnic distribution may be unachievable. The literature also finds that ethnic distributions after a refugee situation often do not return to their prior distributions (Bradley, 2013b; Joireman, 2017). At the same

time, our interviews suggested that many multilateral officials viewed such supporting returns to minority enclaves as presenting "moral ambiguity." On the one hand, returnees have the right to live where they prefer. On the other hand, multilateral support for returns to such enclaves can "facilitate locking in the consequences of ethnic cleansing" or even lead to the displacement of others who do not fit the ethnic profile of the enclave's ethnic makeup. Over time, this sorting of people leads previously mixed communities to become more homogeneous. One official believed that the goal should therefore be "[n]ot restoring the country to what it was before, but restoring basic principles of political, economic, social, and religious rights, with the machinery to protect those rights and safeguard populations from the exploitations that might have precipitated their leaving" (Bradley, 2013b).

Voluntary Return of Refugees Versus Asylum Decisions by Host Countries

The principle of non-refoulement, central to the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, posits that refugees should not be forced to return (UNHCR, 2018c). While refugees exercise some agency over whether to return, there are degrees of voluntary return. There is a significant gray area, or a spectrum between voluntary return and forced return, where refugees experience pressures for return short of being physically or legally forced (Chimni, 1999; Duffy Toft, 2007). Return may not be physically "forced," but refugees may see no other option. Pressures to return can come from adverse conditions in the host country of asylum, such as threats to personal safety or well-being, pressure from neighbors or local politics to leave, economic distress in displacement, or lack of rights and opportunities that would enable local integration (Mixed Migration Platform, 2017). There can also be interventions that some of our interviewees viewed as coercive: assisted return programs that include financial incentives (Morris and Salomons, 2013) and overly optimistic information about home country conditions presented to refugees from trusted sources. There is currently no way to assess the voluntariness of returns because the decisionmaking is not observed and is difficult to measure. These challenges are reflected in a range of views expressed in our interviews:

> "They return when there is a lack of an acceptable alternative."

> "Facilitating support is contentious as it may result in premature returns."

> "Go back because you have no better options? Is that coerced?"

Yet refugees can be left without a durable solution if all parties responsible for the three durable solutions decide not to implement the durable solution for which they have decisionmaking authority. This can happen when refugees cannot or decide not to return or conditions do not allow it, when host countries decide not to grant permanent asylum or integrate them, or when resettlement countries do not accept refugees, thus compelling refugees to return even if that is not their choice. If all three parties responsible for any one of the durable solutions decide not to implement their durable solutions, then refugees can end up stuck among those three decisions for decades and achieve no durable solution, as indeed has happened to the majority of twenty-first-century refugees.

Reconciling Expectations That Displaced People Have Between Conditions in Host and Home Countries

Another challenge is separating issues related to forced displacement from considerations related to economic migration. As one interviewee noted, "Reasons to leave are not the same as reasons to return. You might flee conflict but may not return until you can get a job." In other words, people flee for security reasons but choose to return or not on the basis of a combination of economic and security reasons. After living in

a country of asylum, a refugee may have economic expectations that are different from those typical in the home country (Fransen and Kuschminder, 2012).

Another example relates to refugees from Afghanistan, where several European states established Tripartite Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with the government of Afghanistan and UNHCR concerning the voluntary return of Afghan nationals. These MoUs were to provide refugees and asylum seekers with information and counseling, ensuring the voluntary nature of return and monitoring of returns. However, in practice, UNHCR offices in Europe have no capacity or resources to provide these services. UNHCR found that the MoUs were largely being used to effect forced returns. As a result, the MoUs now primarily serve to facilitate the compulsory return to Afghanistan of people who have been found not to need international protection.

Summary

Despite sustained voluntary return being the preferred policy solution for refugee situations, taking into account whether refugees prefer to return and where to return to, the data show that only in a minority of cases do a majority of refugees return. Analysis of UNHCR data of 53 postconflict cases between 1989 and 2008 reveals that most refugees have not returned to their countries of origin ten years after conflict end. Only 15 out of 53 cases witnessed at least half of refugees returning. On average, only about a third of refugees have returned during that time. We also found that the highest rates of return were during the first four years after the conflict, tapering off after that.

On the other hand, the other two durable solutions defined by the United Nations—local integration and resettlement in a third country—happen even less. Unresolved refugee situations occur for many reasons, including lack of political will or leadership, weak coordination in implementing returns, and refugees' preferences for other options. While multiple legal, policy, and technical documents lay out principles and steps for return, these are not specific enough to create clear conditions for consistent policymaking. In particular, policymaking is stymied by conceptual and practical issues related to defining success in returns. Another challenge is unclear goals for return—that is, whether successful return means crossing a border or achieving sustainable integration, or returning to a community of origin or having new opportunities in urban areas. Other unresolved issues include the extent to which return efforts restore a community to its prior ethnic distribution; the permanence of return; and the need for clearer definitions, principles, and criteria for the voluntariness of return.

A Framework for Evaluating Returns

To further examine the reasons for the declining rates of return over the past few decades, we must first identify the factors that are likely to influence returns. Research to date has assessed the salience of a variety of factors in return decisionmaking. Their relative significance in different situations is likely to depend on both the wider context and numerous factors affecting individuals and their households. Researchers have classified these factors as *structural* (conditions in host and home countries), *individual* (demographic and social attributes), and *policy- and governance-related* (incentives and disincentives) (Black et al., 2004). These factors are also likely to interact and work together, or work at cross-purposes. In this chapter, we lay out a simple conceptual framework that incorporates these ideas and builds on existing research, and our discussion of possible reasons behind the decline in returns over the past three decades. In our new framework, we pay particular attention to the role of governments, multilaterals, and NGOs, extracting evidence from our literature review, key informant interviews, and case study analysis. This is an extension of the conceptual framework developed by Black et al., 2004. This is salient in particular in helping us develop recommendations for PRM and the broader humanitarian and development communities.

Conceptual Framework

We posit a four-part framework of refugee return that incorporates conditions in the home country (or country of origin), conditions in the host country, activities of governments and multilaterals that likely interact with conditions in both the home and host countries, and characteristics of returnees and their households (Figure 3.1). We explore each of these factors separately below and then briefly illustrate how they are likely to interact with each other.

Characteristics of Refugees

Individual characteristics of refugees, including gender, age, and minority status, play a role in returns, though they closely intersect with the other drivers of return discussed previously (Black et al., 2004). In terms of gender, displacement and return can contribute to greater burdens on women, leaving them isolated and their households vulnerable to experiencing poverty—especially when they are solely responsible for earning an income and providing care (Brown et al., 2019; CARE International, undated; Hanmer et al., 2018). Traditional gender roles may evolve in circumstances of displacement and returns but often without supports to cope with the added burdens that displacement brings (Lopez, 1998). Moreover, women may face additional obstacles during displacement (either in the host country or upon returning home) in terms of securing livelihood opportunities, gaining access to community resources, tapping into social and legal services, and even leveraging informal networks for support. The context in which displacement occurs—rural versus urban—is also likely to have some effect on the severity of these issues (Onder and Sayed, 2019; Stefanovic and Loizides, 2017).

FIGURE 3.1
Four-Component Framework for Evaluating Refugee Returns

| Activities of governments, multilaterals, and NGOs |
| Conditions in host country |
| Conditions in home country |
| Characteristics of refugees |
| Refugee returns |
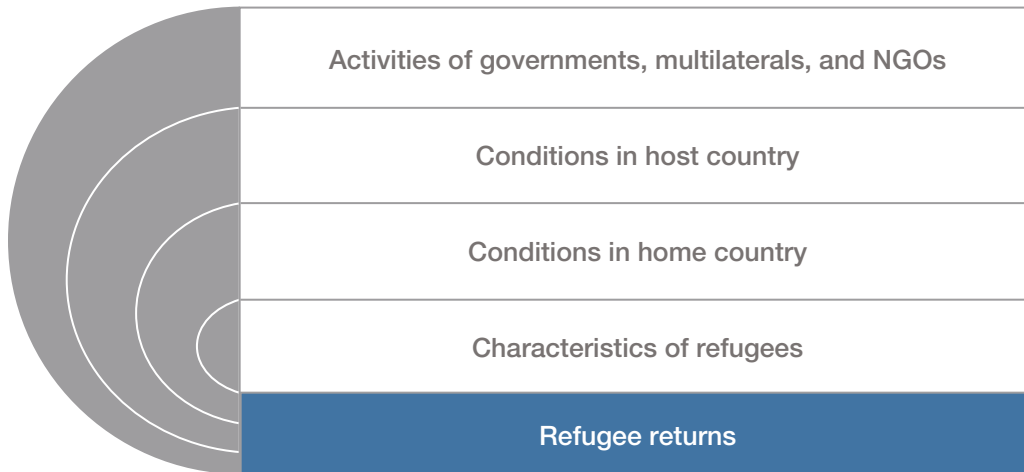
Displaced women and girls also face heightened risk of forced and early marriages and pressure to engage in sex work in circumstances of extreme poverty and decreased rule of law, and in the absence of traditional social support networks. These risks can be exacerbated in shared, temporary, or communal accommodation arrangements common during displacement, particularly the risks of gender-based violence (Freedman, 2016). Rule of law and legal frameworks in both displaced and return situations are likely to be weak or non-existent; and women are particularly susceptible to discrimination with regard to laws governing inheritance, housing, land, and property ownership (Mhaissen and Hodges, 2019), ultimately affecting their integration during displacement and return. Other acute challenges include poor access to sanitation and health care, as well as suspicion, survivor stigma, and social exclusion arising from conservative social mores, particularly in the context of widespread gender-based violence (Rudaw, 2019).

Age is another factor that has been found to influence returns. Younger refugees who have spent a significant period of time outside their home countries may feel less attached to the home country compared with their older counterparts. They may also adapt more readily in their places of displacement, linguistically and culturally, and may have fewer assets in their home countries that they wish to protect or recover. Mandatory military conscription for males of a certain age may also actively discourage returns. For those who do choose to return, younger refugees may prefer (and this may be the case for returnees in general) to return to an urban area with greater employment opportunities and amenities rather than a rural part of the country from which they may have been initially displaced (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015; Onder and Sayed, 2019). Related to age is family status and structure, including the number of dependents (children, elderly, and disabled), which may lead to prioritizing the types of services needed, such as education for children and health care for the elderly and the disabled (Omata, 2013; Onder and Sayed, 2019). The disrupted social circumstances of refugees can further exacerbate the vulnerability of children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, and complicate both temporary arrangements and decisions regarding whether and when to attempt returning home.

Minority status has also been found to influence returns, particularly after ethnic-based conflicts where genocide and ethnic cleansing occurred. In the Balkans cases, for example, minority status was found to be an important determinant of whether refugees chose to return and where they chose to return to—preferring ethnic enclaves as a proxy for security and protection (Adelman and Barkan, 2011; Ambroso, 2006; Dahlman and Tuathail, 2005; Toal and Dahlman, 2011). This preference also relates to views toward the home coun-

try, personal traumas experienced, feelings of belonging and identity, and in turn, views toward the home country and willingness to return (Salloum, 2020; Stefanovic, Loizides, and Parsons, 2015; van Zoonen and Wirya, 2017).

Conditions in the Home Country

Safety, Security, and Rule of Law

Among the most frequently cited factors influencing return are the conditions in the home country, such as safety, security, and the rule of law (Culbertson and Robinson, 2017; Dahlman and Tuathail, 2005; Joireman, 2017; Stefanovic, Loizides, and Parsons, 2015). The emphasis on safety and security in the home country as key drivers of return was further reiterated during our expert interviews, as well as interviews and focus groups conducted in the case studies. Studies have shown that improved security "consistently increases" returns of Syrian refugees (Onder and Sayed, 2019), and safety and security are "by far" their biggest concern as gathered in surveys (UNHCR, 2018b; Yahya, 2018). Other studies have found that both specific personal danger and wider generalized insecurity have been significant deterrent factors for Iraqi refugees considering return (Chatty and Mansour, 2011; Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015), and a "paramount precondition" for return generally (Sydney, 2019). Distrust of home country security services is very highly correlated with unwillingness to return, though half of those willing to return are also distrustful (Sydney, 2019).

Further, research has shown that aggregating stability assessments at the national level can mask local-level conditions that affect willingness to return to specific areas. In Afghanistan, for example, ethnic discrimination was a factor limiting returns in comparatively peaceful areas (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015). Research on returns in Kosovo also highlighted the importance of returnees' expectations of safety and "strong" variance by ethnicity (Özerdem and Payne, 2019). Nonrepresentative surveys of Somali and Tamil refugees in 2004 found that peace, safety, and security were primary considerations for their return, with safety a top priority for Kurds as well (Black et al., 2004). One manifestation of this pattern is that refugees tend not to return to areas where they would be the minority ethnicity, "unless supported by a preponderant use of force" (Adelman and Barkan, 2011, p. 20), and the opportunity to live in an area populated by people of the same ethnic group (Joireman, 2017; Toal and Dahlman, 2011).

Property Restitution and Financial Compensation

Access to shelter upon return is a significant factor in refugee decisionmaking and has been shown to be particularly important in the cases of Afghanistan, BiH, Syria, and Liberia, to name a few (Omata, 2013).[1] In the case of Syria, for example, 56 percent of refugees who had property before the conflict said their property was now either fully destroyed or partially destroyed and uninhabitable (UNHCR, 2018b). Much of this destruction was deliberate (Graham-Harrison, 2019) and, in some cases, led to expropriation and redevelopment designed at least in part to alter the demographics of certain areas (Adleh and Favier, 2017). Related issues with documentation and property law (Human Rights Watch, 2018) also present a significant impediment for Syrian refugee return (Onder and Sayed, 2019), as do issues relating to property rights more generally.

Repatriation programs have also often included compensation schemes, often to account for lost or destroyed property and to generally facilitate return and reintegration. The concept drew broader currency after the Cambodian, Guatemalan, and Bosnian repatriation efforts in the 1990s (Tegenbos and Vlassenroot, 2018) and has been an element of discussions around an Israel-Palestine peace deal and the contemporary questions of Rohingya (Associated Press, 2019) and Syrian returns. Property restitution and rights were a central feature of the international community's attempts to facilitate minority return in BiH in particular. Though initially unsuccessful owing to limited resources and lack of an enforcement capability, the early com-

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[1] For a broader discussion of reparations, see Bradley, 2013a, pp. 13, 14.

BOX 3.1

Property Restitution in Burundi: The Case of the National Commission on Land and Other Assets (CNTB)

CNTB was created after the end of the 1993–2005 civil war in Burundi to serve as a third-party mediator in the resolution of land disputes (some going back as far as 1972) stemming from repeated cycles of forced migration. CNTB initially enjoyed some level of independence, but it also suffered from a lack of enforcement of some of its decisions, particularly those that involved evictions of illegal occupants. CNTB decisions could be appealed in courts and overturned, which became a source of conflict between returnees who were claiming land that they were forced to leave and the new occupants. Eventually, CNTB was placed under the auspices of the presidency, increasing its enforcement mandate but losing its reputation as an independent agency. Moreover, a series of controversial policies to retroactively return taken land, even in situations where returnees and locals had agreed to share disputed areas, further worsened relationships between the groups (Isbell, 2017; Schwartz, 2019).

mitment to establish a formal entity to process property claims to facilitate returns laid the legal groundwork to ultimately restore property rights to their rightful owners as more robust institutional mechanisms took hold (Davies, 2004). Some European countries have also offered compensation for more recent asylum seekers who voluntarily return home (Buring and Tidey, 2018). However, recent research on the Syrian conflict has suggested that the effect of the availability of stipends or compensation on return calculations is complex. In one specific cash-assistance scenario, a higher share of Syrian refugees expressed a willingness to return in the absence of a stipend than with one, though raising the amount of the stipend increased expressed willingness to return (Onder and Sayed, 2019). Such incentive structures raise ethical concerns, however, particularly in circumstances where economically deprived refugees face risks to their lives and well-being in their home countries.

Economic Opportunities

Literature on refugees has emphasized the importance of home country economic opportunities in encouraging returns (Culbertson and Robinson, 2017; Klinthäll, 2007; Stefansson, 2006), but only after security has been addressed (Black et al., 2004). More recent research supports this finding that suggests that economic considerations are not a decisive pull factor for Syrian refugees contemplating return, with most expressing a willingness to return to poor economic conditions and even poor housing, provided political conditions are more favorable (IMPACT Initiatives, 2018; Yahya, 2018).

Basic Services

Basic services (utilities, health care, education) can also be a significant factor in return calculations, particularly in postconflict situations where such services are typically found to be severely compromised or even nonexistent. Damaged or poor infrastructure can be an impediment to returns, as was the case in Sierra Leone in particular and in many cases more generally, where experts have emphasized the importance of basic services and infrastructure in making a sustainable return possible (Mooney et al., 2007). This has also been found to be an impediment to the return of refugees to Syria, where half of the country's overall social infrastructure has been devastated or rendered nonfunctional, with health services especially hard hit (Mhaissen and Hodges, 2019). Nonetheless, according to a 2018 survey of Syrian IDP and refugee returnees, respondents weighed decisions to return by comparing conditions in their homes or places of origin with conditions in their places of displacement. Approximately 39 percent of Syrian IDP returnees and 25 percent of Syrian refugee returnees cited lack of basic services in their places of displacement as a primary push factor for return (IMPACT Initiatives, 2018, p. 22). Refugee returnees (39 percent) were more likely to cite lack of

economic opportunities in their places of displacement as the primary reason for return. Nevertheless, many returned knowing that services would be similarly poor in their communities of origin (IMPACT Initiatives, 2018), suggesting that service provision is not a decisive factor in certain circumstances.

Access to Information

The ability to make an informed decision is a crucial component of the "voluntariness" of any return decision (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1996). This is important not just for ethical reasons but also for the sustainability of any return process. Returnees in Burundi and Sri Lanka, for example, were given overly optimistic information about circumstances in their home communities, leading to issues with local populations upon arrival; and refugees from South Sudan and Bangladesh experienced general panic about expectations that they return without adequate information (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015; Silvela, 2019; Sullivan, 2019). In BiH, unduly positive messaging from external actors undermined their credibility with refugee communities, who knew otherwise from their own networks (Walsh, Black, and Koser, 1999). Other research has demonstrated the various bases on which refugees evaluate and assess the credibility and validity of information and sources, underscoring the active agency involved in decisionmaking (Koser, 1997). These historical examples are relevant today; just over half of Syrian refugees surveyed in 2018 said they lacked information to make an informed decision on return (UNHCR, 2018b). Refugees look at the circumstances of IDPs as an indicator of whether it is safe for them to return home. Key informant interviewees noted that refugees typically rely on word of mouth, test visits, and social media as their main sources of information on safety and security.

Social Networks and Personal Connectedness

Social and family networks can also be important factors in return dynamics, by facilitating the flow of information, access to property and documentation, reintegration, and "circular" returns. The role of social networks in providing information about the environment for returns has been noted particularly in the cases of Iraq, BiH, Angola, and Syria. In Angola, for example, local mediators were found to be important facilitators of reintegration upon arrival in Angola (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015); and in Syria, returns were influenced by conditions on the ground as well as individuals' desire to reunite with members of their social networks. The perception that others in the social network were returning was noted as a driver of returns (IMPACT Initiatives, 2018), and studies that have empirically investigated the role of social capital find evidence of its importance in influencing the decision to return (Stefanovic, Loizides, and Parsons, 2015).

Tied to social networks is one's personal feeling of belonging to a community and, in turn, a place the community calls home (Warner, 1994). Hovil, 2010, describes the three levels of belonging to a place, to a people, and to a polity, the latter conferring the formal recognition of someone's national identity through citizenship and the rights associated with it. The strength of each of these individually and in combination likely influences a displaced person's perceptions toward return. For example, ethnic minorities may feel a belonging to a specific place and a people but not necessarily to the polity or the state that governs the geographic area. Deprivation of citizenship rights, persecution, and neglect all play into the relationship with the polity (Hovil, 2010; Stefanovic, Loizides, and Parsons, 2015; van Zoonen and Wirya, 2017).

Efforts and Progress at Reconciliation

While reconciliation can be somewhat abstract, it is also often an important aspect for sustainable returns, particularly in countries where there has been intercommunal violence, such as BiH (Englbrecht, 2001) and Rwanda. The cessation of armed conflict is in itself not necessarily a sufficient basis for safe returns, as insecurity can remain long after military operations have ended (Onder and Sayed, 2019). Moreover, there is also the role that identity, place, and reconciliation played out during the return of Guatemalan refugees from Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s (Stepputat, 1994). More recent research has shown that reconciliation

progress is a significant concern for Syrians considering return as well (Mhaissen and Hodges, 2019). Important factors include trust among ethnic and religious communities, as well as a need to address the ways in which returnees might be viewed by locals as having abandoned the country. A key informant interview with a Balkans expert noted that returnees faced significant hurdles because of the psychological and emotional problems stemming from the war that home communities suffered. This is particularly difficult in conflict contexts based on interethnic violence.

Another important factor is longer-term governance and reconciliation at the national and local levels in order to maintain peace and security and increase the likelihood of sustained returns.

Conditions in the Host Country

In addition to conditions in the home country, conditions in the host country are also posited to be important. These conditions include job opportunities, housing conditions, and the general environment surrounding refugees in terms of whether the host country and population are welcoming or hostile. One limited survey of refugees in Iraq, Colombia, and Myanmar found that poor living conditions in the host country were the most common motivation (30.4 percent) for return (Sydney, 2019).

Economic Opportunities, Work Restrictions, and Social Networks

Several studies point to the importance of job opportunities combined with social networks. Those often go hand in hand, as employment in many countries is frequently found through personal contacts, networks, and word of mouth (Omata, 2013; Stefanovic, Loizides, and Parsons, 2015). On the other hand, other research has shown that poor economic opportunities, including the right to work legally, as well as economic prospects in the host country, may or may not drive a desire to return, and this can often be improved by facilitating access to needs such as education and training (Onder and Sayed, 2019). This research finds that the opportunity to work, develop skills, and earn a livelihood may also provide refugees with the tools and resources to sustainably return, assuming it is safe to do so (Onder and Sayed, 2019). Access to employment opportunities may also be influenced by general restrictions on movement and work imposed by the host country. For example, there may be restrictions on the sectors or occupations that refugees can work in, or they may be restricted in movement because of the fear of being apprehended by the authorities (Janmyr, 2016; Kumar et al., 2018; Omata, 2013; Stefanovic, Loizides, and Parsons, 2015). Notably, however, other recent surveys have suggested that poor economic conditions have been a significant push factor in the return of many Syrian refugees, with 39 percent of refugee respondents citing a "lack of economic opportunities" in the host countries as their primary return factors (IMPACT Initiatives, 2018).

BOX 3.2

Determinants of Return: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Two studies utilized a vignette approach in household surveys in Lebanon to assess Syrian refugees' intentions to return to Syria. Both studies found that pull factors or conditions in Syria were stronger and more direct drivers of return considerations compared with conditions in the host country or push factors. Chief among the pull factors were safety, economic opportunities, availability of public services, and personal networks in the home country. Interestingly, both studies also found that a change in control (or nonregime control) is associated with an increased likelihood of return. The effect of conditions in the host country was less clear in both studies. However, there is some evidence that improving conditions in the host country is associated with intentions to return, perhaps because refugees feel that they are able to accumulate the necessary resources and are better prepared to commence a safe return (Alrababa'h et al., 2020; Onder and Sayed, 2019).

General Environment in Host Country and Relations with Host Community

Refugees have also reported a sense of precariousness with remaining in their host countries owing to their uncertain legal status (Janmyr, 2016; Kumar et al., 2018). Host governments determine the rights of refugees, including access to public services. National politics can also prevent refugee integration, and host country governments in some cases may actively encourage return. On the other hand, in other contexts, refugee status can be complex, as in the case of Greek Cypriots who fled northern Cyprus seeking refuge in their own "territorially reduced, nation state" (Zetter, 1999), or ethnic Serbs who fled Kosovo for Serbia. Moreover, within a displaced community, members may have varying feelings of belonging, suggesting that a singular approach to promoting returns may not be appropriate (Brun, 2001). Regional instability and conflict can affect both home and host countries. Host country citizens may be resentful toward refugees if they perceive them to cause strain on public services, increase competition for scarce jobs, and, in some cases, pose a threat to ethnic, religious, and demographic balances (Kumar et al., 2018). Local communities may be welcoming or hostile, influencing refugee willingness (and ability) to remain in the host country.

Housing Conditions and Access to Basic Services

Overall, favorable conditions in the host country encourage refugees to remain, while negative conditions promote return. For example, refugees living in camps are more likely to return than those living in housing in cities and towns (Black, 2001; Tuathail, 2010). Camps may be overcrowded, and the living conditions there or in rural areas are often poor. Another determinant is whether there is access to schooling. While schooling in the home country tends to be poor because of destroyed schooling infrastructure and a lack of learning materials and teaching staff, the decision to remain or return is further complicated by the relatively higher financial costs of attending school in host countries, as in the case of Syrian refugees (Culbertson and Constant, 2015; Onder and Sayed, 2019). Similarly, access to basic health care will differ based on displacement context, and in some cases refugees may have better access to health care in host countries (IMPACT Initiatives, 2018; Onder and Sayed, 2019).

Role of National and International Organizations

The third set of factors is the role of national and international organizations.

Security and Stabilization Efforts

International organizations and nongovernmental actors are critical for the provision of security and stability after a conflict (Culbertson and Robinson, 2017), which can help prevent returned refugees from fleeing again (Isser and van der Auweraert, 2009; Schwartz, 2018). These organizations can also enact specific policies and activities that enable, encourage, or discourage return, such as promoting efforts at property restitution (Displacement Solutions and Norwegian Refugee Council, 2018; Harvey, 2006; Joireman, 2017; Stefansson, 2006; Williams, 2006) or providing transportation or stipends. Particularly after severe episodes of displacement, governments are often keen to promote refugee returns as part of a broader project of nation-building and/or rebuilding and will encourage co-nationals to come home (Schwartz, 2018).

There are numerous examples of this role playing out. As discussed in Chapter Two, the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol outline the rights of refugees, as well as the legal obligations of states to protect them. The core principle is non-refoulement, which asserts that refugees should not be returned to countries where they face serious threats to their life or freedom. This is now considered a rule of customary international law. The convention and protocol have also influenced individual states' approach to refugee return. EU law, Directive 2008/115/EC, for example, puts in place common standards and procedures for processing asylum claims and accepting or rejecting refugee status (UNHCR, 1954; UNHCR, 1967). There has been a growing trend of people from the Middle East returning from Europe

under assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) schemes, which are funded by governments and administered by organizations such as the International Office of Migration (IOM). Examples include the German Reintegration and Emigration Program and the European Reintegration Network. These programs can typically provide services such as transportation, meeting upon arrival, housing support, training, access to health care through charitable organizations, and financial support in setting up a business. Yet, they have been criticized as pushing the bounds of voluntary return, as they involve governments providing incentives and facilitation to return in the face of poor options for refugees, or have led to people returning to places with ongoing violence or where reintegration is elusive (Encinas, 2016; Morris and Salomons, 2013). The IOM rolled out new guidance for these programs in 2018 (IOM, 2018). While refugees exercise some agency over whether to return under non-refoulement, there are degrees of voluntary return. Factors that might drive asylum seekers to return include feelings of social isolation, poor employment prospects, uncertainty with legal status, and possible deportation without a safety net. Thus, they may perceive these programs as a preferred option (Mixed Migration Platform, 2017).

Complementarity of Humanitarian and Livelihood Assistance

Humanitarian organizations address short-term needs, including cross-border returns, while development organizations assist with longer-term solutions after return. These activities are often disconnected in return efforts, and thus cooperation between multilaterals and governments is essential. This idea has recently been gaining traction through a greater emphasis on a humanitarian-development-peace nexus, which emphasizes greater coordination across humanitarian and development efforts to bring about sustained conflict resolution, reconciliation, and long-term prosperity (Barakat and Milton, 2020; Fanning and Fullwood-Thomas, 2019; Lie, 2020). Tripartite or quadripartite agreements for return provide the foundation for return efforts, but these efforts are dwindling, according to a key informant interview with a multilateral official. In addition to the end of the conflict and assurances of peace and security, sustainable solutions are more readily reached with the commitment of multilateral support and resources as well as the home country government's will and commitment through policies and programs.[2] Institutions overseeing returns can also encourage and support inclusive and participatory governance and play a key role in promoting and providing technical assistance in addressing fair compensation, reconciliation, and lasting peace, all of which require a concerted, multipronged effort. Finally, these institutions are critical in data collection and dissemination to track outcomes. In general, systematic and comprehensive data are difficult to collect and not available; thus, moving forward, international organizations will likely need to play a key role in data collection and access if solutions are going to be found.

In Angola and other contexts, UNHCR and its partners tried to adapt both governmental and community-based approaches to reconstruction and reintegration, while emphasizing the official governmental channels over the informal structures and networks. On the one hand, governments emerging from conflict often do not have the funds, manpower, or skills necessary to effectively oversee and manage reintegration activities. On the other hand, community empowerment programs can reconstruct the very power hierarchies that sparked the conflict and can also exclude the most vulnerable (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter, 2015).

Interactions Among Various Aspects of the Framework

A main takeaway from our review of these multiple factors is that returns depend on many different actions by many different actors. There is no one single key to successful return in all cases. Our interviewees emphasized the coordinated steps that must take place together for successful return, as illustrated in Figure 3.2.

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[2]   Tripartite agreements are between the United Nations, the host country, and the home country, while quadripartite agreements are between the same three sides with the addition of refugee representatives.

FIGURE 3.2

Steps and Actors in a Road Map to Return

Monitor safety and security
- National government
- UN peacekeepers

Support longer-term needs in livelihoods and services
- National government
- Refugee community
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Facilitate border crossing
- UNHCR
- Host government
- National government

Provide information to refugees
- UNHCR
- Host government
- National government

Resolve conflict
- Parties to conflict
- National governments
- External government or UN agencies

Support rule of law and resolve property disputes
- National government

Develop tri/quadripartite agreements
- UN agencies
- National government
- Refugee community
- Host government

Support basic needs upon arrival
- National government
- Refugee community
- UN agencies

These include conflict resolution, the tri- or quadripartite agreements that provide the foundation for returns, information availability for refugees, facilitation of border crossing, meeting basic needs upon arrival, monitoring safety and security in the new location, supporting rule of law and resolving property disputes, and longer-term livelihoods and services. Each of these steps depends on different actors with different interests working with each other. A key theme from our interviews is that this process lacks sustained leadership, has disconnects between the steps, and is not coordinated end to end to ensure success. In addition, the short-term programs that are often funded do not maintain needed attention over the longer term, often focusing on one element disconnected from others.

Summary

This chapter synthesizes evidence that supports a conceptual framework of return—that it is influenced by multiple factors including conditions in both the home country and the host country, the role of national and international organizations, and individual-level characteristics. The reality is that these factors do not solely act in parallel to each other but in fact intersect at multiple stages during displacement and considerations for return. It is the confluence of factors that influences return, suggesting that it is not a simple, unidimensional decision but one that is influenced by numerous factors and describes a process made over a period of time.

Refugee perceptions of conditions in the home country regarding security, housing, employment, and provision of public services are key pull factors, but these perceptions vary depending on the individual-level attributes of refugees, such as gender and family status, age, and minority status. While an improving economic situation signals the availability of employment opportunities, returnees also experience high levels of unemployment initially after return, and this is also likely to vary by gender and age. Access to basic services such as education and health care is also an important driver of return, and provision of these services

is likely to be more important to families with dependent children as well as those with elderly and disabled members of the household who may require medical care.

Similarly, push factors or conditions in the host country are also key considerations, but younger members of displaced populations may feel less tied to the home country than do their parents and grandparents, especially under protracted displacement circumstances. They may also be better positioned to acclimate to the host community compared with the older generation, who could have strong personal attachments (as well as assets) in the home country.

Finally, conditions in the home and host communities may be moderated by the role that national and international organizations take to promote policies and programs to facilitate refugee return. For example, both national and international organizations were involved in promoting and supporting property restitution in BiH after the war, encouraging refugees to return. International organizations can also be crucial for ensuring security and stability in postconflict contexts to prevent returned refugees from facing violence and fleeing again, as well as targeting supports and services designed for specific groups (e.g., training for youth or women).

A Case Study of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Overview

BiH, a country in southeastern Europe between Croatia to the west and north, Serbia to the east, and Montenegro to the south, had a prewar 1991 population of approximately 4.4 million (World Bank, 2021b). As of 2019, the country's population is estimated at 3.3 million (World Bank, 2021b). The BiH war was the most destructive and violent of the Yugoslav wars, with large numbers of civilian casualties and displacement, widespread reports of human rights abuses, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and destruction of entire villages and communities. Nonetheless, the BiH case is one of cautious optimism that durable solutions are possible for displaced persons, both refugees and IDPs, if the various parties to the conflict can work together, with regional and international support.

The BiH case demonstrated that a formal end to the war, the cessation of hostilities, and the formal signing of a peace agreement created the opportunity for those who were displaced to consider returning home. A large and capable international stabilization force was also a major factor. In addition to safety and security, returnees are pulled in by personal ties and connections to the homeland. One important aspect of this case is that regional and international organizations did not limit their involvement to transporting returnees back home but took an active role in ensuring the implementation of the peace agreement, including the restitution of property and the reconstruction of destroyed homes. However, this case also illustrates the difficulty in achieving the peace agreement's stated goals: returning the country to its prewar mixed ethnic communities and fully realizing the country's economic, political, and social development goals to ease the transition and full reintegration of returnees as well as ensure the well-being of the entire population.

BOX 4.1

An Overview of Displacement in BiH in the 1990s

The war in BiH began in April 1992 and ended in December 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA). Some basic facts about displacement resulting from the war are provided below:

- By the end of the war, there were an estimated 250,000 casualties.
- Approximately half (2 million) of the country's 4.4 million prewar residents were displaced. By the end of the war in 1995, there were close to 770,000 refugees and 1.1 million IDPs (UNHCR, 2021h).
- According to UNHCR, as of 1995, the largest number of refugees were hosted by Germany (320,000), Croatia (200,000), and Serbia and Kosovo (85,000) (UNHCR, 2021h).
- Today, there are fewer than 20,000 refugees and 96,421 IDPs.

Displacement and Return Context

The 1992 breakup of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia triggered a series of independence referendum movements that resulted in armed conflict between several countries in the Western Balkans. The war, which began in the spring of 1992 (shortly after the BiH referendum of independence) and lasted until the end of 1995, resulted in over 250,000 casualties and the displacement of approximately half of the 4.4 million BiH prewar population—with more than 1 million people estimated to be displaced internally and close to 800,000 estimated to have fled to other countries in the region and Western Europe (Ambroso, 2006; Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005; Williams, 2006). The war ended with the signing of the DPA and official recognition by all parties of an independent BiH, which was made up of two autonomous entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska (UN General Assembly Security Council, 1995). As of 2019, UNHCR estimates that fewer than 120,000 refugees and IDPs remain out of a total of 2 million displaced by the conflict, along with close to 50,000 individuals whom UNHCR classifies as "others of concern" (UNHCR, 2021g).

The first three years after the war witnessed the highest rate of returns of those displaced (refugees and IDPs) at approximately 40 percent, and then by 2005, the figure had peaked to approximately 50 percent, or just over a million returnees. Returns were accelerated during that period because of the implementation of the property law, which returned housing to prewar owners, secured occupancy rights, spurred housing reconstruction, and improved security through cooperation between BiH institutions and regional partners (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005). Despite the high rate of returns in relative terms compared with other displacement contexts, the war's enduring legacy was the "unmixing" of the three major ethnic constituent groups: Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats (European Union, undated a; Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005; Williams, 2006).[1]

A Clear Legal Framework Was Put in Place to Encourage Returns

The legal framework for return was clearly laid out in Annex 7 of the DPA, which was explicitly designed to address the return of refugees and displaced persons to their place of origin (Office of the High Representative, 1995). Annex 7 officially articulated the legal principle that displaced persons enjoy the right to choose their destination, but it also communicated an implicit policy preference for facilitating returns to the place of origin, some say in order to reverse the war's outcome of ethnic cleansing (Office of the High Representative, 1995; Williams, 2006). Annex 7 of the DPA is complemented by a strategy for implementation followed by a revised version published in 2010 that took into account refugee and IDP desire to integrate locally (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, and Jaksic, 2010). This assessment is supported by the interviews we conducted: An official from a multilateral organization noted that the framework outlined by the DPA and Annex 7 supported return over local integration. Others have argued that the DPA achieved peace, but by institutionalizing the territorial gains and losses from the war, it discouraged displaced persons from returning to communities in which they would be a minority (Sert, 2011). Even in cases where property was reclaimed and minorities returned, local integration remained difficult. Still others have argued that the DPA's significant and lasting achievements—bringing an end to the fighting, continuing the power-sharing

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[1] According to the 1991 census, approximately 37 percent, 32 percent, and 14 percent of the prewar population identify themselves, respectively, as Bosniak, Serb, and Croat. A significant share of the BiH population is also of mixed heritage through intermarriage between the groups (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005, p. 31). All three groups share many of the same South Slavic traditions of the region, including language. Because of scope considerations, we did not include Croats or the other constituencies in the focus groups and interviews, though we discuss the effect of the war on those communities in our overview and framework sections.

agreement between the main constituent groups despite its fragility, and ushering in a robust international effort to assist in reconstruction—far outweigh its shortcomings on other fronts (Dobbins et al., 2003).

Conditions in the Home and Host Countries

A Significant Number of Refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina Settled in Countries with Better Economic Conditions and with Majority Populations of Their Own Ethnic Communities

In 2000, the BiH government conducted a population census that revealed that 550,000 persons (183,000 households) could be classified as displaced. This prompted a more comprehensive, systematic effort to reregister displaced persons that was completed in 2005. By then, the number of displaced persons had declined to approximately 186,000 (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005). Approximately 21 percent of the displaced population was 18 years or younger, and 15 percent was above the age of 65 (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005). Among those internally displaced, the expressed desire to return differed by geographic area of displacement and ethnicity. The survey inquired about willingness to return and found that, among those displaced in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, close to 78 percent had submitted an application for return, and 86 percent indicated they wished to return. On the other hand, 63 percent of displaced persons residing in Republika Srpska had submitted an application for return, but only 37 percent indicated they wished to return, 41 percent indicated they did not wish to return, and 23 percent indicated they were not sure (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005).[2] These findings suggest that IDPs favored remaining among communities of their same ethnicity.

According to UNHCR data from 1995, approximately 320,000 of the close to 770,000 refugees from the war, or 42 percent, were granted refuge in Germany. Thirty-seven percent sought refuge in Croatia and Serbia, with the remaining spread across Scandinavian countries, North America, and other countries in Europe. Many of the refugees who fled to other, wealthier European countries and North America most likely chose to remain in those countries because of better economic conditions and supports. Similarly, many who fled to Croatia and Serbia sought to remain in those countries because they established new lives there and preferred to live among members of their own ethnic communities. Today, BiH remains a less populous country than it was before the war with declining birth rates and net migrations out of the country (World Bank, 2021b).

Displaced Persons and Returnees Faced Difficult Conditions Initially, and Some Concerns Still Remain

As a result of the DPA, security notably improved throughout the country as outward interethnic hostilities ceased—an assessment also expressed during our interviews. Nonetheless, local policing capabilities needed to be rebuilt, the rule of law needed to be enforced, and law enforcement needed to be professionalized in order to investigate ethnically motivated incidents that continued even after the end of armed conflict (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, 2018; Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005). We interviewed an official from a multilateral organization who noted that it took time to reduce aggression and nontolerance toward minority groups, both of which were necessary in order to create an environment for successful returns. Also, efforts to remove unexploded mines and ordnances were still ongoing even ten years after the end of the war and continued to be a major issue and precondition for safe returns (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005).

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[2] It is not clear from the report what location they were being asked about their willingness to return to.

Despite robust regional and international support, displaced persons faced challenging economic conditions both during displacement and upon return. A study conducted by the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees in 2005 found that less than a quarter of surveyed heads of displaced households aged 18–65 reported that they were engaged in some type of work, including part-time, temporary work (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005).[3] The BiH economy was plagued with structural problems, having been devastated during the war and undergoing a major transition out of the prewar socialist system. The supply of job seekers far exceeded demand, and the transition out of a centrally planned economy left many without the skills necessary to fill available job vacancies (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005). According to World Bank data, the country's overall unemployment rate hovered around 30 percent between 2010 and 2016 and then declined substantially beginning in 2017 to around 20 percent. Youth (15–24) unemployment was especially high, exceeding 60 percent in 2015; it has since declined but remained high at 34 percent in 2020 (World Bank, 2021b). According to interviews, a challenging economic situation has been made worse by a deteriorating political climate. Some interviewees noted tensions between the two geographic entities—the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska—that have contributed to significant outmigration of young people seeking better opportunities and greater stability elsewhere (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, 2018; Nenadić, Lipjankić, et al., 2015).

In terms of social supports such as health care, education, and social protection, the situation has been mixed. For health care, displaced persons and returnees faced problems such as inadequate health insurance coverage, geographic barriers to access (particularly in rural areas), and implementation problems at the local level, where health care is managed and administered (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005). More recently, displaced persons and returnees continued to face difficulties accessing sufficient health insurance (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, 2018). For education, primary, secondary, and postsecondary education for displaced persons and returnees is guaranteed under the BiH constitution, and a draft law signed in 2003 stipulated full rights of refugees and returnees to attend school (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005). Yet, education provision struggled with inconsistent implementation of curricula, transportation challenges, issues with school governance, irregular education outside the school system, and difficulty recognizing and validating education certificates received outside the country. Another noted problem is the issue of "two schools under one roof" or double-shift schools that potentially constrain the time spent learning and can delay the school day (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005). Many of these issues continue to be a challenge even more recently, particularly those related to harmonizing legal frameworks governing education, reaching agreement on curricular content, eliminating ethnically motivated discriminatory practices, and addressing financing shortfalls (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, 2018). Refugees and returnees were also entitled to social protection and care, but insufficient funding, lack of coordination in a decentralized system of care, and inequitable access across groups sometimes made it difficult for refugees and returnees to receive these benefits (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005).

Capacity of Local Governments as Implementing Institutions Was Limited

One of the main challenges of providing social and economic supports to both returnees and displaced persons in assisting with their integration is the capacity of local government—the cantons and municipalities that implement programs for health care, education, employment, social security, and housing. These entities frequently lack the financial, personnel, and technical expertise and equipment for proper implementa-

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[3] According to Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005, p. 115, the number of individuals included in these estimates was 42,213.

tion. Concomitantly, returnees may be unaware of their rights and the responsibilities of these government entities to fulfill their needs. Moreover, data that provide accurate assessments of needs are frequently lacking (Nenadić, Lipjankić, et al., 2015). The Office of the High Representative (OHR), tasked with overseeing implementation of the DPA, ultimately took on a much more active role, particularly as local parties tasked with implementation stalled on their responsibilities (Dobbins et al., 2003). OHR was also able to hold local officials accountable and, according to one NGO interviewed, could replace mayors of localities where performance on metrics such as housing repossession were deemed low.

Role of National and International Organizations

Property Restitution and Reconstruction Have Been a Key Component of Return

Following the legal framework set forth in Annex 7 of the DPA, the Commission for Real Property Claims (CRPC) was established and authorized to receive, process, and decide on property claims. At first, CRPC encountered significant difficulties because it struggled to keep up with the volume of claims, incomplete cadastral records, and lost paperwork, making it difficult to establish property ownership in the many cases that came before it (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005; Williams, 2006). This was compounded by the fact that the entire economic and social system of BiH was transitioning from a system of social occupancy rights with right of inheritance to a system of privatization. To address these complex issues, both governmental entities and NGOs assisted with property claims, supported by international humanitarian and development funds. In the end, the vast majority of repossession claims were ultimately resolved, and as noted, "the property law regime was favorable towards restitution of rights that existed prior to forcible migrations, which meant it set the rights of returnees above any other occupancy rights that might have accrued later" (European Union, undated b, p. 8). Moreover, one NGO representative we interviewed noted that local-level implementation and monitoring increased the chances of properties to be claimed and maintained without reoccupation (European Union, undated a).

After the dissolution of CRPC at the end of its mandate in 2003, jurisdiction over property claims fell under the responsibility of the Property Law Implementation Plan (PLIP), which was designed and implemented by OHR for BiH, UNHCR, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Ambroso, 2006; Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia, 2011). A cornerstone of the PLIP is that it was multicountry and regional in structure, involving the four Balkan countries of BiH, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia. This allowed for a joint approach to be taken to implement the program and help resolve cross-border issues that inevitably arose with property claims. As a result of CRPC and PLIP, the successful property repossession helped spur significant returns in the first three years after the conflict (Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005).

Regional Housing Program

While property repossession was generally successful in returning properties to their rightful prewar owners or residents, there was still a need for the reconstruction of destroyed housing as well as addressing the needs of the most vulnerable populations affected by displacement who could not establish prewar housing ownership. According to estimates, over 40 percent (450,000 units) of the housing stock of 1.1 million housing units was either destroyed or damaged during the war (European Union, undated a; Nenadic, Dzepar-Ganibegovic, Lipjankic, Borovcanin, Spasojevic, et al., 2005). In addition, a significant share of the housing stock in the country had already been deteriorating before the war because of poor management and lack of regular maintenance, and this was exacerbated by illegal and unregulated construction after the war (European Union, undated b).

Thus, emerging out of the PLIP was the Regional Housing Program (RHP), which traces its origins to several successive agreements, including the Sarajevo Process in 2004 and the Ministerial Declaration in both 2005 (Sarajevo) and 2011 (Belgrade), where the countries committed and reaffirmed to working together to find durable solutions for the displaced (Ambroso, 2006; Regional Ministerial Conference on Refugee Returns, 2005). The RHP became operational in the latter part of 2012 with total pledged funding at €291million (US$351 million), of which the largest contributor (81 percent) was the European Commission (UNHCR Regional Bureau of Europe, undated). These funds were to be distributed across the four partner countries of BiH, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

The RHP fund was managed by the Council of Europe Development Bank, and as one multilateral official we interviewed noted, the RHP was "much more than reconstruction of housing units. This was a reconciliation program among the countries that were involved in the war." Another interviewee noted that the opportunity to bring together multiple housing reconstruction road maps into one unified plan that would address the same types of problems engendered both positive attitudes and ultimately cooperation. The program, which is currently in its final phase after having been extended, has been supported by multiple organizations including each of the partner countries, as well as regional bodies such as the European Union, OSCE, UNHCR, and other partners such as PRM. According to information on the program, the RHP assists close to 12,000 families and approximately 36,000 individuals (Regional Housing Programme, 2021b). The RHP's aim in BiH is to provide 3,100 housing units to approximately 9,000 of the most vulnerable individuals (Regional Housing Programme, 2021a).

One of the fundamental principles of implementation of the RHP was to establish the eligibility criteria for housing restitution claims, which were to use a vulnerability, needs-based approach (UNHCR, 2016). Interviews with officials representing government and multinational organizations suggested that this formalized the criteria and overcame the potential for political interests to creep into the decisions on the housing reconstruction claims. Both UNHCR and OSCE provided support to national and local agencies in implementing the program by advising on policies and procedures for processing claims and applying the criteria for eligibility. They also monitored and assisted agencies in each of the four countries in implementing the program—from increasing public awareness, to applying the criteria to decide on reconstruction and restitution claims, to assessing proposed projects emanating from the RHP. Through this multicountry approach, which was further supported by international organizations, the goal was to ensure that the criteria for receiving support through the RHP could be verified across the countries where claimants were located. For example, claims originating from Serbia could be verified by authorities in BiH through the formal communication channels. An official we interviewed noted that, without the cooperation of all the countries, this would have been much more difficult to implement.

Despite efforts to ensure sound design of the program, the RHP encountered significant difficulties in its initial implementation. Various officials we spoke with noted that some of the resources that were initially directed toward projects in certain communities did not ultimately result in any returns. This was partly due to what was defined as success—construction of housing units—despite limited verifiable evidence that there were individuals and households willing to return to those areas where construction of housing occurred. One official noted that even before the war there were already demographic trends of people migrating out of rural areas and toward the cities, which were then accelerated by the war. According to the same official, in certain cases, displaced persons simply had no intention of returning to certain towns and villages targeted for reconstruction.

Overall, the consensus across our interviews with officials representing government, multilaterals, and NGOs is that the RHP provided durable solutions to the most vulnerable and will be an essential contribution to the country's further economic and social development. The RHP has also been a particularly successful tool in assisting the beneficiary countries to close the collective centers, which were facilities converted into temporary housing for vulnerable households and persons displaced by the war and without the

means to secure housing. The RHP has also been considered as a source for replenishing the multifamily housing stock managed by municipalities, which can be used for future social housing support for vulnerable and disadvantaged populations, including those who do not qualify for supports provided to returning IDPs and refugees (European Union, undated a).

Local Nongovernmental Organizations, Multinational Organizations, and Humanitarian Agencies Helped Link Displaced Individuals to Services

One of the initiatives highlighted in our interviews was the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) 2012–Support to Durable Solutions of the Revised Strategy for the Implementation of Annex 7 of the DPA (UNHCR, 2016). With €7 million from the European Union plus €1.1 million from UNHCR, a locally based consortium of municipal, civil society, and community-based organizations and NGOs worked together from 2014 to 2016 to link vulnerable displaced individuals and households to essential services, including housing, employment training, and social supports related to health care and care for the elderly. An official we interviewed from a multilateral agency held the program up as an example of interagency cooperation because the initiative encouraged formation of municipality operational teams composed of a diverse group of stakeholders across both the governmental and nongovernmental sectors. This promoted data-sharing to identify beneficiaries and to coordinate responses (UNHCR, 2016). Nonetheless, it is also important to note the timeline in which this cooperation occurred, and thus the long-term horizon required to support sustainability of returns.

Other activities undertaken by organizations such as Catholic Relief Services (CRS), for example, have leveraged RHP funds (both donors' and national funds) to provide complementary support services in the area of employment (CRS, undated; CRS, 2020b; CRS, 2020c). The largest share of CRS employment support has been toward agricultural production by providing machinery and training to promote open-air and greenhouse agriculture, livestock production, and small-scale farming. CRS has worked with municipal governments to attract investment to the agricultural sector and to help farmers manage risks, as well as worked with municipalities to be generally accountable to international monitoring and oversight (CRS, 2020a). Interviews with multilateral agencies and NGOs noted that the most successful collaborations with local governments were the ones with capable, visionary municipal leaders, particularly the ones who recognized the opportunity to help displaced persons integrate into their community and contribute to the local economy.

Grassroots efforts to support returnee integration have a long tradition in BiH. For example, the Union for Sustainable Return and Integrations in BiH (UZOPI), an independent, multiethnic, and nonpartisan consortium of over 100 NGOs, farmers' and agricultural cooperatives, and other civil society organizations, is another grassroots initiative with the goal of promoting sustainable returns at the local level. Founded during the war, UZOPI states as its mission, "full depoliticization of return and creation of conditions for sustainable return of refugees and displaced people and their integration in the community" (UZOPI, undated). UZOPI's activities encompass local government support to assist with returns, monitoring integration, undertaking informational campaigns, providing job training, and more recently, collecting data in an effort to identify the needs of vulnerable returnees and IDPs. This effort involved the enumeration of local entities across the country, including governmental and nongovernmental, private, and community-based organizations in order to survey them on vulnerable returnees and IDPs that they serve. The data, which are compiled in a database and also noted in other sources, revealed some of the same pressing issues that are affecting returns—for example, low rates of employment, continued ethnic tensions and discrimination, poor infrastructure (roads, water, electricity, and sewage upgrading), and lack of access to education, health care (insurance coverage and accessibility), and social safety net supports (UNHCR, 2016; UZOPI and UNHCR, undated).

Voices of Returnees

In this section, we draw out key themes that emerged in in-depth interviews and focus groups with ethnic Bosniaks, who identify themselves predominantly as Muslim, and ethnic Serbs, who identify themselves predominantly as Orthodox Christian. Both groups were displaced in large numbers as violence escalated into a full-blown war between the army of the newly independent Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the army of the Republika Srpska, a political entity that declared its own independent breakaway state shortly after BiH independence.

Initially, many of the Bosniaks who fled their homes because of the violence went to towns and villages in other parts of BiH; in some cases, they went to countries abroad. Of those who returned home, some returned to the towns from which they were displaced, while others stayed in the towns to which they had escaped, and still others settled abroad. Many of the Serbs who fled to the Republika Srpska chose to remain there rather than return to their hometown within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Improved Security, Personal Ties, and a Desire for a Return to "Normalcy" Contributed to Return

Many of the focus group and in-depth interview participants spoke of their time as refugees as temporary and their decision to return as inevitable, though some refugees indicated that it was hardly a full-fledged decision. One man said, "I had to come back here. I had no alternative. They promised to make those houses for us, on the condition that we return. . . . It's best to be on your own, in your own, however you look at it." Others who left the country attributed their return to "family, nostalgia, freedom, emotion," or as one participant stated, "Bosnia is in my soul. . . . You just want to get back to your homeland. We are all struggling, but again the homeland is the homeland. . . . I decided to get back no matter what."

As displaced people, the refugees moved into the houses or apartments of relatives or friends, or they occupied homes that had been abandoned. Some of the participants commented that it was not possible to live in someone else's home forever. One Bosniak man said, "We hardly waited to get back to our house. . . . That was someone else's house, not ours. Over there we have already felt ourselves as foreigners, that we should get out, that we should go on. You know how it is when you are in someone else's property."

Family ties were also an important factor cited by the interviewees and focus group participants for their return. One Serb woman said she returned because, "[e]xactly the fact that all of my relatives are here. They have all gathered here. I wanted to be with my folks, my family and relatives." Another woman who had been abroad as a refugee said the decision to return to Bosnia and Herzegovina was driven by her mother's personal connection to the country:

> My father, God rest his soul, wanted us to go further to America, but my mom didn't want that. We decided to get back to Bosnia, no matter what happens. It was very difficult when we came here, but what could one do? . . . Simply, it is our country. That is the thinking of my mom. "Those places are far away, I don't want to go there, I want to get back to my Bosnia, no matter what. The situation is better now, there is no war, it has ended."

Some refugees' decisions to return home seemed to be made in part out of a desire for a return to normalcy and life before the conflict. One man said, "I first thought of returning, it was when we liberated Trebevic for the first time. But, we have lost it in a day, so it passed quickly. It was, in fact, a desire for a normal life." Another described their desire to return to their property, stating, "Before the war, we had that vineyard. . . . We had to get back to our own property, to stay. . . . We came and that was it."

Not all of the former refugees interviewed returned to the location from which they had fled. Over half of the in-depth interview participants had settled in other neighborhoods or villages. They either stayed where

they had fled to or went to a third location. Many of them said that they did not return because their homes had been looted or destroyed. One woman, who had gotten married and had a child, stated that she did not think about returning. She said, "I have bought this house and started [a] new life." A few stayed in the cities where they had secured jobs or went to other areas in search of employment opportunities. One Serb man said he specifically waited to return until the war was over, stating,

> I didn't return for several reasons. First, there was the war and it was a wound that was still open, and I didn't want to get into a situation again to think about whether I was going to save my head, who will I come across or not. I would not bring my family into such a situation. And later when 4–5 years pass, a man gets used to it, so I didn't return.

Those who settled in new communities discussed the continued feeling of being an outsider, saying, "Even today we feel like strangers. . . . Now it's all negligible, but it can be felt. 'They are refugees.' Despite the fact that so much time has passed since the end of the war, that we have all settled down more or less, we are still divided into refugees and locals here."

Returnees Reported Experiencing Financial Hardship Tied to Repairing Their Homes

Despite a desire to return, some participants noted that they were waiting for the right time, most often determined by the availability and livability of the homes they lost during the war. In fact, most participants in the interviews and focus groups noted that they had relatively adequate living conditions during their time of displacement. Some lived with family members, and others occupied abandoned houses or apartments. A few lived in collective accommodations for some time. Several participants mentioned disliking the lack of ownership of their living situations. One Serb woman said, "I want my own [house]. That was our estate, my father in law's house was here, so we didn't have to pay the rent anymore." One Bosniak woman said, "When you are in your own property, everything is easier."

However, interviewees and focus group participants reported being delayed in returning because their homes were occupied by others. One Bosniak man explained, "Look, a man was dreaming of returning home all the time, which is normal. But there were no conditions, even though the Washington agreement was signed in 1996 or even back in 1994. We could not return because our houses were occupied."[4] With the establishment of CRPC and PLIP, property repossessions facilitated returns home, including among those who participated in our focus groups and in-depth interviews. Some noted being able to repossess their homes or being compelled to leave homes they had settled in during the war. One woman said, "We came back in time of reintegration of Grbavica, because we couldn't use other people's apartment anymore. We too have been given the notice on eviction and returned."

Even in situations where a home was no longer occupied, some of the interviewees described the need to make extensive repairs to make it livable, but this took time and often required borrowing money from family or taking out a loan. Alternatively, some people's homes were fully destroyed. In other cases, people could not return to their homes because the roads leading to them had been destroyed. One woman was unable to return to her hometown with her family, noting,

> How could I return to [a town in BiH] when everything was burned down? I am giving you an example. Where could we get back to? We used to have a house there, used to live there. And in the end, where to get back when there was no one there anymore? Everything is overgrown with bushes.

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4   The interviewee may have been referring to the DPA but did not recall it by name.

In general, interviewees and focus group participants reported enduring financial hardships. Among our interviewees and focus group participants, 18 of the 32 mentioned the financial burden of rebuilding or renovating their homes. Many drew on their own savings or borrowed from family and friends. Some described delays in getting basic services restored. As one Bosniak man explained, "If we had electricity, water supply sooner. Because we had water problems for a long time."

Some participants identified a few organizations or entities that assisted them with return, particularly in providing financial and material support to rebuild their homes. One man received supplies for a house from World Vision, an NGO, while another said that a Swiss organization helped him rebuild his house and provided money, and the Federal Institute provided materials for a roof. One man reported receiving reconstruction materials from the War Veterans' Organization, and another received a modest amount of government aid to make needed repairs. Still others received a plot of land, but here again, they had to borrow to build a house and that took time, delaying their return.

More often than not, interviewees relayed stories of difficulties accessing timely support from local authorities, as one woman explained:

> We were applying to Canton. But they kept turning us back to the Municipality. The Municipality did not have funds, we had to wait for our turn and we couldn't wait and live in one room. . . . Then we decided to create basic conditions for life by taking a loan from the bank. So that we were paying it back for years.

Other returnees described the strict eligibility requirements to receive reconstruction aid, for example, as one woman noted that her building did not meet the minimum threshold of original (prewar) tenants.

These challenging circumstances left some of our interviewees with the impression that one had to have certain connections or privileges to receive aid. One Serb man said he had no success in applying for aid and that "[i]t has always been, the one who is closer to the fire gets warm." Ultimately, several refugees were left disappointed by the lack of support, as one Bosniak woman summed up:

> I had much greater expectations both from the state and the Municipality, the local community and everything. I know that even the state itself has just gotten out of war ravaged, destroyed and materially disabled, but already from 1997, 1998, when the donations started to come, one was supposed to work much harder on that return of all of the tenants.

Another participant in the same focus group noted the following:

> We thought that the building would be reconstructed faster and that the people would return. But, we did not have adequate help. So that it was literally "stand on your own feet." And that wasn't supposed to happen to the suffering citizens of Sarajevo, to come after all that psychological and physical suffering, and suffer even more. In fact, the return was the new suffering.

It was difficult to determine which, if any, of the interview and focus group participants had benefited from the RHP. It was not referred to by that name among the participants, and it is important to note that our sample was small and not representative. Moreover, our focus group and in-depth interview participants may not have met the required eligibility requirements to benefit from the program.

Returnees Frequently Struggled to Secure a Means to Earn a Livelihood

A few refugees were able to resume work upon their return, or shortly thereafter. For example, one woman said that the main determinant for her return to Sarajevo was that she was able to return to her company from before the war, stating, "I have worked in [furniture manufacturing company] before the war and I got an

invitation to get back to work. That is why I have returned to Sarajevo." On the other hand, another Bosniak woman described the difficulties of finding work that could support a family, stating,

> Even those who worked had very low salaries. At that time the husband had to register with the employment bureau, he was unemployed. And he waited for three years to get the right on some kind of disability pension. There were no incomes, I was working. That was not enough to support a family of four.

Another woman said that it took a couple of years before she was able to get government assistance to find employment. Other interviewees took a certain pride in self-reliance, and another person noted,

> The challenge for me is to adapt to the environment, to survive, to stay alive. As our people say: Dear God, please spare me from asking help from the others. I wish if I could manage on my own, without bothering the others. The challenge is to accommodate to the new way of life at this age, nothing more.

As most of the refugees returned in the late 1990s and early 2000s, COVID-19 had no impact on their time as refugees and returnees. A few mentioned, though, that the global pandemic has worsened the economic situation in BiH.

Summary

The war in BiH displaced close to half of the country's prewar population and led to widespread destruction of residential and commercial properties. The number of casualties, widespread destruction and displacement, and crimes committed meant reconciliation and return would be especially difficult in this case. Although BiH, made up of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska, has not regained its prewar population of 4.4 million, the country has witnessed returns as a direct result of key factors outlined in our framework. There was a decisive end to the conflict with the cessation of armed conflict and a signing of the DPA, with participation of all warring parties as well as regional and international support. Moreover, the agreement included specific provisions to facilitate refugee returns through Annex 7. The international community also committed to ensuring implementation of the agreement with a robust presence on the ground, at least in the initial years after the agreement.

Importantly, however, our in-depth interviews and focus groups revealed that strong personal ties and social networks "pulled" people to return home even when it was not clear they would have ideal housing arrangements and economic opportunities. Despite attempts to encourage a "remixing" of ethnic communities, many of the displaced chose to return to areas where they would not be in the minority. Numerous programmatic efforts have improved the well-being and sustainability of returns, including housing supports and reconstruction, assistance with livelihoods and economic reintegration, and facilitating access to basic services such as health care and education. However, high rates of outmigration since the end of the war almost three decades ago suggest economic opportunities remain limited. This is especially the case for young people and was exacerbated in 2020 by the response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

One of the key issues that remain to be addressed in the country is building the capacity of canton and municipality governments to function more effectively, streamline bureaucracy, and root out corruption. It is particularly important to rebuild those institutions, with support from international organizations and NGOs, given the damage caused by the war to the social, economic, and political structures of the country. Spurring these government entities to view returnees as an asset to their communities through their contributions can mobilize them to develop policies and programs that benefit not just returnees but the community as a whole.

Notably, postwar BiH received an unparalleled level of international support in the form of a massive stabilization force, very substantial and sustained economic assistance, and continuing international oversight with a strong emphasis by UNHCR and other agencies on refugee returns. This combination of supports is unlikely to be oft repeated. The results demonstrate not only what can be achieved in terms of refugee returns when they receive this priority, but also the continued difficulties with reintegrating a society divided by ethnic conflict.

A Case Study of Kosovo

Overview

Kosovo is a landlocked country in southeastern Europe surrounded by the four countries of Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, and North Macedonia. Kosovo's prewar 1998 population was close to 2 million, and as of 2019, the country's population was estimated at 1.8 million (World Bank, 2021b). Although sharing geopolitical and historical connections, the Kosovo conflict and displacement case is distinct from the BiH case in several key respects. First, compared with the BiH war, the Kosovo war was far shorter in duration, ending abruptly after the military intervention of the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies. Initial returns of ethnic Albanians occurred very quickly and in large numbers. Second, Kosovo's political status remains contested, with full independence not yet recognized by Serbia and some other countries. This constrains cooperation on developing and implementing policies and programs and resolving key issues affecting returns. Third, before the dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Kosovo, unlike BiH and the five other republics that formed the federation, was governed as an autonomous province within Serbia. Thus, Kosovo's system of governance as an independent country was relatively newer by comparison, though in both the BiH and Kosovo cases, national and local government institutions required capacity-building.

In other respects, Kosovo's case is similar to that of BiH. For one, a clear end to the war was likely the most important factor for return, though mostly in the case of ethnic Albanians who returned more readily compared with Serbs and other ethnic groups. For both Kosovo and BiH, our interviews and focus groups revealed that personal ties and social networks proved to be strong pull factors. Both countries

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BOX 5.1

An Overview of Displacement in Kosovo, 1999–2000s

The war in Kosovo began in 1998 with clashes between ethnic Albanian and Serb military forces, intensifying between March and June 1999 with U.S. and NATO involvement. Some basic facts about displacement resulting from the war are provided below:

- By the end of the war, there was an estimated 12,000–15,000 casualties (Spiegel and Salama, 2000).
- Approximately half (900,000) of the country's 2 million prewar residents were displaced in 1999 and returned immediately.
- More than 220,000 were displaced in the second wave.
- Today, there are around 90,000 IDPs in Kosovo considered vulnerable and requiring durable solutions; approximately 200,000 of those displaced from Kosovo reside in Serbia, and 16,000 reside internally within Kosovo.

are also experiencing transitions socially, economically, and politically and are struggling to create decent livelihoods for their people. Importantly, both countries are grappling with the challenge of a separation between their different ethnic communities—both physically through geographic concentrations and, in the case of Kosovo more so than BiH, institutionally, such as the languages taught in schools and interaction in public as well as private spaces.

Displacement and Return Context

By the spring of 1999, internationally sponsored negotiations to resolve the ongoing military campaign of the Kosovo Liberation Army against Serbian law enforcement and military forces in Kosovo had reached an impasse. This led to a NATO bombing campaign and a massive Serb effort at ethnic cleansing, which sent close to 900,000 ethnic Albanians fleeing toward the borders with Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro. The NATO aerial campaign and the threat of a ground offensive eventually led to the withdrawal of Serbian forces, at which point a second wave of displacement occurred, this time of mostly 200,000 ethnic Serbs and Roma fleeing toward the border with Serbia and Montenegro (Ambroso, 2006; Suhrke et al., 2000). The conflict had ended by the summer of 1999, but tensions remained, and the violent riots in 2004 directed against minorities, particularly the Serbian population, precipitated subsequent smaller waves of displacement with approximately 4,000 displaced and 1,000 houses demolished. As noted, the riots in 2004 "undermined confidence of the minorities not only in the readiness of the ethnic Albanian majority population to accept them as an integral part of Kosovo's society, but also in the capacity of the international community's security forces to contain violence" (Ambroso, 2006, p. 8). Out of the nearly 1 million people displaced by the conflict, as of 2016, UNHCR estimated that around 90,000 individuals continue to have displacement-related needs and require durable solutions. Approximately 200,000 of those displaced from Kosovo reside in Serbia, and around 16,000 reside internally in Kosovo (Suhrke et al., 2000; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017).

Kosovo's Official Political Status Remains Contested, Notably by Neighboring Serbia, but There Are Legal Frameworks Governing Return and Institutions Tasked with Implementation

After the war, the United Nations appointed an interim administration under UN resolution 1244 to oversee Kosovo's affairs (United Nations, 1999). While many countries, including the United States and most of the European Union, recognized Kosovo's independence, many others did not, including Serbia and Russia. In 2008, after failed negotiations to determine Kosovo's final status, the Kosovo government issued a declaration of independence, effectively ending UN administration (United Nations, 2008). The ongoing political dispute between Kosovo and Serbia regarding political status can hamper cooperation on key activities intended to promote return, including record verification for claims on property restitution, information sharing, and facilitating cross-border flows.

Despite these ongoing tensions, some progress has been made between the governments of Kosovo and Serbia in addressing displacement and returns. For one, Kosovo's constitution explicitly recognizes the rights of displaced people to return and the country's responsibility to "promote and facilitate the safe and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons and assist them in recovering their property and possession" (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008, p. 60). Thus, the constitution recognizes the internationally accepted *Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (or the Pinheiro Principles)*, which provide displaced persons not only the right to return but also the right to prop-

erty and housing restitution lost because of the conflict (Leckie, 2007; UNHCR, 2005; United States Agency for International Development [USAID] and Kosovo Ministry of Justice, 2016).

The constitution also guarantees "the right of all citizens of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia habitually residing in Kosovo on 1 January 1998 and their direct descendants to Republic of Kosovo citizenship regardless of their current residence and of any other citizenship they may hold" (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008; OSCE, 2019). While there was no equivalent of the Sarajevo process as in BiH, there was a parallel interinstitutional initiative for durable solutions for Kosovo in 2014, also known as the Skopje Process. Representatives from Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro participated; and since then, there have been joint communiques issued to commit to cooperation to resolve issues, including those related to returns (OSCE, 2019). Interviews we conducted noted the significant obstacles of the unresolved political status of Kosovo, but cooperation between Kosovo and other governments in the region toward finding an ultimate resolution to its political status has improved. Nonetheless, interviews with multilateral organizations revealed that direct communication and cooperation between the governments on this issue remains limited, and international mediation tended to occur between UNHCR offices in Kosovo and Serbia. It is not clear whether this is still the case.

The main institution monitoring returns in Kosovo is the Ministry of Communities and Returns (MCR). The Ministry issued Regulation No. 02/2010 establishing Municipal Offices for Communities and Returns (MOCRs) and stipulated their functions to facilitate, support, and monitor returns (Republic of Kosovo, 2018a; 2018b). An assessment by USAID and the Kosovo government recommended further steps to strengthen the legal framework governing property rights; formalizing the process and documentation for transfer of property rights and ownership to ensure rights protection and accurate cadastral record-keeping; guaranteeing and enforcing property rights of displaced persons, minority ethnic communities, and women; and promoting productive use of property, including in the agricultural sector, to promote economic growth (USAID and Kosovo Ministry of Justice, 2016).

Since the report, MCR has issued a comprehensive legal framework and guidelines in MCR Regulation No. 01/2018 on the Return of Displaced Persons and Durable Solutions. The stated objective of the regulation is to "establish necessary conditions for achieving durable solutions for persons displaced within Kosovo and in the region, between 28 March 1998 and 31 March 2004 and define responsibilities of competent, decision making and implementing bodies, assistance procedures and criteria" (Republic of Kosovo, 2018b, p. 2). Although the regulation is in place, a comprehensive strategy for implementation needs to be developed, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) is one of the organizations working with the MCR to develop such a strategy that was set to be approved in May 2021 based on information from interviews we conducted in early 2021 (OCHA, 2004).[1]

Return Conditions

Kosovo Remains a Geographically and Ethnically Divided Country, and Several Minority Populations Face Significant Vulnerabilities

According to the latest available census data from 2011 reported in the 2020 Annual Statistical Bulletin, issued by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, the total population of Kosovo is 1.74 million. The ethnic composition of Kosovo is 91 percent Albanian, up from 82 percent in 1991, the last census taken before the war. In

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[1] In addition to the 2018 framework and guidelines, the Kosovo government, the IOM, and partners are drawing from the United Nations' *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (OCHA, 2004). The year 2018 also marks the twentieth year of the principles, and thus the initiative is referred to as GP20.

1991, Serbs were recorded as 10 percent, whereas they were counted as 3.4 percent of the population in the 2011 census according to the latest published figures (Kosovo Agency for Statistics, undated; Kosovo Agency for Statistics, 2020). Notably, the 2011 census did not include the four northern municipalities with a significant concentration of ethnic Serbs, most likely undercounting their true share of the population in earlier released figures (OSCE, 2020). Together, the other minority groups were estimated at 5.6 percent of the population. Among them are three distinctly different communities in terms of identity and culture—the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians—though they are frequently combined in census counts.[2] These three communities tend to share many of the same socioeconomic disadvantages of high unemployment, low education attainment, and living in informal, poorly constructed dwellings under difficult conditions. They are often not formally registered and without documentation, thus have poor access to social services (OSCE, 2020). Some efforts have been underway to address these issues. Notably, meaningful reconciliation between the communities has not taken place and has thus hindered returns.

A community vulnerability report conducted in 2013 of the municipalities of Fushe Kosovo and Obiliq, two municipalities in the Pristina District, found that among the different communities in Kosovo, Serbs were less likely to possess all three means of identification (ID card, passport, or birth certificate). This was attributed to the lower rate of integration of the Serbian community with institutional life in Kosovo (Shaipi, 2013). The unemployment rate was also highest among the Serb, Roma, and Ashkali populations at over 40 percent for each, while it was lower for Egyptian (28 percent) and Albanian (24 percent) populations. According to this assessment, employment rates, which measure the number of employed as a share of the working-age population, were low across all the communities in this area—ranging from 25 percent for Albanians to 3 percent among the Ashkali community (Shaipi, 2013, p. 13). The combination of high unemployment rates and low employment rates suggests that a very large share of the working-age population is out of the labor force (not working and not looking for work). Another study in 2018 found even higher rates of unemployment, low rates of employment, and high dependence on social welfare supports among Kosovo's IDPs. IDPs also face challenges to accessing basic services such as health care: According to the study, approximately 7 percent of Albanian; 17 percent of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian; and 12 percent of Serbs in private accommodation and 42 percent of Serbs in collective centers reported struggling with receiving health care (Danish Refugee Council [DRC], 2018).

UNHCR statistics revealed that as of December 2020, the largest concentration of IDPs in Kosovo is in the northern Mitrovica region. There has been a steady overall decline in returnees over the past ten years, and over half of returnees are from Serbia, followed by returnees from within Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, other Balkan countries, and Western Europe (UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission, 2020). Now that Kosovo's official institutional language is Albanian, Serbian returnees in particular struggle with reintegration. There are frequently parallel or dual administration systems running depending on whether the area is in a majority Albanian or majority Serbian part of the country, constraining both communities from accessing services such as health care, education, and diploma recognition in geographic and administrative areas where they are not the majority. This, in turn, likely discourages returns. Moreover, the high rates of unemployment suggest the country as a whole faces structural challenges that are affecting both IDPs and the general population. It was noted in an interview with officials from a multilateral organization that it may be necessary to mainstream some solutions in order to address the general economic, social, and political constraints facing the country.

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[2] Members of the Roma community typically speak the Romani language or Serbian and live in predominantly Serbian communities in either the north or south of Kosovo. Ashkali and Egyptians speak the Albanian language and live in the predominantly Albanian areas of Kosovo. While all three communities have a long history in the Balkans region and historical accounts of their origins remains disputed, members of all three communities trace their ancestries back to nomadic tribes or early settlers from other regions, including South Asia, Western Asia, and North Africa (Bhabha et al., 2014; Zemon, undated).

Perceived Ethnic Hostilities Have Discouraged Some Minorities from Returning

A 2016 survey of Kosovo IDPs jointly conducted by DRC, various Kosovo and Serbian government agencies, and UNHCR found that the vast majority of Serbian IDPs (93 percent in private accommodations and 83 percent in collective centers) preferred to integrate in their place of displacement in Kosovo instead of returning to their place of origin (DRC et al., 2018). Interviews with various officials representing several multilateral organizations and NGOs suggest that, while there have been steady improvements over time in terms of reducing interethnic tensions and hostility, there are essentially separate societies in Kosovo with limited interaction between the Albanian and the minority communities, particularly the Serb community. Efforts to address this issue among younger generations and school-age children have shown some success in encouraging interaction and engagement, but they remain fairly modest in scale. The local government, supported by organizations such as OSCE, is working to improve relations among the communities through sporting events, peaceful marches, and organized visits to religious and cultural heritage sites to promote cross-faith understanding (OSCE, 2019). Public messaging is another issue and can drive the willingness of IDPs to return. News media reports in Kosovo, Serbia, and other countries in the region shape perception of the security situation. Misinformation can spread through television and radio broadcast media and is even more challenging to contain because of the proliferation of social media. These sources can be exploited to shape public perception of the safety and security conditions that may be detached from what is actually occurring on the ground (OSCE, 2019).

Progress Has Been Made in Property Restitution and Repossession, but Obstacles Remain

The agency initially tasked to address property claims was the Kosovo Property Agency, which was succeeded in 2016 by the Kosovo Property and Comparison Verification Agency (KPCVA). KPCVA enforces decisions stemming from property claims and oversees rental arrangements for properties under administration (OSCE, 2019, p. 21). One of KPCVA's main responsibilities is the comparison and verification of cadastral records, of which over 4 million documented records were taken by the Serbian authorities when they withdrew in 1999 (KPCVA, 2016; KPCVA, 2017; KPCVA, 2019; OSCE, 2019, p. 21; USAID and Kosovo Ministry of Justice, 2016). The agency has consistently reported financial difficulties and personnel turnover in its published annual reports (KPCVA, 2016; KPCVA, 2017; KPCVA, 2019).

In general, interviews with officials across multiple multilateral organizations and NGOs noted the persistent issue of reoccupation of vacant dwellings after eviction and the reluctance of local authorities to intervene to address the issue. Interviews noted that initial repossession of properties typically takes place under international monitoring, and in cases where reoccupation occurs, local authorities are reluctant to intervene in the absence of that monitoring. This reluctance has been attributed in multiple interviews with multinational organizations and NGOs to a lack of political will on the part of local government to address the broader issues influencing returns, among them housing repossession. These issues are occurring in both Albanian- and Serbian-dominated areas and stands in contrast to property repossession in BiH, where robust mechanisms are in place to ensure properties are not reoccupied illegally.

Role of National and International Organizations

In Addition to Housing, Complementary Services to Promote Employment Are Needed Among Returnees

A UNHCR needs assessment survey in 2016 of over 4,600 displaced persons outside of Kosovo who expressed interest in receiving interest-to-return supports emphasized assistance in housing construction,

income-generating opportunities, and improvement in security (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017, pp. 24, 27). Less than 40 percent of those surveyed indicated they owned the house they were currently residing in, and almost half either rented or were living with a relative. About a third rated their housing conditions as poor or very poor (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017, p. 32). The majority reported owning property (residence or land) prior to displacement, though about a quarter of those individuals did not have documentation to prove ownership. The vast majority of those surveyed indicated that their property in Kosovo was either destroyed (over 40 percent) or occupied (close to 30 percent) since displacement. For those properties that were occupied, the majority of the owners (66 percent) had submitted a claim for repossession with less than half (45 percent) decided in their favor (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017, pp. 34–35).

UNHCR has been heavily involved in facilitating the "go-and-see visits" and "fact-finding" for minority returnees to allow them to assess the situations on a personal basis (Ambroso, 2006, p. 7). Returning families are also entitled to receive a "harmonized package" of supports based on regulations and guidance (OSCE, 2019). PRM and DRC, for example, have worked together to support families with house repair, furniture, food and other assistance, and an income generation grant (Catholic Relief Services, undated). OSCE also works with UNHCR to monitor compliance on rights related to the country's ten minorities, and that can vary geographically in terms of which community is considered in the minority. Other international organizations have also worked closely with the government of Kosovo, the local MOCRs, and NGOs. For example, IOM is currently implementing the European Union–Return and Reintegration of Kosovo (EU-RRK) project. This project is a partnership among IOM Kosovo, the EU Office in Kosovo, and the Kosovo Ministry of Communities and Returns and draws on local NGOs for implementation and support. This support includes housing reconstruction, livelihood assistance and income-generating grants, and other integration supports. EU-RRK is currently in its fifth phase, which was supposed to end in May 2021. An interview with IOM representatives revealed that the program has facilitated the return of approximately 600 families over the course of ten years. This support has also included capacity-building for MCR and the MOCRs (IOM, undated).[3]

Initially, NGO activity in Kosovo was significant, and their presence not only contributed to consumption in ways that stimulated the local economy but also made jobs readily available for local residents. Some international NGOs were able to transfer their knowledge and experience to local, homegrown organizations that continued the work (Tafallari, 2014). However, Kosovo was going through a difficult period transitioning from a centrally planned to a decentralized system of governance, much like BiH was experiencing. The challenges that the government faced were compounded by the steady departure of NGOs along with their technical expertise and the jobs that they provided.

International Organizations Have Steadily Shifted Their Focus from Returns to Addressing the Needs of Extremely Vulnerable Minority Communities

Interviews with multilateral organizations and NGOs in Kosovo revealed that there has been a steady shift toward addressing the needs of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. Interviewees noted that many of these communities lived in informal settlements that had no property deed or title associated with the land. After the war and displacement, many of these settlements ceased to exist or became sites of construction. International organizations and NGOs have advocated for municipalities to allocate land to these communities. One interviewee noted that a history of deeply held discriminatory perceptions and practices toward these communities frequently results in allocation of unsuitable land where it is very difficult to construct shelters and housing.

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[3]   For more details on the EU-RRK and its various phases, see IOM, undated.

International organizations have pushed to close the collective centers constructed as temporary shelters during the war. Some of these collective centers in the north of the country housed displaced Serbs, many of whom did not want to leave the area because they had established roots and could access education, health care, and government services provided in their own language. In those situations, social housing was constructed to replace the collective centers.

Voices of Returnees

This section synthesizes the experiences and perspectives of returnees to Kosovo from the 1999 conflict, drawing out key themes that emerged from the conversations. Many of the themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews and focus groups with returnees in BiH were echoed in Kosovo. An end to the armed conflict was an important prerequisite for return, though many chose not to return to places where they would be in the ethnic minority. Family and social networks were important pull factors in both cases, and struggles to find jobs and secure livelihoods were commonly expressed. Notably, in both cases there was disappointment with available supports for reintegration. Continued ethnic tensions were more prominently cited in the Kosovo case, suggesting the greater role of that factor specifically among our interviews and focus groups in terms of influencing returns.

This section covers interviews and focus groups with ethnic Albanians who were displaced between 1998 and 1999 as the ongoing conflict between Serb military forces and the Kosovo Liberation Army escalated and NATO began its aerial bombing campaign; and ethnic Serbs who fled Kosovo as Serb military forces withdrew and NATO forces entered.[4]

Both ethnic groups described harrowing tales of displacement in 1999. Among those we interviewed, ethnic Albanians described traveling on foot or by bus, many of whom went to Albania or Macedonia, and ethnic Serbs traveled to Montenegro or Serbia. Some were displaced to other European countries such as Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. For those who traveled to neighboring countries, conditions were described as being poor; and families with children and elderly members had a particularly difficult time. Some families described sleeping on factory floors, inside places of worship, or out in open fields, even in the rain.

Notably, ethnic Albanians in our interviews and focus groups generally indicated that displacement lasted for months, compared with ethnic Serbs, who noted displacement for longer periods of time (typically a number of years).

Family and Country Ties Were Key Drivers of Returns

In the focus groups and in-depth interviews with ethnic Albanians and Serbs, there were some commonly expressed as well as diverging reasons for return. Commonly expressed reasons across both groups included emerging family-related circumstances such as a family member growing ill or the desire to be closer to family left behind (both typically had to do with elderly parents). In some cases, returnees noted the decision to return to receive support from parents or other family members, having faced difficult living conditions in their host communities. Other returnees noted being able to return to a previous job, or having secured a new job, in some cases in combination with a property or home they left behind that they could return to.

Interviewees and focus group participants also talked about their connections to their villages or towns, using such phrases as "everyone is pulled . . . there is no place like the one you were born in" or "the

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[4] It should be noted that because of project scope considerations, our data collection was limited to ethnic Albanians and Serbs; and we did not include other ethnic minorities who experienced displacement and continue to do so, including the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. We include these communities in our overview and framework sections.

homeland was calling." One ethnic Albanian focus group participant noted that it was a patriotic obligation to return:

> [I]t was optimism and the will, the desire to help, as we said, during the war, the martyrs gave their lives for the freedom we enjoy, and now it was our obligation to return, to try and give what we know and what we can. I felt compelled to return.

Notably, among our sample of focus group participants and interviewees, some of the more vocal ethnic Albanians expressed a strong connection to their country. While some of the Serb interviewees expressed a similar sentiment, there was also more apprehension toward a state deemed potentially hostile to them as an ethnic minority population considered the aggressors in the war. This is discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Improved Security Encouraged Returns, Though Ethnic Tensions Remain

The ethnic Albanians participating in our interviews and focus groups by and large expressed confidence in the improved security situation after the arrival of the NATO troops in the summer of 1999. Many were able to return to their villages and towns, at least in predominantly Albanian areas, though unexploded mines from the conflict remained a serious concern.

While noting the limitations in terms of the representativeness of our sample of in-depth interviews and focus groups, ethnic Serbs, on the other hand, expressed greater concern (in some cases regret) for returning, making particular reference to the violent riots that occurred in 2004.[5] One Serb interviewee noted that she and her family faced harassment after return with small explosive devices thrown at the house, although that did not change their minds about remaining. These types of incidents, including those at religious sites, have also been documented and reported on (OSCE, 2019, pp. 25–26). Several interviewees and focus group participants displaced from Pristina, for example, chose to return to a predominantly ethnically Serb town instead because of fear of perceived hostility from Pristina's predominantly ethnic Albanian population. In addition to perceptions of hostility, one focus group participant cited lack of health care and education options (i.e., schools offering the Serbian language) in Pristina. In fact, a 2013 vulnerability assessment report in two municipalities in Pristina indicated that despite overall "satisfactory levels of security," Serb residents reported lower levels of perceived personal security in terms of being able to walk around without fear of harm, trust in law enforcement, and feel safe speaking in their mother tongue—compared with the other ethnic populations (Albanian, Egyptian, Ashkali, Roma) (Shaipi, 2013, pp. 36–37).

Poor Housing Conditions and Lack of Economic Opportunities in Host Communities Drove Returns

By and large, displaced ethnic Albanian and Serb communities we interviewed noted being accepted by the local communities where they were displaced. In the case of ethnic Albanians, for example, there were numerous stories of being welcomed and hosted by families with modest means in Albania, noting that they welcomed them with "bread and salt and heart," and "they welcomed us very well with the capacity they had, because they did also not have the conditions." While our Serb interviewees noted similar examples, some also expressed that their longer period of displacement led to a waning welcome over time. Some of the displaced decided to return because they no longer wanted to feel like a "guest" among the host community, and in the words of one focus group participant who commented about the widespread hardship around the events of the time, "[It is] better to live in poverty in your home than elsewhere." The most frequently cited

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[5]   In-depth interview 1, male Serbian; focus group 3, male Serbian.

push factor, particularly for the Serb participants in our interviews and focus groups, was the lack of employment opportunities in the host communities or the ineligibility to obtain a work permit, as well as restrictions on movement. Some expressed their belief that they would be better positioned to find a means of livelihood in Kosovo, or had at least some expectation of support from the state to find employment.

Interviewees Largely Expressed Disappointment in Supports After Return

During displacement, both Serbian and Albanian communities noted that they received assistance from aid organizations such as the Red Cross, Caritas, UNHCR, and other organizations to cover basic needs such as food, clothing, hygiene products, and baby supplies, as well as health care and education. Interviewees also mentioned that UNHCR and other organizations such as DRC provided information on conditions at home and transportation to return. One interviewee noted that they received some compensation (1,000–1,200 francs), while another gave the figure of 2,500 francs upon return and some compensation to replace certain items in their damaged home.

Nonetheless, interviewees and focus group participants also expressed overall disappointment when discussing longer-term needs such as quality housing and stable employment. As one Serbian male noted,

> Let me be honest with you, we received promises . . . that me and my wife will be given jobs and that they will help us rehabilitate our house, this and that . . . however, what we received was transport of our possessions . . . that was all the assistance we received. We were not employed and these were empty promises that followed us for years, it will happen, it will happen but it never happened.

There was significant frustration expressed toward local municipalities in their handling of housing claims. Returnees from both ethnic communities noted applying multiple times for housing support but receiving rejections each time:

> I submitted a request for one-off assistance in form of house material, to improve conditions for my children and my request was rejected. I asked for assistance five times in total, assistance from municipality. I never received anything, not even a reply as to why my request was rejected, so I stopped begging, and concerning other things, me and my family we live same as others. (in-depth interview, Serbian male)

> [T]hey [municipality] formed a commission for the purpose of giving us some aid to reconstruct the houses. But they did not give that aid to us at all. Therefore, we de facto are now here where I am in the apartment until we have the conditions, so that we can renovate a little our house or to build a smaller house, we have no other aid, we do not have money, we do not have the conditions. (in-depth interview, Albanian male)

On the other hand, some participants acknowledged the significant presence of international organizations including UN agencies, OSCE, DRC, and the European Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), though a couple of interviewees also noted limited housing availability and upward pressure on costs in certain areas because of this presence. This was also mentioned by several respondents in separate interviews and focus groups.

Despite some respondents noting that they did not receive any support from organizations, there were also examples of participants noting that they did receive support. One participant noted that a Danish organization (most likely DRC) built them a house and furnished it. Another participant noted that DRC had provided transportation to Kosovo, and they were able to get farming supplies including equipment and livestock, allowing them to earn a livelihood in their return to a rural area. Another noted that an American organization had provided food, clothes, and wood-burning stoves.

Information on events back home was typically obtained from family members who remained behind, as well as relatives and people traveling to and from Kosovo, and from the television news. One focus group

participant noted that they relied on personal contacts for news because they felt the media were not always accurate in their reporting.

Interviewees Were Mixed in Their Desire to Remain or Leave

Among the interviewees and focus group participants, the sentiment about remaining or leaving was mixed. Some expressed a patriotic duty to remain and to rebuild and implored others to do so as well, while others were frustrated with the economic situation and were concerned about the future of their children in terms of being able to find jobs. Some attributed the steady outmigration of young people to the deteriorating economic situation. The impact of, and response to, COVID-19 undoubtedly had an influence here, but it was also clear that the country had been struggling economically even before the pandemic.

Summary

Kosovo, like BiH, has been the recipient of a very substantial amount of international support in the form of peacekeepers, economic assistance, and oversight. As in BiH, this has brought peace and high levels of refugee returns but at the price of increased ethnic segregation.

The Kosovo case stands in stark contrast to the BiH case in several important ways, although there are also similarities in displacement and return contexts. The ethnicities in Kosovo are separated by language as well as religion. Kosovo's relatively shorter war facilitated the almost immediate return of its displaced Albanian population, many of whom returned to their places of origin in predominantly ethnic Albanian areas. On the other hand, Serbs from Kosovo chose to remain in areas they were displaced to or to return to areas such as the northern Mitrovica region or other jurisdictions with predominantly Serbian ethnic concentrations. Kosovo's contested political status differs markedly from the situation in BiH, where official recognition of its sovereignty by Serbia and the other countries in the region helped facilitate multinational cooperation and investment including housing reconstruction in addressing returns issues. Kosovo has had some support, but it lacks the comprehensiveness that a regional approach brings as in the case of BiH. While tensions between the ethnic communities remain a concern in both cases, lingering concerns were a more prominent theme in our interviews and focus groups in Kosovo, particularly among the Serbian participants. Kosovo's parallel administrative systems mean health care and education, including recognition of official documentation such as identification and education credentials, remain an obstacle for minority communities and could be discouraging further returns.

Despite differences between the cases, they share a number of commonalities. Our focus group and in-depth interview participants cited family ties and connections, social networks, and a desire to return to the homeland as significant pulls to return. Returnees across both cases faced significant challenges finding jobs and securing resources to repair their homes. Both groups expressed concern for the economic situation in their respective countries, and the prospects of young people (including their own children) earning a decent livelihood. A distinctive characteristic of Kosovo's situation is the increasing attention international organizations are paying to the economic and social conditions of the historically marginalized and vulnerable communities of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians. While similar communities also reside in BiH, increasing attention to addressing their needs in Kosovo featured more prominently in our document review and stakeholder interviews.

A Case Study of the Kurdistan Region–Iraq

Complex circumstances of displacement make Iraq an important case for analysis related to returns. Iraq has been one of the world's largest sources of civilian displacement in recent decades because of multiple wars, with large waves of refugees, IDPs, and returns. Iraq is also a refugee host country, taking refugees from Syria. Furthermore, there is variation in the statuses of the conflicts that caused people to become displaced in the first place.

Within Iraq, we focused on the KRI for our analysis, as it enabled us to consider three groups of people residing there who are either currently displaced or were previously displaced. The first group is Kurds from northern Iraq who fled persecution from Saddam Hussein in the 1980s and 1990s, lived as refugees in Iran, and later returned to Iraq. The second group is Iraqi IDPs who were displaced either by the Islamic State (also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS or by the military operations against ISIS and fled to the KRI, where they remain. The third group is Syrian refugees from Syria's civil war, mainly ethnically Kurdish, living in the KRI.

This chapter considers these three displaced populations in the KRI, as well as how their circumstances interact. Although they have been displaced from different conflicts, come from multiple places of origin, and were displaced during different periods of time, we include them together to demonstrate the complexity of displacement and returns in a location that has experienced ongoing insecurity for decades. Even if their origins are different, solutions must consider circumstances of all of them together as part of the same society.

The chapter provides an overview of the displacement and return context in the KRI, describes conditions in the home and host locations, reviews government and multilateral approaches, and narrates perspectives of the returnees and currently displaced. It is based on a review of the literature; interviews with 16 multilateral officials, diplomats, and leaders of Iraq's displaced communities (including Kurdish, Christian, Yazidi,

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BOX 6.1

An Overview of Displacement in Iraq in the Past Decade

While this chapter focuses on displacement in one region of Iraq, here we provide a snapshot of displacement in general in Iraq during the past decade as the broader context (Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2020; IOM, 2021; UNHCR, 2020b):

- In 2019, 345,000 Iraqi refugees lived in other countries, down from 1.7 million in 2010. During this period, the United Nations registered the return of 260,000 refugees. These differences in numbers may reflect the fact that not all returnees registered or that some refugees found other solutions, such as resettlement or integration in their host countries.
- From 2010 to 2019, over 800,000 Iraqis applied for asylum in another country.
- In 2021, Iraq had 1.2 million IDPs, down from 5.7 million after the defeat of ISIS in 2017.
- Iraq has the second-largest number of IDP returns from 2010 to 2019, returning 5 million people.
- Iraq hosts 274,000 refugees from Syria.

Kakai, and Sunni Arab leaders);[1] and discussions (focus groups and interviews) involving 48 displaced people in the KRI: Iraqi Kurds who fled to Iran and later returned to the KRI, Syrian refugees, and currently displaced Iraqi minorities from Ninewa Province.

Displacement and Return Context

Multiple conflicts have led to the displacement of Kurds who fled from the KRI to Iran as refugees, Iraqi IDPs who fled neighboring Ninewa Province to live in the KRI, and Syrian Kurdish refugees who fled to the KRI. Over time, under American protection from the aftermath of the first Gulf War onward, the KRI transformed from a place where people fled violence to a place where people found refuge.

Conflict between the KRI and the central Iraqi government forced several waves of Kurds to flee to Iran: in the 1970s and early 1980s, 1991, and 2003 (Fawcett and Tanner, 2002; Human Rights Watch, 2004; McDowall, 2004; Van Engeland-Nourai, 2008). In the 1970s and early 1980s, several hundred thousand Kurds were displaced, as Baghdad aimed to consolidate its control over Kurdish areas with oil or rich farmland, expelling the Kurds and moving in ethnic Arabs. Some Kurds were internally displaced, while others fled to Iran. In 1980 at the start of the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime expelled the Iraqi Shiite Faili Kurds to Iran, accusing them of collaboration with Iran since the community traced its origins to eighteenth-century immigrants from Iran. Estimates of the numbers of displaced from these events range from 200,000 to 372,000. In the late 1980s, the Iraqi Ba'athist regime conducted a campaign of ethnic cleansing against the Kurds (the Anfal Campaign). During these years, the regime killed thousands of Kurds (with estimates ranging between 50,000 and 182,000) and destroyed thousands of villages (the Kurdistan Regional Government puts the number at 4,000) (Human Rights Watch, 1993; Johns, 1988). In 1991, the Iraqi regime moved to crush the Kurdish insurgency that came in response to these actions, destroying more villages and displacing more civilians. That same year, 1.85 million Kurds fled to the Turkish (450,000) and Iranian borders (1.4 million) (Galbraith, 2003). While Turkey kept its borders closed, Iran opened its borders. In response, the United States and its allies implemented both the Northern No Fly Zone under UN auspices to prevent Iraqi planes from attacking the Kurds and Operation Provide Comfort to offer humanitarian assistance. These steps enabled many of the Kurds gathering at the borders of Turkey and Iran to return home after a matter of weeks. Others fled to Iran.

Iraqi Kurds returned from Iran mainly in the 1990s and 2000s. The returns in the 1990s happened after the Iraqi government indicated that it would not prosecute or conscript into military service those who had fled as refugees, according to our interviews with Kurdish community leaders. However, return numbers were limited owing to ongoing security problems. In 1994, civil war broke out in the KRI between the region's two main political parties—the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan—internally displacing more Kurds. In 1998, the United States mediated an end to the civil war between the political parties. A 2001 Iranian census estimated that 204,000 Iraqi refugees remained in Iran, although actual numbers of remaining Iraqis were higher as some gained citizenship or failed to be counted (Van Engeland-Nourai, 2008). In 2003, a quarter of Iraqi refugees in Iran still lived in government-run camps (Redden, 2003). Returns in the 2000s happened after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and removal of Saddam Hussein from power. His removal, in combination with increasing restrictions on the refugees' access to work

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[1] The Yazidis and the Kakais are Iraqi minorities residing mainly in northern Iraq. The Yazidis follow a monotheistic religion, and the Kakais practice the Yarsanism religion. Both speak mostly Kurdish dialects. While fully accurate population data are lacking, there are an estimated 300,000–700,000 Yazidis and 100,000–250,000 Kakais in Iraq (Abouaoun and Kalian, 2020; Henne and Hackett, 2014). They were targeted for atrocities and expulsion by ISIS, with the Yazidis experiencing particularly savage massacres.

and public services in Iran, led some 400,000 Iraqi refugees in Iran to return (Van Engeland-Nourai, 2008). UNHCR cites Iranian government figures of 30,000 Iraqi refugees remaining in Iran as of 2021 (UNHCR, 2021c).

The U.S. 2003 invasion of Iraq sparked an insurgency and ongoing insecurity in Iraq that lasted from 2003 through 2011, although circumstances in the KRI were more stable than elsewhere in Iraq during that time.

In 2011, Arab Spring uprisings in neighboring Syria led to civil war and extensive displacement of the Syrian population, both internally inside Syria and externally as refugees in neighboring countries, including Iraq (Walsh School of Foreign Service, 2021). Over half of Syria's prewar population is displaced: This includes 5.6 million refugees in Middle East host countries, a million refugees in Europe, and Syria's 6.5 million internally displaced persons (UNHCR, undated b; UNHCR, 2021f).[2] The KRI hosts a small percentage of Syria's refugees. Around 243,000 Syrians, mainly ethnic Kurds, resided in the KRI in 2021 (UNHCR, 2021e). Out of all of Syria's refugees in all countries, only 267,000 (UNHCR, 2021d) have returned.

Starting in 2014, large-scale internal displacement in Iraq again took place both when ISIS conquered territory in Iraq, causing people to flee, and when the Iraqi military, backed by the U.S.-led Global Coalition, undertook operations to retake territory from the group. That year, ISIS took possession of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, and surrounding areas in Ninewa Province, a region that abuts the KRI and that is home to many of Iraq's minority communities. ISIS also took other regions of Iraq and targeted minorities for persecution and atrocities, including Yazidis, Christians, and Kakai, many of whom fled from Ninewa Province to the KRI. The military operations against ISIS involved some of the most intense urban combat since World War II and widespread destruction of housing. These events resulted in nearly 6 million internally displaced Iraqis by 2017. The numbers of IDPs dropped quickly after the defeat of ISIS, as many returned home. As of December 2020, 1.2 million Iraqis remained internally displaced, and 4.8 million had returned, with the government of Iraq supporting a significant drive to encourage IDP returns. The largest proportion of Iraq's remaining IDPs live in the KRI (about 500,000 IDPs in October 2020) and Ninewa Province (300,000 IDPs) (Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2020; IOM, 2021).

Return Considerations in the Home and Host Locations

While Host Communities Aimed to Be Generous to Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, Resource Constraints and Long Periods of Displacement Led to Poor Conditions

For all three populations, the host countries or regions set policies that enabled refugees and IDPs to access shelter, public services, and work. However, government resource shortages in both Iran (for the Iraqi Kurds) and the KRI (for the Iraqi IDPs and Syrian refugees) have precluded fulfilling these policies, and weak wartime economies have made many of the displaced struggle for their livelihoods. In addition, in both Iran and the KRI, the public initially offered significant and generous help to those in need, but frustrations rose over time because of resource shortages that also affected host communities.

Although Iran initially welcomed the Iraqi Kurdish refugees, over time Iran placed restrictions on them and actively encouraged them to return to Iraq. Iran housed the refugees in a combination of camps and urban areas. In the beginning, Iranian citizens often hosted the refugees in their homes, and many refugees had access to K–12 education and public health care. During the 1990s, Iran hosted the largest number of refugees in the world, mainly from Afghanistan and Iraq, and struggled with resources for them (Guchteneire,

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[2] UNHCR, 2021f, for refugees; UNHCR, undated b, for IDPs; plus about a million in the European Union.

Koenig and Cassarino, 2008; Van Engeland-Nourai, 2008). During the 1990s, Iran passed a series of laws that limited rights to work for refugees, instated penalties for employers that hired them, and barred access to free public education and medical treatment. The Iraqi Kurdish refugees did not have the right to access free higher education or own property, according to our interviews. In some cases, their freedom of movement was confined to their particular camp or town, also according to our interviews.

While both federal Iraq and the KRI have generous policies for the Syrian refugees hosted there, economic constraints prohibit meeting goals. Iraq is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. However, its 1971 Refugee Law and 2009 Law No. 21 provide rights to refugees similar to those in the 1951 Refugee Convention (Yassen, 2019). Iraq allows Syrian refugees there to work (UNDP, ILO, and WFP, 2017). Syrians are given renewable 12-month residency cards and the right to education, health care, and employment; however, extreme budget constraints from hosting so many displaced people mean that, in practice, access to these services is scarce. About 40 percent of the Syrians live in camps (Yassen, 2019). About half of Syrian refugee children do not have access to education, because of the already strained capacity of the KRI's education system to accommodate the additional numbers of children (World Bank and KRG Ministry of Planning, 2015). With jobs difficult to find, families resort to child labor and child marriage to cover income gaps. One study found that the lack of employment opportunities, basic services, and safety and security was viewed by the Syrian refugees as reasons to eventually leave the KRI (IMPACT Initiatives, 2018). Despite these hardships, another study found that refugees still preferred the lower quality of life as a refugee in the KRI to the insecurity in Syria (World Bank, 2020).

As Iraqi citizens, the Iraqi IDPs have the same rights to housing, public services, and jobs as residents of the KRI. Yet the same resource constraints that affect hosting the Syrian refugees apply to the Iraqi IDPs, leading to poor access to jobs and services. In 2019, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) estimated that it needed $1.9 billion per year to cover costs for services and other needs of the Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs (Ministry of Interior, 2019). In 2020, it put that figure at $1 billion, as more had returned home (van Wilgenburg, 2020).

The Remaining Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons Are the Most Difficult Cases to Return

While most of Iraq's IDPs returned to their homes quickly after the defeat of ISIS, Iraq's remaining IDPs include some of the most difficult cases for return. Many are unwilling or unable to return (Sydney, 2018), and when they do return, many returns are not durable, with some people lacking adequate shelter or at risk of becoming displaced again. Remaining IDPs include several categories of people:

- *People whose homes were destroyed and lack shelter to return to.* According to data provided by IOM during an interview for this study, 120,000 Iraqi homes were completely destroyed in the fighting with ISIS and still need removal of debris and explosive hazards, while international agencies have restored 75,000 homes.
- *Minorities who experienced violence.* Minorities were targeted for atrocities by ISIS, had villages destroyed, and lack trust in their safety. This destruction of communities, trauma, and fear prevent their return home. The Yazidis were particularly targeted, with massacres of men, sexual enslavement of women, conscription of youth, and destruction of villages. Minority populations were already declining prior to ISIS owing to outmigration to other countries. For instance, Iraq's Christian population dwindled from 1.4 million in 2003 to 240,000 in 2021 as many left Iraq to relocate to Western countries (BBC News, 2021). Many minorities do not return to their homes as they hold out hope for obtaining asylum in Western countries.

- *People who are perceived to be affiliated with ISIS.* After the defeat of ISIS, many communities do not want to accept those whom they view as guilty back into their communities. These include wives and children of ISIS fighters, other relatives of fighters, or people who are viewed by their communities as collaborating. There may be people in this group who were not affiliated with ISIS but who nonetheless cannot return because their communities believe them to be and do not want them back. Some in this group also may have committed crimes, although justice procedures have not been implemented to the extent needed to manage this issue in Iraq after ISIS.

Among the Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons and Syrian Refugees Currently Displaced in the Kurdistan Region–Iraq, Desire to Return Home Varies

In one survey of remaining Iraqi IDPs in camps in September 2020, few wanted to return home (REACH, 2020). Only 20 percent of those remaining in camps intended to return within a year, and among those in Erbil in the KRI, only 5 percent intended to return. Damage to homes (43 percent), lack of jobs (37 percent), and fear or trauma (31 percent) were the main barriers reported to return. Over half in another survey perceived their home areas as unsafe, and half reported no basic services available (Al Shami and Davis, 2020).

Among the Syrian refugees, most want to return home eventually, but not in the near future. A 2019 survey found that 75 percent of Syrian refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan say that they want to return eventually, but only 6 percent wanted to do so in the next year (UNHCR, 2019). These proportions are higher than in a similar 2017 survey that found that only half of Syrian refugees wanted to return eventually (UNHCR, 2020b). Main reasons cited by Syrian refugees for not returning were security, limited livelihoods, limited shelter, avoiding military service, limited basic services, fear of detention, limited access to education, and no political solution (World Bank, 2020).

Security Is Required for Returns for All Groups

For all of these groups (Iraqi Kurdish returnees, Iraqi IDPs, and Syrian refugees), security has been foundational to the decision of whether to return. When the Kurds fled to the Iranian border in 1991, large-scale return was enabled quickly when the United States and its allies implemented the Northern No Fly Zone under UN auspices to prevent additional violence by air from the Iraqi regime. Additional large-scale return of Iraqi Kurds from Iran happened after the deposition of Saddam Hussein, making Iraqi Kurdish refugees believe they would no longer be targeted.

Among the remaining Iraqi IDPs and Syrian refugees in the KRI, lack of security in their places of origin (e.g., Ninewa Province and Syria) remains a barrier to return. Ninewa Province still faces security problems, including clashes between the KRG and federal Iraq over territory, ISIS remnants still operating, fighting between the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and Turkish forces, and the Popular Mobilization Forces, which are militias that officially operate under the Iraqi government but often act according to sectarian interests and are sometimes backed by Iran. One survey of Iraqi IDPs found that they viewed minority regions in Ninewa Province as insecure (REACH, 2020). All of the Iraqi minority community leaders in our interviews believed that conflict is ongoing and not resolved, with an outbreak of violence possible at any time; of particular concern to these community leaders is that they viewed the Iraqi government as not powerful enough to control the PMF militias. Several minority leaders described examples of "failed returns" in certain villages, noting that "many regret going home" because of a lack of security, compromised public order owing to a lack of policing, and resentment from the communities who stayed and fought and who consider the IDPs traitors for leaving.

The ongoing insecurity in Syria and the lack of a political resolution to Syria's civil war despite dwindling fighting prohibit returns of the Syrian refugees, although many want to return eventually, as discussed in the survey results earlier. In this context, refugee returns to Syria in general remain low and are unlikely to increase significantly within the next few years without such a political solution that gives confidence that it is safe to return (Culbertson, 2020). Furthermore, there are reports of returned Syrian refugees facing arrest, torture, conscription, or harassment by the government or armed groups (Loveluck, 2019; Sherlock, 2019), also deterring returns since refugees fear that the same could happen to them.

Widespread Destruction of Housing and Weak Economies Prevent and Shape Return

Upon return to the KRI from Iran, many Kurds struggled with housing and jobs. Many of them had lost homes in Saddam Hussein's campaigns to destroy Kurdish villages; others had sold their homes in anticipation of not returning to Iraq from Iran; yet others returned to find their former homes occupied by others who did not own them. Having enough housing stock and sorting out property claims proved to be key challenges when large numbers of Kurdish returnees arrived back from Iran. In 2004, UNHCR stopped a return facilitation program from Iran after being notified by the KRG that housing shortages made absorbing returnees difficult. Finding a job upon return, when skills had been developed in other countries and when all of Iraq was at war and also faced a financial crisis, posed problems for many Kurdish returnees. After decades of war, American sanctions on Iraq, and Iraqi regime sanctions on the KRI, the KRI private sector was weak, with the government viewed as the main source of stable jobs. A financial crisis in 1994 led to devaluation of the Iraqi dinar, further inhibiting private sector employment, making new public sector jobs scarce, and making salaries not go as far. Our interviewees and the literature noted that some Iraqi Kurdish returnees had repeated internal displacements after return to Iraq because of these issues (Fawcett and Tanner, 2002; McDowall, 2004).

Widespread destruction of villages of origin and homes of Iraqi IDPs has prevented local economies from recovering, and prevented many who would wish to return from finding a livelihood. Minority leaders in our discussion also noted that promised compensation from the Iraqi government that could help them rebuild their homes has not been fulfilled. They viewed jobs, housing, education, and public services as a complete package that needed to be in place for return. COVID-19 has further increased difficulties in finding livelihoods for returnees. Iraqi IDP men and women returned home at different rates, as men moved for jobs even if security and support for families were not available, while women were more likely to stay where schooling was available for children (Al Shami and Davis, 2020). They particularly wanted help from the international community with jobs (Al Shami and Davis, 2020).

Roles of National and International Organizations

Formal Government and Multilateral Help for Returning Kurds Was Very Limited, with Most Help Coming from Communities

Iraqi and KRI government tools to help the Kurdish returnees from Iran were limited, according to both the literature and our interviews with Kurdish community leaders. Romano, 2005, attributes the weak government assistance to returnees to competing governmental structures among the Iraqi central government, the KRG, and the two main Kurdish political parties (which had been engaged in a civil war from 1994 to 1998). The central Iraqi government had been behind much of the Kurdish initial displacement and so offered little help to the Kurds with returns during this period. The establishment of the U.S.-backed Northern No Fly Zone enabled creation of the KRG in 1992 as a semiautonomous government within Iraq (KRG, 2018). As

a new regional government in the context of a civil war and financial crisis, the KRG had limited tools to help returnees. Kurdish leaders interviewed noted that because the KRG was a new government with scant resources at that time, it lacked capabilities or institutions to help the Kurdish returnees. In addition, KRG leaders had been in exile themselves and lacked experience managing refugee returnee programs. One Kurdish leader interviewed described this as "an administrative vacuum in the early 1990s." Another said, "We did not have experience to deal with a group of people who came back for reintegration in their own country." While these interviewees noted that individuals within either formal KRG structures or the two Kurdish political parties sometimes took initiatives to help returnees, there were no formal KRI or Iraqi government policies or programs to help the returnees.

Interviewees described how Kurdish returnees took it upon themselves to rebuild their villages after destruction by the Saddam Hussein regime. In some cases, after villagers took the initiative to rebuild, the KRG stepped in with support for infrastructure, such as following up with installing electricity or other utilities. Friends, neighbors, and family members provided any financial or other assistance needed for reintegration.

Similarly, there was little multilateral assistance to support the Kurdish returnees from Iran. Under pressure from the Iranian government, UNHCR organized a voluntary repatriation campaign for the Iraqi Kurdish refugees in 2003, including providing information, explosive hazard awareness training, some cash, medical help, and transportation back to Iraq. It also opened up a new border crossing as the border region was heavily mined (Guchteneire, Koenig, and Cassarino, 2008; Van Engeland-Nourai, 2008). In 2004, UNHCR quickly stopped its efforts because of security problems and limited housing to accommodate the returnees. While UNHCR facilitated the return of 13,000 Kurds from Iran in 2004, it was outpaced by the spontaneous returns by the refugees themselves that year (BBC News, 2004). Once the Kurdish returnees arrived in the KRI, they received little assistance from multilaterals and NGOs, as security conditions prevented most such organizations from working in the region. Kurdish leaders interviewed from this time were not aware of multilateral assistance for reintegration.

That 4.5 Million Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons Returned After the War Against ISIS Is a Major Accomplishment for Iraq, Although Resources Constrain Needed Steps

The vast majority of Iraq's IDPs were able to return to their homes after the defeat of ISIS. By any measure, this is a remarkable accomplishment for Iraq. The remaining 1.2 million—consisting of those who had lost their homes, minority communities, and families with perceived affiliations to ISIS—are the most difficult cases. Many factors contributed to this level of returns, although this report is not able to rank which were the most important.

Iraqi citizens returning spontaneously and dedicating their efforts to the rebuilding necessary is one key factor.

The Iraqi government facilitated IDP returns by recapturing territory from ISIS, encouraging returns through messaging, engaging a government ministry dedicated to displacement (the Ministry of Migration and Displacement), and providing material support, transport to areas of origin, in-kind assistance, return grants, and some compensation for damaged property, injuries, and deaths caused by ISIS (Anzellini et al., 2020; Culbertson and Robinson, 2017). Compensation remains rare, though; as of January 2020, only 1 percent of compensation applications were accepted and none were paid. As the Ministry of Migration and Displacement is still processing grants from 2014, IOM is helping with technical assistance on the backlog of grants. The Iraqi Ministry of Planning is developing a national durable solutions plan, according to our interviews.

Multilaterals have also played roles in returns, in coordination with the Iraqi government. UNDP has focused on reconciliation efforts and reconstruction. The International Committee for the Red Cross has

worked on advocacy and is making sure people with perceived ISIS affiliations are treated according to humanitarian law. OCHA is coordinating multilateral activities related to humanitarian issues in general, including returns. Multiple agencies have worked on brokering return agreements with local communities. Yet, one multilateral official was very skeptical of such formal return agreements facilitated by multilateral agencies as precursors to returns, noting that sometimes agreements are signed, without leading to significant returns, as monitoring and implementation procedures by either the Iraqi government or multilaterals are lacking.

Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons Camp Closures Have Been Controversial, with Questions About Voluntariness of Returns

As a distinct, but related, topic affecting overall Iraqi policy toward displaced persons, camp closures remain a key issue. In 2019 and 2020, after 4.8 million Iraqi IDPs had already returned home, the Iraqi government started closing Iraq's remaining IDP camps, implementing objectives of all IDPs returning to their areas of origin. All but two camps in federal Iraq were closed at the time of this report. The KRG has not closed its remaining IDP camps. International agencies have criticized the camp closures as premature and potentially leaving IDPs without shelter during the pandemic. Both OCHA and UNHCR in particular have publicly criticized the closures (OCHA, 2021). Camp closures have led to secondary displacement, as some of those forced out of camps often had no alternative shelter arrangements apart from squatting in damaged empty buildings or informal tented settlements on the outskirts of urban areas. IOM found that half of those forced to leave camps were not able to return to areas of origin and lived in damaged or unsafe buildings without necessities (Schlein, 2020). One multilateral official interviewed was concerned that the Iraqi government had "not thought through what will happen to these people if they do leave." One minority leader called the camp closures "cruel and dangerous." While one donor government official believed that the camps were closed too quickly, he also acknowledged, "I don't know what alternatives are if you don't want long term support for people in camps" with people "being forever dependent."

There Are No Significant Facilitated Return Efforts for the Syrian Refugees by Multilateral Agencies

There are no significant multilateral facilitated repatriation efforts for Syrian refugees. The United Nations has stated that it is not facilitating returns because of security and other conditions (Regional Durable Solutions: Working Group for the Syria Situation, 2019). UNHCR's position is that "the present conditions in Syria are not conducive for voluntary repatriation in safety and dignify" (UNHCR, 2018a). It provides four criteria for when it would shift to facilitating large-scale repatriation for Syrian refugees: legal frameworks for rights of returnees are in place in Syria, evidence that protection needs are being met, improvement in conditions of return areas, and large numbers of refugee requests for return support. The Assad regime in collaboration with Russia held a conference on promoting refugee returns in 2020, but the European Union made statements in opposition, stating that the time is not right for refugees to return to Syria (European Council: Council of the European Union, 2020; Hubbard, 2020).

All Three Displaced Populations in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq—Returned Kurds, Iraqi Internally Displaced Persons, and Syrian Refugees—Were Viewed in Terms of the Political Balance of Power

For the past century in Iraq and Syria, since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of new countries of the Middle East, demography and ethnicity have had important implications for political power (Culbertson, 2016). In all three cases in this chapter, the displacement of communities and their return were viewed

by political elites as affecting political power, as proportions of ethnicities living in certain locations can determine power structures.

The Iraqi Kurds were displaced by the Saddam Hussein regime when it was trying to reengineer demography in Iraq so that its valuable land (with oil resources, with rich farmland, or bordering Iran or Turkey) was not occupied primarily by Kurdish groups but by Arabs, particularly in the context of Kurdish independence movements. Many Iranians are also ethnically Kurdish and viewed the Iraqis as fellow Kurds in need. Their presence was welcomed upon return to the KRI as reenforcing the Kurdish nature of the region. According to our interviews, the KRG and the KRI host community see the presence of the Syrian Kurds in the KRI as beneficial because it increases the Kurdish population in the context of decades of the Iraqi government aiming to reduce it. The Syrian Kurds are treated as fellow Kurds who are welcome to stay. In our interviews with Iraqi Kurdish and Ninewa IDP community leaders, all raised concerns that the returns of their communities were linked to political interests related to which ethnic groups were dominant in which areas, making them feel like pawns. They also viewed the federal Iraqi government and the KRG as taking steps that would prevent certain communities from returning to their villages because they aimed to shape demography and thereby influence political power. For some of the Iraqi IDP minorities, interviewees raised the thorny issue of the ethnic character of communities that displaced people return to. For instance, the Yazidi population has historically been centered in the city of Sinjar in Ninewa Province. The Saddam Hussein regime made efforts to populate Sinjar with Arabs. Sending Yazidis home to Sinjar will once again change the ethnic balance. As one multilateral official queried, "So what are we trying to restore to? What period in time?"

Iraq Lacks Solid Plans for Returns of Families with Perceived Affiliation to ISIS

Many Iraqi communities perceive families with possible affiliation to ISIS as a threat and often do not want them back (International Crisis Group, 2020). Yet, systematic approaches to enabling such families to return are lacking. In our interviews, the Iraqi police and judiciary were seen as not having the capabilities to handle the responsibilities of trials for those who might have committed crimes, with concerns that returnees would instead face "kangaroo courts" that could judge people on the basis of having an ISIS family member, even if the returnee had committed no crimes. Multilateral and NGO officials described working with tribal and community leaders for a "security guarantee" to take the women and children with perceived ISIS affiliations back in safety or designate a "sponsor" who commits to take care of the returnee financially. In some cases, the sponsorship involved an arranged marriage for returning women, a practice that our interviewees said they did not support. Those with perceived ISIS affiliations also require formal government security clearance paperwork that enables them to travel and pass through checkpoints, along with identity paperwork that enables them to access public services locally. Without such paperwork, these people cannot travel or obtain health care or education for their children. In some cases, in order to receive this paperwork, according to our interviews, the Iraqi government requires women to "disavow" a relative believed to be part of ISIS. This means, for example, that a woman in this situation cannot leave a camp, travel to or within a city and cross checkpoints, or obtain education for children without disavowing a husband who may or may not actually have been part of ISIS. Some do disavow their relatives, condemning what a relative did, while others think their family member should not be blamed. One multilateral official noted, "A family should not be required to give evidence against their own family member in order to receive civil documentation, which is a basic right of a citizen. But many people have no other option but to disavow, because they need an ID for their kids to survive." Another said that it is "shameful that Iraqi government has transferred responsibilities to communities and tribal leaders." Interviewees called for national Iraqi policy solutions, noting that tribal solutions should not substitute for national security clearances.

Voices of Returnees and the Displaced in the Kurdistan Region–Iraq

This section describes the viewpoints of the three groups, based on focus groups and interviews with 48 individuals, in the KRI: the Kurdish refugees who fled to Iran in the 1980s and 1990s and later returned to Iraq, minorities/IDPs from Ninewa Province who fled ISIS from 2014 onward, and Syrian Kurds who fled to the KRI post-2011 from the Syrian civil war.

Very rarely did a single factor determine a return decision; rather, a combination of factors together as a package drove decisions to return. Returnees identified a combination of push-and-pull factors that influenced their decisions to return home while refugees. Some refugees returned when they thought life would be better in their home country, while others left when circumstances changed for the worse in the host country. Security was the foundational factor that enabled return, combined with other reasons.

Security Was the Most Cited Factor Influencing Return

For the Iraqi Kurds, the "why" of the return was commonly the emotional connection with their home, but the determining factor of the "when" of their return was most often the security situation in Iraq. Fourteen out of the 24 Iraqi Kurdish discussion participants specifically mentioned various events or changes in the security situation that signaled to them that they could return home, such as the Iraqi regime's announcement of amnesty for returning Kurds or the fall of Saddam Hussein. In one focus group, when asked, "At what point did you consider return?" all five of the female participants said, "Kurdistan was free, and . . . " or "There was security, and . . . " before identifying other factors. An Iraqi Kurdish man said, "The security of Iraq improved; it was the most important [factor when] we decided to come back."

Similarly, the Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs cited security foremost for return, noting that they could endure their current difficult living circumstances. While they said they would need other conditions to return, like jobs, schools, hospitals, and basic services, little of this would matter without basic security. One Ninewa minority IDP woman said, "It is better for me to be here, though the camp is terrible, but the only good thing about the camp is the security." Syrian refugee men feared for their safety and possible conscription into military service in Syria.

Trust Was Cited by All Groups as an Important Part of Security

Trust with respect to security was a common theme among all groups. Having trust—in the government, in ruling political parties, in neighbors, in the peace, or in the situation writ large—was a key factor in the decision to return. One Iraqi Kurdish man said, "One thing which made us return late was the fact we did not trust the government of Saddam. We thought if we [came] back they would kill us. We didn't trust the amnesty. We thought it was just to encourage us to go back and kill us when we are back." When asked about the biggest obstacle to return, one Syrian Kurdish refugee man said, "We lost our trust and we do not feel it is going to be secure again. . . . We cannot even trust our neighbors. Arabs came and as soon as they found that we are Kurds, they immediately started threatening us to leave the place. I cannot return there. This cannot be solved." One Syrian Kurdish refugee woman said, "I do not trust the security. How can I trust it? On one side you see Arabs, and on the other side Turks, and they are all against the Kurds. There is no trust and I do not see any future for us in Syria anymore. I lost my trust in Syria."

Necessary Conditions to Return for the Currently Displaced Were Stated as a Package, Viewing Compensation as Particularly Important but Lacking

When pressed further on what they would need to return home, the Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs did identify factors that could potentially have an impact—most of which were related to security. In addition, they

would often in a single sentence mention a package of conditions that would be necessary all together at the same time, such as potable water, electricity, paved roads, health care, education for their children, jobs, help rebuilding destroyed homes, help with transportation to return home, and certain political outcomes, such as a unified government ruling over the city or an autonomous region.

A number said that their houses were destroyed, so they did not have a home to return to. Some said they needed compensation for rebuilding their homes. One Iraqi IDP woman from Ninewa said, "I want support before I go back. They have to provide us with food. And we need compensation and we need to make sure we have the money to build our house in Sinjar." Yet they did not think compensation would be available or sufficient. One Iraqi IDP Ninewa man compared the compensation that he heard was offered for housing with the amount he would actually need: "It is not enough. How can I use it? What should I do with this? I cannot rebuild my house. No, I prefer to stay in the tent here."

Longing for Home and Family Was Key to Decision for Those Who Returned

A longing for home, country, community, emotional ties, and family were common reasons given by the returned Iraqi Kurdish refugees for wanting to return home. Ten of the 24 Iraqi Kurdish participants made at least one remark about this. Many described wanting to return home to relatives, former houses, jobs, or businesses; almost half of the participants that had returned mentioned missing family (including the need to care for sick relatives) as a reason to return. One Iraqi Kurdish woman said, "It is always good to come back to your country; home is the best." Another Iraqi Kurdish woman, when asked why she was glad to have returned, said, "It is my country, wherever you go, you have to come back to your country, I belong to here. My beloved people are here, the future of my kids is here. Sooner or later I have to come back." Some, but not all, of the Iraqi IDP Ninewa minorities also considered returning home. When asked what their goals were for the next 10–20 years, several of the Iraqi IDP Ninewa men and women said they would like to have returned home and for there to be security and services.

The sense of home among the Syrian refugees and others of the Iraqi IDPs was not as strong in our focus groups. These participants were less likely to express fondness or emotional ties for their home countries or communities, because of the atrocities they had faced. Relatives or friends in the home country or community were not discussed as an element influencing a desire or decision to return home, as many were also displaced. Some of the Iraqi IDP minority leaders noted deep emotional ties of their community to their places of origin, with a general sentiment of wanting to return but not being able to because of fears of security, lack of reconciliation, and levels of destruction. They worried about ongoing discrimination preventing minorities from staying in Iraq. Their houses were destroyed, and they noted that compensation typically was not available for them to rebuild.

Welcomeness or Difficulties in the Host Community Influenced Return to Some Extent

Circumstances in the new community often influenced the desire to return. The way the local communities treated the refugees and IDPs varied significantly among the interviewees. Some were very positive about their interactions with their host communities, while others noted that their circumstances deteriorated over time. Some felt that the only support they received was from locals, and they praised their kindness.

Most of the Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs felt welcome, describing peaceful relations with communities in the KRI. None identified negative relations in the KRI as making them want to return home. Some believed their circumstances were better in the KRI than they had been in their homes before displacement. One Iraqi IDP Ninewa man said, "I cannot return. It is better for me now. I have better security and better education for our kids, and we have better health care here. All of these would be difficult if we go back."

Many Iraqi Kurdish returnees noted positive treatment in Iran for a few years, as they received food, clothes, and support. One Iraqi Kurdish male returnee said about Iran, "We cannot pay them back for the help the people of Kurdistan received from the Iranian government. The people shared everything they had with us." Another said,

> There was help from the Kurdish people of Iran. We cannot forget it. The help was the fact that every single Iranian had at least two Iraqi families living with them in the same house. They shared their house and food with us. This was a great sacrifice from their side. But I did not see any other help. There was no organization and no government's help.

Yet over time, the Iraqi Kurdish refugees believed both the Iranian government and people treated them more harshly. This coincided with Iran facing its own struggles, such as hosting large numbers of refugees from both Iraq and Afghanistan as well as job scarcity among Iranians because of economic problems. Participants in our discussions described discriminatory treatment in Iran or restrictions placed on them because of their status as an Iraqi refugee. This included limited access to education, job scarcity, restrictions on their freedom of movement inside Iran, inability for youth to attend Iranian university, inability to own property or a business, ID cards that singled them out as refugees, and poor living situations. These factors made them want to leave Iran when conditions in the KRI allowed. Some felt they could pinpoint a specific circumstance in Iran that led to their decision to return, such as being told they could not work in Iran anymore. One Iraqi Kurdish man said, "Once I went to a bakery, and I complained about the bad quality of the bread, but they stopped us and they used to say: If you are not happy with our quality, then why don't you return to your country. . . . just return and leave here." One Iraqi Kurdish woman said, "[The locals] really made fun of our poverty and our clothes and our accent." One man said, "Since we were never considered Iranians, we did not have a future there. . . . I could not stand it anymore."

Many of the Currently Displaced Syrian Refugees and Ninewa Internally Displaced Persons Did Not Want to Return, Remembering Traumas

Most of the currently displaced Syrian refugees and Ninewa IDPs said that they did not *want* to return, especially the Syrian Kurds. The vast majority were adamant about not returning, skeptical that conditions could ever enable return. Rather, they wanted to either stay in Kurdistan or go to Europe. Only one Syrian refugee woman said she wanted Syria to be safe enough for her to return and to have her former house and job again. One Syrian refugee man said, "I cannot imagine of a single thing getting better. Everything would turn worse. Nothing is good there." A number of refugees and IDPs attributed not wanting to return to traumatic experiences and losses. One Ninewa IDP minority man said, "Mosul is still not safe for us, and I cannot go to a city where my family was killed." A Syrian refugee woman said, "We never think of returning. . . . I cannot forget how I escaped, how can I go back to the place where I saw thousands of people killed in front of my eyes."

Housing Conditions Were Difficult but Did Not Contribute to Return Decisions

Housing and living situations varied among the Iraqi Kurdish returnees, Syrian refugees, and Iraqi IDPs. Some stayed in camps, others lived in cities, and others had lived in both at some point. Many of the Iraqi Kurdish returnees had lived in crowded home situations in Iran, as some locals hosted multiple families. Others lived with relatives or friends in Iran, and some rented houses. Yet they did not specifically identify their difficult living conditions as a primary reason to return home. Some described missing their houses in Iraq. Several cited difficulty in earning enough to pay rent in Iran or deteriorating living conditions when Iran reduced its housing support for them. Others also noted that the inability to own their own houses in Iran contributed to the feeling that they did not truly belong. Many Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs also commented that their

houses were destroyed and that they would need compensation to rebuild them, the second most important factor cited in returning. They also said they were unable to get information on the state of their homes.

Lack of Job Opportunities Was a Motivating Factor to Leave Host Communities, but Many Returned Home to Disappointing Job Opportunities

Employment challenges were cited as a reason for some to return. Yet while the possibility or promise of work was important in the return decision, actual jobs did not always emerge. Some Iraqi Kurdish returnees said there were no jobs when they arrived in Iran, particularly for women, while others found ways to generate income. A common contributing factor to the return decision by Iraqi Kurds was a shift in employment circumstances, whereas at one point work had been available in Iran, it suddenly ended, or newly adult children could not find employment. Several Iraqi Kurds said that jobs became scarce even among Iranians as time went on, which contributed to increased hostility toward the Iraqi refugees as competition for jobs. One Iraqi Kurdish woman explained why they returned: "The people were not nice anymore. . . . They said: Iraqis have taken our jobs." Another said, "As soon as my husband could not work, we decided to come back." Prospects of a job back home in Iraq drew some. Those that returned had mixed experiences in finding employment upon return, but many were disappointed in the lack of job opportunities. Many of the Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs said that a job was a necessary condition for their return. An Iraqi IDP Ninewa woman said, "I want jobs and services, and the government needs to create jobs. I want a life the same as the one before ISIS appeared . . . [I want] help from organizations for people to open their shops, and helping the people who have got ideas."

Families Considered Access to Education in Deciding Whether to Return

Over half of the Iraqi Kurdish returnees identified limited educational opportunities in Iran for their children as a factor contributing to their decisions to return home. Most said that their children had been able to attend K–12 school in Iran, alongside Iranian children, though some said that as Iraqi refugees, their children had not been able to attend school. Most said they did not face discrimination in schooling for younger children. However, as non-Iranians, they were not permitted to attend public universities, and private universities were expensive. This therefore meant that Iraqi Kurdish refugees were unable to attain education past high school, and several identified their children's ability to attend an Iraqi university as a return consideration. While most did not identify this as the sole reason for their return to Iraq, a few mentioned this as one of several key factors. One Iraqi Kurdish man said, "As soon as they told us we cannot send kids to school and when I was not allowed to work, then I immediately decided to come back to Iraq." When describing her decision to return, an Iraqi Kurdish woman added, "I had two kids in school. The government of Iran said the following year, the government cannot let my kids go to school. The school is not for us anymore." Similarly, several Ninewa IDPs said that while their children had access to school in the KRI, they would be concerned about not having access if they returned to their homes of origin and education had not yet been restored.

Information Was Insufficient Prior to Returning Home

Most participants in all three groups reported that they did not receive sufficient information from friends, family, and other sources to provide a clear picture of conditions back home. Most Iraqi Kurdish returnees acknowledged that they had not accurately understood what the situation would be upon their return. They relied on several information sources: reports from relatives and friends who had returned, radio, letters, and visitors. They were most concerned with seeking information on the security situation, their homes, and the safety of their relatives. Some Syrian refugees and Iraqi IDPs said that they had relatives or friends back at home keeping them informed and telling them not to return, as basic services remained unavailable, while

others said that there was no one they knew in their home community to ask. Several participants said that those they knew who had stayed or returned home were unhappy.

Most Wanted Help with a Return, but Many Did Not Receive It or Were Disappointed with the Help That Was Available

Iraqi Kurdish returnees reported wanting help with their return home, but they were generally disappointed. Similar to what we found in the literature and in our interviews, few were able to get the help they wanted from the government or international organizations either because of organizational capacity limitations or because the situation was not stable enough to enable addressing all needs. Most Iraqi Kurdish returnees reported not receiving any formal help from their government, the United Nations, or NGOs in deciding to come home, making the trip home, and settling again in their home country. A repeated theme was expressed by one Iraqi Kurdish woman who said, "I expected life would be better. . . . But all the things we expected did not happen. We expected that the government of Kurdistan or humanitarian organizations would prepare a house for us for the near term, but it did not happen early enough."

Nearly ten Iraqi Kurdish returnees said that the United Nations provided transportation or food for their return. Most noted that the return journey was generally easy for people. The Syrian refugees and Ninewa minority IDPs also wanted transportation to be provided if they returned. Multiple Iraqi Kurdish returnees said that they would have liked a welcoming reception at the border that could have provided information and guidance about the steps that they would have to take and the resources available to them.

Some did receive several types of assistance for their return, but most viewed it as insufficient. One Iraqi Kurdish woman said, "The government did what they promised. Money, and land and job, and free school, it was good. And the government did it all. The only thing is that the organizations must have provided us with a shelter before we move to a house." Many identified a number of ways they wished that they had been supported. This included food, security, temporary housing, job placement or job training, functioning schools, utility services, help navigating bureaucracy, identity cards, and compensation for rebuilding homes. Some of the Syrian refugees or Ninewa minority IDPs said the support they needed was not related to return but rather to adapting to their new lives or moving to Europe.

Our participants did not express a preference about which entities provided support, whether governmental or nongovernmental. However, they tended to believe that NGOs had more power, resources, or efficiency to support refugees and IDPs than government agencies. Some thought that there should be more coordination between the government and NGOs for helping them.

Similarly, most of the Syrian refugees and Ninewa minority IDPs also said that they knew of no organizations that were working to support a return home, though they said their return would be predicated on support. A Ninewa IDP man said, "I just need to be helped, I have no organizations in my mind. It can even be the government or anyone." An Iraqi Kurdish woman said, "I believe organizations could have come to us and listened to our needs. But we did not know that even organizations exist or we can go and ask them for help."

Compensation Was Viewed as Necessary to Rebuild Homes but Rarely Available

As discussed earlier in this chapter, Iraq has policies for compensation of those who lost homes because of ISIS, although implementation of such programs has not been at pace.

Kurdish leaders with whom we talked said that there had not been systematic compensation policies for Iraqi Kurdish returns, although some individuals in the government or political parties sometimes offered help. Most of the Iraqi Kurdish returnees reported not having received any compensation, although several described compensation from the United Nations, the KRG, or Kurdish political parties. Some heard stories about others receiving compensation yet received none themselves. Compensation to those we talked to

varied: between US$20 and US$150 from the United Nations for each individual (which one Iraqi Kurdish man described as "nothing"), 1,500,000 IQD (about US$1,000) and land for one's family from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan political party, and 10,000 IQD (about US$7) for each family member from the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Most emphasized the importance of compensation for rebuilding destroyed homes. Even those who had received some compensation wished it could have been greater in light of the challenges they faced. Those who did not receive compensation commented that it would have been helpful to have received it. Many also wished to be given land since their homes had been destroyed.

The Syrian refugees and Ninewa minority IDPs said that, before going home, they needed compensation in order to rebuild their houses. Some said they would need this before leaving the KRI, because they did not trust that they would receive it once they were back in Syria. Three Ninewa IDPs calculated that they would need between US$14,000 and US$17,000 to rebuild their homes. Some were skeptical of the effectiveness of any compensation given current circumstances. One Syrian refugee woman said, "Even if they compensate, we will still live in war."

Kurdistan Refugees Often Returned to Disappointing Circumstances

Once back in Iraq, the Iraqi Kurdish returnees faced significant struggles. Some regretted leaving Iran to return to Iraq. Food, electricity, and water were inconsistently available. Some could not find jobs, and those who owned a shop or company often did not have enough business. They recounted ongoing concerns about security, their personal safety, their property, and their ability to reintegrate into society, while others felt that the situation had stabilized. A few of the Iraqi Kurdish refugees mentioned being surprised upon returning home and finding that their houses had been looted. Several also mentioned that either they or their children had difficulties reintegrating into Iraq socially or culturally. As one Iraqi Kurdish leader interviewed noted,

> You have to reintegrate in your own society. The biggest problem is economic, the source of money, how you live. If you leave your country for 10–15 years, when you come back you are almost a stranger in your own home. You need a period of time to reintegrate. . . . Because everything is different. . . . You have no source of income, no house, your friends—some of them have died or left the country. The same with family. It is a complex process for reintegration.

One Iraqi Kurdish woman said about returning, "The difficult thing was the fact that life was not easy here. The basic services were not available here. There was no electricity and no water and no telephone and no gas. It took us two years to cope with Iraq." An Iraqi Kurdish man said, "It was difficult; we were starving to death. We had no money and no food." Another said that when he returned "[i]t was difficult, people were poor and we did not have money and the people were making bread from herbs, and grass. And a few years later the civil war started, everything was expensive. I did not eat meat for months."

Summary

The KRI is a complex case of displacement and returns. At the same time it is a source of refugees to Iran, a source and host of Iraqi IDPs, and a host of Syrian refugees, and so it is both a home location and host location for displaced persons. The various displaced communities are from conflicts that are in different states of resolution.

There were different levels of engagement from international actors. In terms of military intervention, U.S. and coalition activity created the Northern No-Fly Zone under UN auspices and deposed Saddam Hussein, which created the conditions for Iraqi Kurdish refugees to return. U.S. and coalition activity also

supported Iraqi government security forces in taking back territory from ISIS, enabling IDPs to return. The ongoing war in Syria and multilateral decisions not to facilitate refugee returns mean that Syrian refugees in the KRI and elsewhere may remain for some years. In comparison with the BiH and Kosovo case studies, a key contrast is the lack of regional engagement by neighboring countries in developing solutions for displaced persons.

In terms of government engagement and multilateral activity related to humanitarian and development issues in returns, when Iraqi Kurdish refugees returned, the KRG lacked the institutional capability to provide much systematic support for the returnees. Multilaterals also played small roles, as their presence was low because of ongoing security problems. However, the government of Iraq has supported returns for 4.8 million IDPs from ISIS and the military activity against them; however, their closure of camps housing some of the remaining IDPs during the COVID-19 pandemic has been criticized as premature and leaving some IDPs vulnerable. Some people were also able to access government or NGO resources to support their return, while others could not and in some cases did not know whether anything was available. Iraq also faces a challenge about what to do with displaced families associated with the aggressor in its recent war: those families with perceived affiliations with ISIS.

Conditions during returns of the Iraqi Kurdish refugees and IDP minorities have been challenging. Economies in both cases were weak, making finding a livelihood upon return a struggle. In addition, many face or faced destroyed or damaged housing, with few practical means of finding compensation for rebuilding. Poor security for all three displaced groups discussed in this chapter remains an ongoing issue.

Displaced groups themselves talked of returning because they were drawn by home, emotional ties, and families, although some had been so traumatized during their displacement that they did not want to return. Return decisions were often difficult and made in an environment of uncertainty. People generally wanted to return home, and the promise of security, safe housing, and a job motivated them to do so. But it was difficult for people to get sufficient information about what conditions were like back home and whether they would be able to meet their needs if they returned. People also had different views on what constituted adequate security, housing, and job and public service prospects. Return decisions involved weighing these various factors against each other, including factors specific to their personal situations. People in our case studies made these decisions based on what they believed they would find at home, only to be disappointed when they returned.

Themes from Across the Case Studies

In this chapter we discuss common themes across the case studies we conducted of BiH, Kosovo, and the KRI. We group them into four broad categories and discuss themes that we extracted within those categories. The four categories are (1) characteristics of the refugees, (2) conditions in the home country, (3) conditions in the host country, and (4) role of governments and multilaterals in facilitating returns.

Characteristics of the Refugees

Personal and Family Ties Were Important Drivers of Return

Across the three case study locations, returnees noted that their connections to the homeland were a strong driver of return. This might have included ties of emotion and heritage to the home country, family members who had remained, a life-changing event such as a death or illness in the family, or other personal connection that compelled them to return home. In addition to these personal drivers of return, the ability to repossess or recover lost property is also critical and is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. Securing housing, possibly the most important and valuable physical asset possessed by a household, is a crucial step toward return and reintegration. One reason we may see returns that are high during the first few years after a conflict ends but that subsequently plateau and decline may have a lot to do with the ability to repossess and recover lost housing, as well as leverage personal connections that can wane over time. The large returns in the beginning after security resumes may be fueled by these strong personal and physical connections to the homeland.

Decisions to Return or Integrate Were Frequently Driven by Ethnic Considerations

Given common displacement experiences across all three areas, there were strong tendencies for refugees and returnees to prefer remaining in or returning to communities where they were not the ethnic minority. However, international organizations in particular across the three cases expressed reluctance to pursue policies that "locked in the ethnic cleansing" that had occurred. For example, supporting the integration of minority communities in host communities where they are a majority will likely mean further homogenization of the communities they came from. Nonetheless, the reality of declining returns had already prompted a reconsideration of previous approaches to finding durable solutions. Ninewa minorities fled from their ancestral homelands to the KRI, and among the focus groups and interviews we conducted, they overwhelmingly expressed a desire to remain among their Kurdish hosts. In Kosovo, with a geographic concentration of minority communities, support to integrate will mean the continuation of an ethnically divided country by geographic area for the foreseeable future. It is also important to recognize, however, that some of the stated preferences for return or integration are reflective of preexisting demographic shifts occurring before the conflict, such as the migration from rural to urban areas across all three cases.

Conditions in the Home Country

End of Armed Conflict Did Not Always Create the Conditions of Peace and Security Necessary for Sustainable Returns

In all three cases, there was an end to the hostilities and the conflict. However, unresolved security issues in Iraq and to a much lesser extent in Kosovo led to renewed conflict that posed threats to each country's security and stability. In some cases, it resulted in renewed hostilities such as the civil war between the rival Kurdish political parties in the 1990s and the riots in Kosovo in 2004. More recently, in Iraq, the predominance of the Popular Mobilization Force militias that operate officially under government authority but de facto operate outside the purview of the official government authorities contributed to further insecurity that inhibits minorities displaced by ISIS from feeling safe in returning to their homes. It was also notable that across all three cases, the document review and interviews revealed a disconnect between national-level efforts to promote return rights and the local-level will to enforce the law. In Kosovo, for example, ethnically motivated incidents were not effectively pursued and prosecuted by law enforcement and the courts. One of the reasons displaced persons may prefer to return to communities where they are not in the minority is because, in the absence of effective law enforcement and justice, being in the ethnic majority may serve as a proxy for safety and security.

We Found Limited Examples of Comprehensive Reconciliation, and Its Effect on Returns

Across the three case studies, reconciliation efforts and results were uneven. Kurds displaced from Iraq in the 1980s and 1990s who participated in our discussions noted that the Iraqi government's formal "declaration of amnesty" precipitated their choice to return; at the same time, tensions between the KRI and federal Iraq remain, culminating in the 2017 failed Kurdish referendum for independence from Iraq. Ninewa minorities and Syrian refugees expressed a strong desire to remain in the KRI because of their distrust of the ethnic majority communities, militias, or governments in the areas they were displaced from. The situation in the KRI is further complicated by questions of integrating not just those who were persecuted but also the aggressors, or those affiliated with them, such as ISIS families residing in the camps. Efforts at reconciliation across these communities have been somewhat limited. The Iraqi government, for example, has delegated handling of reintegration of ISIS families to informal tribal and community mechanisms owing to weak formal government institutions. The result has been an absence of following international norms in resolving these cases (such as requiring women to denounce husbands or providing identity documents on a discretionary or local basis), a strengthening of tribal or other nongovernmental structures at the expense of government solutions, and inconsistent application of justice.

Kosovo's contested political status vis-à-vis Serbia has hampered effective measures at reconciliation and indirectly affected relationships between the majority Albanian and Serbian ethnic communities. Lack of formal reconciliation also made it more difficult for ethnic Serbs in Kosovo, who were regarded by the majority ethnic Albanian community as historical oppressors and aggressors in the war, to reintegrate economically, socially, and politically. In BiH, implementation of and support for returnee integration depended on leadership at the local level (canton and municipality). Localities with visionary leaders and with institutions possessing high levels of capacity or willingness to acquire capacity tended to experience better outcomes.

Countries Struggled to Rebuild the Economic, Social, and Political Institutions Required to Support Returns

War damages not only physical infrastructure but also the institutional fabric of countries and communities. Each of the cases we studied struggled to rebuild its institutions in order to facilitate and support sus-

tained returns. Initially, humanitarian and development assistance propped up economies through mainly consumption-based activities, but over time as these organizations completed their missions, the countries could not sustain the same level of activity and job creation for their citizens. All were also embarking on some effort to transition from a centrally run, primarily socialist economic system to a predominantly privately run system. These transitions are difficult and require significant will to address the structural constraints. Consistently, across all three cases, as reported in our focus groups and interviews, economic challenges hampered the ability of returnees to regain their footing and ease their transition back. Weak economies translated to difficulties for returnees in finding and securing a job, and most participants reported little in the way of support and assistance on that front.

In addition to the economic considerations, social institutions, including education and health care, had to be restored. There were varying degrees of challenges with the provision of social services. In Kosovo, for example, public health facilities and schools in some areas were available only in the Albanian language, essentially excluding members of the Serbian community and other non-Albanians from access. Similarly, for schooling, ethnic Serb returnees originally from the capital city of Pristina noted that it is difficult even today to find schools that provide education in the Serbian language. This prompted them to choose to return to predominantly Serbian communities surrounding the capital city. There were also challenges with recognizing education certificates between Serbia and Kosovo, and this was also noted as a challenge in BiH. In the KRI, displaced persons, including IDPs and Syrian refugees, had rights to health care and education according to Iraqi law, but there was inconsistent provision of these because of a lack of resources.

Property Restitution and Reconstruction Were Important Factors in Facilitating Sustained Returns, but Implemented Differently by Location

The Western Balkans cases (BiH and Kosovo) recognized the importance of property restitution and reconstruction, but they were implemented very differently in each case. As residents fled their communities because of the conflict, many of their homes became occupied by others who had fled their own homes. After the end of the conflicts, entities were established and procedures were put in place to restore housing to the prewar owners in both BiH and Kosovo. Our interviews and document review revealed that repossession was more sustained in BiH because of robust local enforcement and monitoring, including OHR willingness to replace local leaders who were not implementing CRPC decisions. On the other hand, a lack of enforcement and monitoring at the local level in Kosovo resulted in low repossession rates, particularly in terms of preventing reoccupation of homes. These factors may be indicative of local willingness to facilitate return. Some returnees to the KRI from Iran also noted that they had found their homes occupied by others, but there was no formal mechanism to resolve such issues.

In terms of reconstruction of damaged homes, BiH was a direct beneficiary of the large-scale investment in the reconstruction of homes through the RHP—a program possible because it involved the agreement and cooperation of multiple countries that also worked to develop the frameworks and implementation plans. The initial efforts to bring parties together to develop a strategy to address housing loss and damage laid the groundwork for major investment by humanitarian and development organizations 15 years later to support housing reconstruction through the RHP. Regional agreements and coordination encouraged funders to invest in reconstruction across multiple countries, thus guaranteeing that the solution is a regional one rather than one focused on a single beneficiary country. Kosovo did not have an equivalent to the RHP, and its political status remains unresolved. On the other hand, rebuilding the thousands of villages destroyed in the KRI has happened only partially to date. In terms of the Ninewa minorities, the Iraqi government has been financially strapped and backlogged and has been slow to process housing claims. UN agencies have invested in housing reconstruction for some communities, but to date not at the level needed for the scale of displacement.

Conditions in the Host Country

While Conditions in Host Countries Varied Considerably, They Were Rarely a Predominant Driver of Returns

Across the three cases we examined, circumstances during displacement varied considerably from living in temporary housing facilities to being able to secure adequate shelter and access to good basic services. In some cases, our interviews and focus groups revealed that extended periods of displacement led to increased tensions with the host communities. The displacement of Iraqi Kurds in the 1980s and 1990s led to displacement for many in Iran, and interviews and focus group participants noted that Iranian authorities exerted pressure to return home with the rationale given that security in the KRI had improved. Kurdish returnees also noted a lack of access to higher education for their children or the right to own property as motivating factors to return. While most Kurdish returnees noted that they returned home because of emotional ties, what triggered their return was security in the KRI, and a few noted a push from a lack of opportunities in Iran. To some extent, this was also the case in the Western Balkan nations of BiH and Kosovo, but it was not a central theme across the interviews conducted. Overall, however, it was not so much the conditions in the host country but the pull factor of a connection to their homeland, enabled by improved security, that compelled people to return.

Actions of Governments and Multilateral Organizations

The Most Comprehensive International Involvement Included the Full Spectrum of Military Intervention, Stabilization, Humanitarian Action, and Development

Militaries, international organizations, and NGOs frequently interacted with host and home country governments (both national and local governments) to address the needs of displaced persons and facilitate returns. In the three cases, the role of international organizations could be categorized into four distinct categories:

1. military intervention, peacekeeping, and stabilization
2. humanitarian support in both the home and host countries
3. multistakeholder convenings to develop frameworks and implementation plans
4. government capacity-building and monitoring to ensure compliance with frameworks and agreements.

The varying degrees of U.S.-led international military intervention in all three cases both prevented further violence and started to create conditions for returns, although some would argue that in certain cases, the United States should have intervened earlier to stop the violence. The United States and allies enforced a no-fly zone in the KRI to stop the violence against the Kurds by the Iraqi regime, enabling many to return home. The U.S.-led coalition initially failed to stabilize Iraq in the aftermath of the 2003 intervention, and security conditions deteriorated over the next several years in Iraq in general, although conditions were more stable in the KRI. The United States and its allies conducted airstrikes against ISIS to stop ongoing massacres of Yazidis (although many had already been massacred, enslaved, or conscripted before the United States did so) and then supported the Iraqi security forces in their defeat of ISIS, creating conditions that could eventually enable more Ninewa minorities to return home. U.S. and NATO forces conducted airstrikes and launched a ground offensive in the Western Balkans. Ground-based peacekeeping forces were also prominent in the Western Balkans. Subsequently, and with a decisive end to the wars, peace agreements were brokered in the Balkans, and a framework for peace and reconciliation was put in place that involved multiple countries in the region.

All three cases were exposed to extensive periods of international oversight and supervision: OHR in the case of Bosnia, the UN mission in Kosovo, and the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq.

In the KRI, the return of Kurds after the conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s was largely characterized not by a comprehensive international approach to meeting humanitarian and development needs, but by small-scale and ad hoc efforts by UN agencies or NGOs. The Iraqi government has prioritized return home for people displaced by ISIS and the military operations against them, with support from UN agencies and NGOs. On the other hand, BiH had a robust international presence that produced the DPA and Annex 7, which laid out a very clear objective for returns as well as subsequent investments through the RHP. Moreover, there was a monitoring mechanism through OHR to ensure claims were being processed and actions were being taken, including replacement of noncompliant officials to address roadblocks.

Multilaterals Took an Active Approach in Facilitating Returns Through Capacity-Building with Newly Established Government Institutions

Kurds who fled Iraq in the 1980s and 1990s were not assisted by any local government entity in Iraq. While the KRG was established in 1992, its capacity was too low at the time to implement a consistent return assistance effort. UNHCR facilitated in fits and starts owing to a dynamic security situation and lack of housing solutions in the KRI at the time. On the other hand, more recent displacement in Iraq precipitated the establishment of the Ministry of Migration and Displacement. The Iraqi government made a big push for IDP returns with multilateral support that included some reconstruction. BiH established the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, and the Ministry of Communities and Returns was established in Kosovo. Kosovo also established MOCRs to facilitate returns and integration at the local level. These important steps were followed by support of local and international NGOs as well as multilateral organizations, but it is an ongoing process, and they in particular require support in implementation at the local level including in the areas of policy enforcement and monitoring.

Summary

Each of the three case studies experienced a unique set of circumstances around conflict, displacement, and return. Nonetheless, we identified a set of common themes around our four-part framework that linked the three cases together; and as noted earlier in this report, the return process is influenced by a confluence of factors that play out in both converging and diverging ways across the case studies.

For one, personal and family ties were common drivers of return with returnees citing a personal life event, a yearning for the homeland, or the desire to be around family who remained behind. Yet, these personal ties are also linked to their ability to repossess and recover housing, significantly altering their circumstances after return, and dependent on the coordination and role of governmental and nongovernmental agencies. One of the key drivers of return was property restitution and reconstruction, though the BiH case stands out from the other two cases in terms of relative success in achieving this goal.

In each of the three cases, the conflict was rooted in ethnic divisions and strife. This made it difficult to encourage returns in a way that restored the prewar ethnic composition of the communities, despite an official end to the hostilities. Returnees tended not to return to communities where they would be in the minority, but there was variation that was influenced by the steps national and local leaders took to reconcile differences and by their vision for returnee integration in their communities. It was not sufficient to end open and armed conflict; it was also necessary to put in place security safeguards that were anchored in social and economic inclusion.

Conditions in the host countries varied considerably, and while they were frequently described as difficult, they were not a predominant driver of returns. A change of circumstances in the home country, along with a personal desire to return, was the main driver, although poor conditions in the host country made the decision to return easier for some.

Overall, despite efforts of multilateral organizations to support government capacity-building, economic development, and reconstruction, existing structural barriers and the need for reform hampered growth and job creation and made transitioning for returnees challenging. Many of the policy supports and programs needed to assist returnees are also needed to support the general population.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our study has found that despite the intent of the global humanitarian and development communities, most refugees are unable to return or find another durable solution even after decades of displacement. While return is the stated preferred policy solution internationally for displaced persons, an examination of historical data reveals that returns happen for only a minority of refugees. Furthermore, the other two durable solutions of resettlement and local integration are even less common. Instead, most refugees continue living in host countries in an indeterminate status, without the ability to integrate or move on.

That forced displacement continues to outpace refugees' ability to find a durable solution demonstrates that current approaches need to change. The unprecedented number of refugees, the complexity of their needs, and the ongoing challenges that both home and host countries face mean the three durable solutions must be pursued in combination, along with efforts to develop a greater menu of interim solutions with robust international support to promote the well-being of refugees and facilitate a more successful longer-term transition to a sustained, durable solution. With respect specifically to increasing returns, the international community should reexamine current implementation efforts, and resources and actions need to align with renewed determination. Our recommendations below, primarily to governments, donors, and international organizations, stem from this reframing.

Expend Greater Effort on Conflict Resolution and Stabilization to Address the Root Causes of Conflict-Based Displacement, or Create the Conditions That Allow Quick Return

Overall, our study finds that refugee returns to the place of origin occur only for a minority. The decision to return is a deeply personal one and one that is not easily altered by policies or programs. Our study finds that it is shaped by displacement experiences, familial bonds and other ties to the place of origin, security, job availability, and other factors. Given that only a small fraction of forcibly displaced people return, the best approach is to prevent mass displacement from occurring in the first place. This means reinvigorating multilateral global and regional approaches to resolving disputes and preventing them from escalating into armed conflicts that precipitate mass displacement. This recommendation is directed to the major world powers, international and regional security bodies, and border countries. The presence of a neutral, stabilizing, and peacekeeping force can help stem further refugee flows and create the beginning of conditions for some refugees to return. Enduring security creates the space for addressing the other critical components of return, including property restitution and housing reconstruction, reestablishment of basic services such as health care and education, and economic investments to increase labor demand and restore livelihoods.

Focus on Facilitating Return During the First Five Years After a Conflict

Our study has found that most returns happen within a four-year window after the conflict ends, with return levels tapering off after that. We therefore recommend that facilitated return efforts focus on this narrow yet important window. Donor governments and international agencies could place more resources in these four years, including provision of information, facilitation of return journeys, and rebuilding communities.

Ensure Return Efforts Include Local, National, and Regional Stakeholders to Enable Better Coordination of International Diplomatic, Security, Humanitarian, and Development Initiatives

Successful return efforts have depended on coordination across multiple actors including national, state or provincial, and local government; international humanitarian actors; and bilateral development partners. Because conflict and displacement in one country frequently spill over into other countries, it is not sufficient to focus efforts on just the national government of the country that is the source of displacement. Willing host countries can play an important role, encouraged by outside powers to engage at multiple levels of governmental and nongovernmental cooperation. In addition, diplomatic efforts directed toward key stakeholders can help solve problems and improve security to ensure that those who return do so safely and securely. Coordination across multiple levels and actors also ensures humanitarian assistance is tailored to address needs across borders and displacement circumstances and reduce duplication of efforts. The most significant development initiatives, once security and humanitarian assistance are provided, will require coordination in line with national strategies of both the home and host communities affected by the crisis. Importantly, and based on examining trends in returns, investment in early efforts to promote coordination is important as return becomes even more unlikely as time elapses.

This coordination proved to be critical in the area of property restitution and reconstruction, for example, with differences between BiH and Kosovo in the way this was addressed. Property restitution was a significant feature of BiH policy to promote returns, ensuring that homes were returned to prewar residents. Reoccupation rates were low as official decisions involving restitution were consistently enforced. By contrast, this was not the case in Kosovo, where illegal reoccupation was a recurring problem and local law enforcement did little to intervene, thus suggesting limited meaningful agreement and coordination across levels of government and international organizations on this issue.

Similarly, the RHP stemmed from an agreement that involved four partner countries (BiH, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia) that were all affected by the conflict and the subsequent mass displacement that occurred. The program, funded by the European Union, United States, and other contributing countries, has maintained significant on-the-ground support by UNHCR, OSCE, other multilateral organizations, and local government entities, as well as international and local NGOs. There was no equivalent large-scale program of this kind in Kosovo, though key informant interviewees from BiH acknowledged that, ideally, the RHP would have been designed and implemented sooner in order to encourage more returns. Property restitution and reconstruction should occur before significant time has elapsed, because the more time that elapses, the more likely it is that some of the displaced and their children will adapt to the conditions in the host communities.

It is also important to consider the factors that will most likely lead to successful implementation of policies and programs that are designed to facilitate returns. For a start, as described in the Global Compact on Refugees, all parties affected should work closely together on solutions, including establishing working groups to address competing issues that parties to the conflict frequently face, and developing the UN-sponsored

tripartite or quadripartite return agreements that bring multiple stakeholders to the table. Without question, these approaches should be informed by accurate and up-to-date data to create realistic expectations regarding return, as well as subsequent plans. There should also be a consideration of needs based on gender, age, disability status, and geography.

Build the Capacity of Home Country Governments at the National and Local Levels to Manage Returns and Security

As noted in our study, war ravages a country's institutions, and in some cases the capability to provide even basic services. To enable returns, former institutions need in many cases to restore and rehabilitate their lost capacities, and new institutions may also need to be established. Even after institutions have been reestablished or rehabilitated, there may be a disconnect between different levels of government in terms of policy implementation governing returns. Thus, institutions require time, resources, and leadership to develop the capacity to formulate and implement return policies and programs. This would include engagement, training, and support at both national and local levels to ministry staff, local government officials, municipal law enforcement, and other community-based organizations to ensure a common vision and goals to support sustainable returns and reintegration. Moreover, international NGOs that provide expertise and services in postconflict contexts should transfer their knowledge and expertise to local-based NGOs to ensure that services and supports are not interrupted after international NGOs leave.

Invest in Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms

Capacity-building, and a formal, documented commitment to ensure the safety and security of returnees, should be coupled with a focus on rule of law, security institutions, and enforcement capabilities along with monitoring mechanisms to ensure security of returnees, implementation with fidelity to the return program design, and the tracking of milestones and goals. Moreover, accountability mechanisms that allow for corrective action or enforcement, including finding alternative means of achieving results, need to be in place. It is also necessary to plan for on-the-ground international implementation and support teams, peacekeepers, or monitors on various topics (e.g., housing) to build trust, engage in problem-solving, and promote fairness, transparency, and accountability. In the case of BiH, for example, OHR was tasked with ensuring implementation of the DPA, including possessing the authority to intervene if the provisions of Annex 7 supporting returns were not being implemented. In the case of Ninewa IDPs, stakeholders viewed the lack of monitoring of return mechanisms as a gap.

Take Demographic Shifts, Natural Migration Patterns, and Personal Preferences into Account When Developing Refugee Return Policies and Programs

It is important for the home country governments and the international multilateral organizations promoting and supporting returns to recognize the shifts already occurring before the conflict and displacement in order to inform allocation of resources in support of returns, along with migration patterns of refugees preferring to return to a location in their home country other than their original homes. For example, rural to urban migration even before the conflict or preferences of returnees not to return to rural areas or areas

where they are not in the ethnic majority suggest that pushing for returns to refugees' original places of origin may not be successful in encouraging and sustaining returns. This may be the case with younger populations, but it may also be the case for households seeking livelihood opportunities as well as access to better education and health care typically more available in urban areas. Therefore, policy efforts should not focus solely on interventions and supports in the geographic areas of origin, but instead should be based on supporting where refugees prefer to return to. Efforts to compensate or provide restitution should factor in these trends.

Design Return Aid and Development Aid to Address Structural Economic Problems and Public Service Inefficiencies

The cases we examined in this study faced deep structural economic and public governance constraints that predated the conflict and displacement. Entrenched political interests, regulatory constraints to private sector growth, and a generally mismanaged public sector mean it will take time to improve governance, spur a dynamic economic recovery, and ensure that the appropriate incentives are in place to manage the country's resources more efficiently and effectively. Some of these efforts require investments that will yield outcomes only in the long term, while in the meantime short- and medium-term solutions are also needed. These investments might include those needed for large-scale job creation (e.g., "big" infrastructure projects) while simultaneously addressing postwar reconstruction needs. It might also include investments in spurring private-sector growth and entrepreneurship through packages of supports such as low- or no-interest loans, job training, and a reduction of bureaucratic red tape to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

Many of the solutions targeting returnees will not be successful unless remedies to address the broader structural problems are mainstreamed and investments that are made are tied to the country's overall economic development strategy. Approaches to address the economic challenges facing returnees can also address those faced by the host country population. Given the need for reform in many of these cases, development aid could be linked to meaningful efforts to implement reforms that, in turn, could increase the likelihood and sustainability of returns and reintegration.

Update Standards and Metrics to Measure Refugee Return Efforts Globally

We found that definitions, data, standards, and targets regarding success either are not clear or are used differently by different entities. Therefore, the United Nations should define successful repatriation and integration and accurately track it by developing clear metrics for what counts as returns and collecting data on those metrics. Current data resources provide information on people who have returned to their home countries but are missing information on the quality of returns and integration through measures of housing, securing of identification, and employment. These are necessary to determine systematically across multiple contexts what works in terms of policies and programs supporting returns and reintegration. Currently, UNHCR and IOM maintain databases containing information and analysis of displacement and return; building on those capabilities to track the quality of implementation of durable solutions including returns, integration, asylum, and granting of work visas is needed.

Though we conducted a preliminary analysis, further empirical investigations should be commenced with access to more robust data to identify relationships between historical rates of return across the full spectrum of individual cases with factors that may have affected those results. Such factors could include

the presence, if any, of peacekeepers and levels of international economic assistance, as well as more refined measures of economic and political conditions in the home and host countries.

Target Mixed and Comprehensive Durable and Interim Solutions in a Timely Manner—Instead of Repatriation—as the Preferred Solution for Refugees

While UN policy pinpoints return as the preferred solution for refugees, this study has found that returns happen for less than a third of refugees. In addition, the other two durable solutions (local integration and resettlement) are available for even smaller proportions of refugees. Yet global refugee policy continues to place rhetorical emphasis on returns as well as the two other defined durable solutions. The focus on these solutions may be hampering progress on exploring and developing other alternative solutions, with the effect of keeping displaced persons in limbo for extended periods of time under very difficult conditions.

Greater investment should be made in each refugee situation to find refugees a comprehensive, combined range of solutions. The United Nations should change official policy so that it no longer targets return as the single preferred solution, but instead aims for finding a combined set of solutions for refugees within a limited period, so that refugees do not spend lifetimes or generations waiting in limbo. This will mean increasing initiatives to facilitate return, working with more host countries on agreements to integrate displaced persons, and increasing current limits on resettlement in third countries. As described in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, this should also include increasing access to interim solutions, such as work visas. Others have also noted the need for new emphasis on solutions other than return.

Several steps are needed. PRM should lead a global effort to commit to finding all refugees an interim or durable solution within ten years of their original displacement. Such solutions should enable self-reliance of the refugees (e.g., the right to work), reasonable living conditions (e.g., not confinement in camps), and maintenance of human capital of refugee populations (e.g., the ability for children to attend school). A combined set of actions to meet this goal should include the following:

- **Returns.** New ways of promoting returns are discussed elsewhere in these recommendations.
- **Resettlement.** With the exception of the past few years, the United States has taken the most refugees for resettlement, taking 62 percent of all resettled refugees in 2015 (UNHCR, undated c). The United States should use its diplomatic and other leverage to get other countries to take more refugees for resettlement, including the Western democracies that have typically taken resettlement cases, as well as countries that are not traditionally leaders in resettlement, such as in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.
- **Local integration.** This is also the time to increase incentives and support for integration of refugees in the countries where they currently reside, including the development of an international fund to incentivize host countries to offer citizenship, as well as livelihood and mobility freedoms.
- **Interim solutions.** In addition to the traditional three durable solutions, other interim solutions should be developed and implemented, such as the granting of ten-year work visas to refugees who are willing to go to another country to work. The recent decision by the Colombian government to grant ten-year temporary protected status, including the right to work, to Venezuelans is an example of such efforts.

As stated clearly in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, the challenge of worldwide forced displacement is not exclusively the problem of the home country or host countr(ies) to address. Host nations that carry

a significant burden of hosting refugees more frequently face challenges themselves, and this can hamper humanitarian and development efforts that require local cooperation and support. It is our conclusion that the durable solution of returns should be pursued alongside simultaneously engaging with the other two solutions and designing options for interim solutions that allow refugees to receive health care, develop their human capital through lifelong training and education, and earn a livelihood in order to be self-reliant and gain from the dignity that comes with work. We argue for a greater upfront concerted effort to create the necessary conditions in the home country for voluntary returns through security and multilevel governmental engagement and capacity-building. This effort should be accompanied by an accounting of the integrated nature of seeking durable solutions and the need to create interim solutions that relieve the pressures that host countries face to support the well-being of refugee households.

Key Informant and Stakeholder Interviews

Table A.1 provides a list of key informants and stakeholders we interviewed to gather both broad information about the topic and information specific to our cases. Table A.2 provides information on topics and subtopics covered and the types of questions we asked in each topic.

TABLE A.1
Key Informant and Stakeholder Interviews

Governmental agencies
- U.S. Department of State
  - PRM Headquarters
  - PRM Belgrade Field Office
  - PRM Erbil Field Office
  - U.S. Embassy in Iraq (Baghdad)
- Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (BiH)

Multilateral and UN agencies
- UNHCR
  - Global Headquarters
  - Bosnia and Herzegovina Mission
  - Kosovo Mission
- World Bank
- IOM
  - Erbil Mission
  - Kosovo Mission
  - Iraq Mission
- OSCE
  - Bosnia and Herzegovina Mission
  - Kosovo Mission
- OHR (Bosnia and Herzegovina Mission)
- UK Department for International Development
- European Union Office (Kosovo)

NGOs
- Omran Center for Strategic Studies
- Refugees International
- Global Community Engagement and Resilience
- Balkan Center for Migration (Serbia)
- Catholic Relief Services (BiH)
- Developing Together (Kosovo)
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
- International Committee for the Red Cross

Others
- University professors with expertise in refugee issues
- Leaders of the following communities in Iraq:
  - Kurd
  - Sunni
  - Christian
  - Yazidi
  - Kakai

TABLE A.2

List of Topics and Subtopics Covered in the Key Informant and Stakeholder Interviews

Topics	Subtopics
Lessons learned from displacement context(s)	• Success stories and failures • Barriers and facilitators
Legal frameworks	• Appropriateness of current legal frameworks • Main gaps in current legal frameworks
Main actors and roles	• Who are the key organizational actors broadly and in the case study context, and what are their roles
Key push-and-pull factors	• Given their experience, what are the key factors that influence return and reintegration
Future priorities	• Future focus of humanitarian and development communities, as well as governmental and nongovernmental sector

In-Depth Interviews and Focus Groups

We conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews across our three case studies of BiH, Kosovo, and the KRI. As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we converted our initially planned in-person focus groups to virtual focus groups. In addition, in order to ensure that we did not preclude the participation of individuals who did not have access to technology or had less facility with using technology, we also incorporated one-on-one, in-depth interviews either in person or by phone. Our partner Ipsos completed all the focus groups and interviews in the local languages, translated the transcriptions, and transmitted the transcriptions to RAND for analysis.

Focus group and in-depth interview participants were recruited by Ipsos in each of the case study locations. The RAND team developed the population criteria for selection, in close consultation with Ipsos staff with a strong grasp of the context. Ipsos staff recruited participants, working through COVID-19 restrictions regarding physical distancing and other requirements. In each of the locations, Ipsos maintains a network of field staff who recruit participants for focus groups and in-depth interviews. In most cases, because of COVID-19 restrictions, the focus groups and interviews were conducted via videoconference using either Microsoft Teams or Zoom. In some cases, where it was possible to conduct the one-on-one, in-depth interviews with physical distancing, some were conducted in person, particularly if respondents were expected to have difficulty accessing the internet for videoconference participation. Participants were provided an incentive for their participation, typically in the form of a mobile phone card, a cash voucher, or a voucher to a local grocery store.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ipsos conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with returnees from the main ethnic groups affected by displacement: Bosniaks and Serbs in BiH. Tables B.1 and B.2 summarize the target populations in each

TABLE B.1

Virtual Focus Groups with Returnees in BiH

Focus Group Number	Focus Group	Location(s)	Number of Participants in Each Group
1	Bosniaks, males, aged 45–55	Sarajevo	4
2	Bosniaks, females, aged 45–55	Sarajevo Zenica	4
3	Serb, males, aged 45–55	Gradiška Banja Luka	2
4	Serb, females, aged 45–55	Banja Luka Vukosavlje	2

TABLE B.2

In-Depth Interviews with Returnees in BiH

In-Depth Interview	Location(s)	Number of Participants per Interview (× number of interviews)
Bosniaks, males, aged 55–65	Sarajevo Žepče	1 (× 3 interviews)
Bosniaks, females, aged 55–65	Sarajevo	1 (× 3 interviews)
Serb, males, aged 55–65	Banja Luka Vukosavlje Modrica Doboj-Brod	1 (× 5 interviews)
Serb, females, aged 55–65	Pale Sokolac Ortiješ Bijeljina	1 (× 5 interviews)

of the locations in the Western Balkans. Note that because of cancellations and technological difficulties for some participants in the focus groups in BiH, Ipsos conducted one-on-one interviews with them instead.

Kosovo

In Kosovo, our partner Ipsos conducted virtual focus groups and interviews with ethnic Albanians and Serbs. Tables B.3 and B.4 summarize the populations included in each of the locations in Kosovo.

TABLE B.3

Virtual Focus Groups with Returnees in Kosovo

Focus Group	Location(s)	Number of Participants in Each Group
Albanian, males, aged 40–65	Gjakove/Djakovica Rahovec/Orahovac Mitrovica, Podujeve Llashkobare—Ferizaj/Urosevac	5
Albanian, females, aged 40–65	Pristina	6
Serb, males, aged 40–65	Gracanica Radevo Lipljane	5
Serb, females, aged 40–65	Batuse/Gracanica Gracanica Preoce	5

TABLE B.4

In-Depth Interviews with Returnees in Kosovo

In-Depth Interview	Location(s)	Number of Participants per Interview (× number of interviews)
Albanian, males, aged 40–65	Neperbisht/Suhareke Pristina	1 (× 2 interviews)
Albanian, females, aged 40–65	Pristina Ferizaj	1 (× 2 interviews)
Serb, males, aged 40–65	Gracanica Kuzmin/Kosovo Polje	1 (× 2 interviews)
Serb, females, aged 40–65	Gremnik/Klina Gracanica	1 (× 2 interviews)

Kurdistan Region–Iraq

The KRI provided us multiple perspectives from Iraqi Kurdish refugees who returned from Iran, as well as currently displaced Iraqi IDPs, who were minorities who fled Ninewa Province. We also obtained the perspectives of Syrian refugees who are currently refugees and live in the KRI. This allowed us to collect rich data across different stages of displacement status and return. Tables B.5 and B.6 summarize the populations included in each of the locations in the KRI.

Table B.7 provides a list of topics and subtopics covered in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

TABLE B.5

Virtual Focus Groups with Returnees, IDPs, and Refugees in the KRI

Focus Group	Location	Number of Participants in Each Group (× number of groups)
Returned Kurds, males, aged 45–65	Erbil	5 (× 2 groups)
Returned Kurds, females, aged 45–65	Erbil, Soran	5 (× 2 groups)
Ninewa minorities, males, aged 25–65	Sharia Camp, Duhok Governorate	5
Ninewa minorities, females, aged 25–65	Sharia Camp, Duhok Governorate	5
Syrian Kurds, males, aged 25–65	Domiz Camp and Semel District, Duhok Governorate	5
Syrian Kurds, females, aged 25–65	Domiz Camp and Semel District, Duhok Governorate	5

TABLE B.6

In-Depth Interviews with Returnees, IDPs, and Refugees in the KRI

In-Depth Interview	Location	Number of Participants per Interview (× number of interviews)
Returned Kurds, males, aged 45–65	Erbil	1 (× 2 interviews)
Returned Kurds, females, aged 45–65	Erbil, Naqada	1 (× 2 interviews)
Ninewa minorities, males, aged 25–65	Sharia Camp, Duhok Governorate	1
Ninewa minorities, females, aged 25–65	Domiz Camp, Duhok Governorate	1
Syrian Kurds, males, aged 25–65	Semel Camp, Duhok Governorate	1
Syrian Kurds, females, aged 25–65	Semel District, Duhok Governorate	1

TABLE B.7

List of Topics and Subtopics Covered in the Focus Groups and In-Depth Interviews

Topic	Subtopics
Displacement circumstances	• Timing of displacement, locations, and general information about circumstances
Conditions in the host country	• Housing conditions • Employment opportunities • Access to health care, education, and other basic services • Safety and security • Relations with host community
Conditions in the home country	• Decision to return (or for those currently displaced, are they considering return?) • Key factors considered (or for those currently displaced, considering with return) • Sources of information on home conditions • Role of organizations in facilitating return • Factors hindering or supporting return • Experiences after return in terms of access to housing, jobs, employment, and basic services, (or for those considering return, what expectations do they have about conditions at home if they are considering return?) • Desire to remain or leave (or for those currently displaced, expectations about circumstances if they returned compared with current circumstances)
Future goals	• Future goals and aspirations for themselves and their children

Measuring Postconflict Refugee Return (Detailed)

To measure refugee return after war, we must define three dimensions: the end of conflict, the period for measurement, and the metrics of return. This section defines the three dimensions in turn.

Conflict Termination

First, we must specify what counts as an end to a conflict. A country is defined as experiencing armed conflict if the annual battle-related deaths in a given year exceeds 1,000 in that country's territory. This follows UCDP/PRIO's definition of war, but we include the additional requirement that the violence take place in a particular territory. This restriction is necessary for understanding the displacement of populations, where the location of violence matters (Pettersson, Högbladh and Öberg, 2019).[1] To do so, we used the UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset Global Version 19.1, "the most comprehensive structured event data available on organized violence in the post-1989 world" (UCDP, 2021; Högbladh, 2019, p. 3; Sundberg and Melander, 2013).

An end to a conflict, then, is defined as when annual battle-related deaths in a country's territory fall below 1,000 for a year, and this end is then confirmed with battle-related deaths remaining below 1,000 for a second, consecutive year. This definition of conflict's end, or postconflict episode, is tailor-made for the purposes of studying refugee return. The basic idea is that a two-year decline in violence, even if violence is not entirely eliminated, is enough time for refugees to consider returning to their countries of origin.[2] In many cases, the two-year reduction in fatalities will prove to be temporary, as war roars back in the following years.[3] But refugees (and policymakers trying to assist them) have to make decisions about return in real time, without knowledge of an uncertain future. They cannot know if a decline in violence indicates a true end to the war or merely a short-term lull. Even events that mark the end of a war, such as the signing of a peace agreement or a military surrender, do not guarantee that peace will hold in fragile postconflict situations. Thus, a complete universe of cases includes all postconflict episodes that mark

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[1]   Most armed conflict data sets code all countries party to a conflict as "in conflict." For instance, in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, the United States (and its international partner countries) is coded as "in conflict" in Afghanistan starting in 2001. But when seeking to study patterns of displacement, the geography of the conflict—not just the parties to the conflict— is what is crucial. While the United States has been party to the conflict in Afghanistan, the conflict's refugees fled from—and could return to—Afghanistan, not the United States. Therefore, we restrict our case selection to countries that experienced war on their territory. See Pettersson, Högbladh, and Öberg, 2019.

[2]   A two-year reduction in violence below 1,000 deaths per year is a more expansive view of postconflict episodes than the actual end of a conflict or the signing of a peace agreement and a less expansive view than declared ceasefire.

[3]   If the number of battle-related deaths in the country's territory rises above 1,000 after a two-year decline, any later two-year decline is considered a separate postconflict episode.

windows of opportunity for refugee return, regardless of whether refugees actually return or whether the war actually ends.

Importantly, refugees do not always wait for armed conflict in their home country to end before returning (Chu, 2019). Refugees regularly return while conflict is ongoing, even if only for a short amount of time. However, we limit our study to return after conflict because of the interest of our sponsor. Since this study is focused on policies to promote safe, voluntary, and sustained refugee return, we must look at countries where the conflict has ended in order to abide by the principle of non-refoulement, a central tenet of international law that prevents states from returning individuals to a country where they would face harm.

Measurement Period for Refugee Return

Second, we must specify a period for measurement of refugee return. It is important to evaluate the return of refugees in a set time frame so that each case is comparable (see, e.g., Dobbins et al., 2003; Doyle and Sambanis, 2006; Fortna, 2008). We measure how many refugees have returned ten years after a conflict ends. Since the most recent available UNHCR data are from 2018, we only include conflicts that ended by the close of 2008 (UNHCR, 2021g).[4] This means that many of the major ongoing refugee situations, such as Syria, Iraq, and South Sudan, are not included in our analysis. The return of refugees in the aftermath of conflict is a process that likely takes years, and our data set was designed to capture how it unfolds over a ten-year window.

We label the year that a conflict ends (the first year of the two-year period when deaths drop below 1,000) as Y_0. We draw on a quantitative measure to ensure we have an objective, straightforward, and accessible measure of the official end of a war. The alternative would be to identify through documentation the "official" end of the war for each of our 53 cases, which we deemed infeasible and unreliable. We evaluate returns after the end of the war, as refugees may choose to return soon after the war ends. However, to be certain that we have correctly identified the end of the war, we use two consecutive years of staying under the threshold to confirm that the war ended in the first year the violence dropped. Assuming refugees who want to return will do so right after a war ends, which we call Y_0, we will want to assess returns in Y_1—the first full year after the war ends. The first full year of the postconflict period is year 1 (Y_1), then Y_2, and so on until Y_{10}, which is the year we measure the outcome. We refer to cases by "Country (Y_0)" since some countries have more than one postconflict period, such as Angola (1994) and Angola (2001).

Table C.1 presents the list of 53 cases included in the analysis along with the year that the conflict is coded as having ended (Y_0).

Even to a casual observer, several cases immediately stand out as dubiously "postconflict" (Autesserre, 2010).[5] In cases such as Afghanistan (2002), significant violence continued for many years after. This is the result of our minimal definition of the end of conflict: two consecutive years of fewer than 1,000 annual battle-related deaths. In Afghanistan, for instance, battle-related deaths were below 1,000 in 2002 and 2003—which is sufficient to merit inclusion in our data set—but rose above 1,000 again starting in 2004. Globally, this pattern is common: Civil wars often relapse after coming to an end, and even if full-scale war does not resume, significant violence can continue for many years (Boyle, 2014; Licklider, 1995; Walter, 2015). The cases included in our data set demonstrate the continued violence in postconflict situations (see Table C.2).

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[4]   To maintain our focus on major refugee situations, we also excluded cases where the refugee population in the year the conflict ends is fewer than 1,000 or where the cumulative number of refugees in the ten-year postconflict period does not exceed 10,000. UNHCR population statistics are available at UNHCR, 2021g.

[5]   For an important critique of the concept of "postconflict" and its use by the international community, see Autesserre, 2010.

TABLE C.1

List of Postconflict Cases Included in Analysis

El Salvador (1989)	Azerbaijan (1994)	Chad (2000)
South Africa (1990)	Ghana (1994)	Rwanda (2001)
Lebanon (1990)	Ethiopia (1995)	Nigeria (2001)
Liberia (1990)	Myanmar (1995)	Sri Lanka (2001)
Rwanda (1991)	Bosnia and Herzegovina (1995)	Angola (2001)
Iraq (1991)	Liberia (1996)	Afghanistan (2002)
Sierra Leone (1991)	Tajikistan (1996)	Algeria (2002)
Mozambique (1991)	Russian Federation (1996)	DR Congo (2003)
Uganda (1991)	Iraq (1997)	Liberia (2003)
Serbia (1991)[a]	Rwanda (1998)	Ethiopia (2003)
Myanmar (1992)	Republic of the Congo (1998)	Burundi (2003)
Chad (1992)	Sierra Leone (1999)	Indonesia (2004)
Somalia (1992)	Indonesia (1999)	Nigeria (2004)
Ethiopia (1992)	Serbia (1999)[a]	Uganda (2004)
Tajikistan (1993)	Turkey (1999)	Russian Federation (2004)
DR Congo (1993)	Philippines (2000)	Colombia (2005)
Georgia (1993)	Eritrea (2000)	Chad (2006)
Angola (1994)	Ethiopia (2000)	

[a] There is some unclarity regarding what precise territory the two key data sets—UCDP/PRIO and UNHCR—are referring to by Serbia in 1991 and 1999, and in particular, whether they are referring to the same territory. The problem stems from the shifting political boundaries in the territory of the Former Yugoslavia. In 1991, for instance, it is unclear whether the data sets are referring to the territory of all of Yugoslavia or just the portion that would eventually become Serbia. The confusion stems from the fact that the UCDP/PRIO data set indicates that "Yugoslavia (Serbia)" existed as a member of the international system from the beginning of the data set (1946) until 2006, at which point it was divided into Serbia and Montenegro. However, Macedonia became a system member in 1991, Croatia in 1991 or 1992 (different dates are given on different pages; see Pettersson, 2019, pp. 10, 14), and BiH and Slovenia in 1992. So in 1991, did battle deaths that took place in "Yugoslavia (Serbia)" include battle deaths that took place in what would soon become Croatia, Bosnia, and Slovenia, but not Macedonia?

TABLE C.2

Levels of Postconflict Violence

Number of Postconflict Years	Cases with 25+ Deaths/Year	Cases with 500+ Deaths/Year	Cases with 1,000+ Deaths/Year
0 years	4 (8%)	11 (21%)	27 (51%)
1–3 years	11 (21%)	19 (36%)	12 (23%)
4–7 years	9 (17%)	19 (36%)	12 (23%)
8–10 years	29 (55%)	4 (8%)	2 (4%)

Half of the cases returned to war-level violence (1,000 or more annual deaths) for at least one year. A large majority (80 percent) experienced at least one year with 500 or more battle-related deaths. And all but four of the cases experienced low-level violence (25 or more deaths) during the ten-year measurement period. But, as stated above, refugees do not have the benefit of hindsight when they decide to return. A lull in violence might be the beginning of peace or merely a short respite in the war. This uncertainty is a constant in the lives of people living through war as combatants, civilians, refugees, or returnees. Violence often does resume, which is why many returnees have to again flee their home (Schwartz, 2019).

Metrics of Return

Third, we must specify how to measure refugee return. We measure postconflict refugee return as cumulative returns after the end of the conflict as a percentage of the cumulative refugee population. UNHCR data provide the *stock* (S_t) of refugees in a given year by country of origin, as well as the number of *returned* (O_t) refugees. Our denominator is the total number of people displaced at the end of the war, but also taking into account those who may become displaced after the war ends. Thus, we need to take into account both the baseline number of refugees at the end of the war and the net flow of new refugees over the ten-year period, which also accounts for those who return.

The stock population in any given year (S_t) is equal to the stock population in the previous year (S_{t-1}) plus the net flow of refugees and returnees (F_t) for that year:

$$S_t = S_{t-1} + F_t. \tag{C.1}$$

The net flow of refugees and returnees (F_t) is calculated as the number of new refugees (R_t) minus the number of returnees (O_t):

$$F_t = R_t - O_t. \tag{C.2}$$

Therefore,

$$S_t = S_{t-1} + R_t - O_t. \tag{C.3}$$

Rearranging Equation (C.3) to get the number of new refugees each year to construct the cumulative measure, we get

$$R_t = S_t + O_t - S_{t-1}. \tag{C.4}$$

Using the above, we can calculate the percent cumulative refugee return over ten years (PCRR$_t$) as

$$PCRR_t = \frac{\sum_{t=1}^{10} O_t}{S_0 + \sum_{t=1}^{10} R_t}. \tag{C.5}$$

PCCR$_t$ is the cumulative refugee returns in Y_1 to Y_{10}, S_0 is the stock of refugees in the year the conflict ends, and the term $\sum_{t=1}^{10} R_t$ is the flow of new refugees over the ten-year period starting with the first year after the conflict ends and taking into account returns over that same period. Thus, this measure uses the number of refugees in the year that the conflict ends (Y_0) as the baseline number of refugees that are outside the country at the start of the postconflict period. (As a reminder, we do not examine refugee returns that take place while the armed conflict is ongoing.) However, we also account for the refugees that exit the country after Y_0 (which can be a sizable number) by using the *cumulative* number of refugees in the postconflict period in the

denominator. Refugee returns are also measured cumulatively, but we do not include refugees that returned in Y_0 itself.[6]

We measure refugee return using UNHCR's annual data on the number of refugees (including "people in refugee-like situations") and returned refugees for each country in the world (UNHCR, 2019b; UNHCR, 2021g).[7] UNHCR statistics have the advantage of covering every country for every year of our analysis (1989–2018).[8] However, UNHCR statistics also come with several disadvantages that limit the scope of our analysis. First, the data on refugees and returned refugees are likely a significant undercount because an individual must be a registered refugee in order to be counted (UNHCR, 2019b).[9] Second, the data provide no information on the nature of the return. We do not know whether it is safe or dangerous, voluntary or coerced, sustained or fleeting. UNHCR notes that "returns normally would take place only under conditions of safety and dignity," but on some occasions at least—as indicated by UNHCR's own use of the qualifier "normally"—it does not (UNHCR, 2019b, p. 68). Third, refugees are considered returned if they return to their countries of origin, but the data do not provide information on whether they return to the home, town, or even the region that they lived in prior to fleeing. Thus, overall, UNHCR statistics miss the on-the-ground, dynamic experience of return for individual refugees, but they do provide a bird's-eye view of national-level macro-trends that, even if imperfect, enhance our understanding of global trends in refugee return over time (Chu et al., 2019).[10]

Table C.3 provides summary statistics of our key variable of interest and other variables that describe home and host country conditions. In Table C.4, the cumulative number of refugees, the cumulative number of refugee returns, and the cumulative percentage of refugee returns is shown for each case included in the dataset.

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[6] Because of the aggregate nature of the data, a conflict coded as ending in a particular year could have ended at any point from January 1 to December 31. Thus, we cannot know if returns that took place in Y_0 occurred before or after the conflict's end. It is possible, therefore, that we are excluding a large number of returnees from the analysis: the ones who return as fast as they can upon hearing the news of a declared cease-fire, signed peace agreement, or military victory by one party. In fact, Table C.5 shows that in nearly one-third of cases, over 20 percent of the cumulative refugee return took place in Y_0. In Iraq (1991), Serbia (1999), Myanmar (1995), and South Africa (1990), the four most lopsided cases, more people returned in Y_0 than in the next ten years combined. Excluding immediate returns from our analysis of postconflict refugee return clearly distorts our interpretation of the "success" of these cases, where rapid return was the majority experience. It also distorts our analysis of the full set of cases, but to a lesser degree and with no dramatic change to the overall results. Including the Y_0 returnees increases the mean cumulative return percentage from 31 percent to 40 percent, and the median from 21 percent to 32 percent. This is a significant difference, to be sure, but the big-picture conclusion, that most refugees do not return to their home countries, remains true. This exclusion is regrettable, but including the "immediate returns" would have introduced analytic confusion to the data.

[7] For the purposes of UNHCR statistics, "Refugees include individuals recognized under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, the refugee definition contained in the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees as incorporated into national laws, those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute, individuals granted complementary forms of protection, and those enjoying temporary protection. The refugee population also includes people in refugee-like situations." UNHCR, 2019b, p. 63. People in refugee-like situations are defined as a "category [that] is descriptive in nature and includes groups of persons who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks similar to those of refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained." And returned refugees are defined as "former refugees who have returned to their countries of origin, either spontaneously or in an organized fashion, but are yet to be fully integrated. Such returns normally would take place only under conditions of safety and dignity." UNHCR, 2019b, p. 68. Note that we do not examine IDPs in this study; this is because UNHCR only has comprehensive IDP return data starting in 2007.

[8] UNHCR's Refugee Population Statistics Database provides annual data on each country's stock of refugees and flow of refugee returns, which we used to calculate the annual flow of new refugees so that we could calculate the cumulative number of refugees in the period of interest. In calculating the number of new refugees each year, we did not account for refugees who were resettled or locally integrated since they are a very small proportion of the total.

[9] Furthermore, the data quality is uneven because "the data are generally provided by Governments, based on their own definitions and methods of data collection." UNHCR, 2019b, p. 68. For an example of data inconsistencies, see Table C.6.

[10] Recent research has collected high-quality, representative survey data that give us a better picture of return from the perspective of individual refugees. See Chu et al., 2019.

TABLE C.3

Summary Statistics

Variable	Measure	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum, Maximum	N	Source
Postconflict refugee return	Cumulative percentage of refugee returns ($Y_1 - Y_{10}$)	0.31	0.26	0, 0.84	53	UNHCR 1989–2018
Home country security	Number of years with low-level violence	6.62	3.63	0, 10	53	UCDP 1989–2018
Home country security	Number of years with moderate violence	3.09	2.79	0, 10	53	UCDP 1989–2018
Home country security	Number of years with high violence	1.62	2.18	0, 8	53	UCDP 1989–2018
Home country security	Length of war	7.17	5.11	0, 17	53	UCDP 1989–2018
Home country economy	Average Gross National Income/cap. ($Y_0 - Y_{10}$)	1,348.06	1,818.42	13, 9494	50	World Bank 1989–2018
Home country economy	Average annual change Gross National Income/cap. ($Y_0 - Y_{10}$)	0.13	0.14	−0.1, 0.71	50	World Bank 1989–2018
Host country geography	Percentage of refugees in neighboring countries	0.66	0.34	0, 1	53	SpData 2020
Host country economy	Percentage of refugees in low-income hosts	0.57	0.41	0, 1	53	World Bank 1989–2018
Host country economy	Percentage of refugees in middle-income hosts	0.22	0.32	0, 0.99	53	World Bank 1989–2018
Host country economy	Percentage of refugees in high-income hosts	0.20	0.30	0, 1	53	World Bank 1989–2018
Host country security	Percentage of refugees in high-refugee-producing hosts	0.42	0.36	0, 1	53	UNHCR 1989–2018
Host country security	Percentage of refugees in hosts with 1000+ battle-related deaths	0.19	0.27	0, 0.99	53	UCDP 1989–2018
Host country security	Percentage of refugees in hosts with 25+ battle-related deaths for five+ years	0.37	0.37	0, 1	53	UCDP 1989–2018
Host country refugee opportunities	Percentage of refugees in hosts with large informal economies	0.14	0.25	0, 0.97	53	Hassan and Schneider 2016
Host country refugee opportunities	Percentage of refugees in hosts with high unemployment	0.20	0.26	0, 0.99	53	World Bank 1989–2018
Host country refugee opportunities	Percentage of refugees in hosts with low education spending	0.23	0.34	0, 1	53	World Bank 1989–2018

TABLE C.4

Cumulative Number of Refugees and Refugee Returns and Percentage of Refugee Returns for Each Case

Case	Cumulative Number of Refugees (Y_0–Y_{10})	Cumulative Number of Refugee Returns (Y_1–Y_{10})	Cumulative Percentage of Refugee Returns (Y_1–Y_{10})
Serbia (1991)	1,158,398	978,336	84
Mozambique (1991)	1,567,693	1,217,046	78
Liberia (2003)	429,705	324,263	75
Congo (1998)	93,823	67,133	72
Angola (2001)	626,040	441,026	70
Rwanda (1998)	288,243	198,938	69
Rwanda (1991)	4,818,371	3,213,693	67
Burundi (2003)	651,131	418,084	64
Angola (1994)	701,480	439,349	63
Myanmar (1992)	385,577	234,201	61
Liberia (1996)	1,172,632	682,781	58
Rwanda (2001)	266,436	152,929	57
Afghanistan (2002)	6,568,644	3,663,364	56
Ethiopia (1992)	357,276	196,370	55
Sierra Leone (1999)	531,650	269,929	51
Ethiopia (1995)	135,326	65,362	48
Liberia (1990)	1,100,859	517,745	47
DR Congo (2003)	929,922	430,359	46
Sierra Leone (1991)	904,390	412,655	46
Somalia (1992)	1,029,861	431,169	42
Bosnia Herzegovina (1995)	1,062,630	427,047	40
Serbia (1999)	523,119	193,942	37
El Salvador (1989)	50,919	16,480	32
DR Congo (1993)	620,007	165,513	27
Nigeria (2001)	34,325	8,002	23
Tajikistan (1993)	163,977	34,400	21
South Africa (1990)	14,923	3,128	21
Tajikistan (1996)	132,360	26,531	20
Myanmar (1995)	208,039	40,300	19
Sri Lanka (2001)	180,361	32,232	18
Uganda (1991)	103,879	18,154	17
Uganda (2004)	36,915	5,361	15
Chad (2000)	87,128	12,309	14

Table C.4—Continued

Case	Cumulative Number of Refugees (Y_0–Y_{10})	Cumulative Number of Refugee Returns (Y_1–Y_{10})	Cumulative Percentage of Refugee Returns (Y_1–Y_{10})
Eritrea (2000)	511,747	71,456	14
Chad (1992)	228,729	31,490	14
Iraq (1997)	2,951,753	391,116	13
Chad (2006)	70,605	8,927	13
Iraq (1991)	1,448,528	169,960	12
Georgia (1993)	58,068	6,708	12
Ethiopia (2000)	93,963	10,002	11
Azerbaijan (1994)	429,406	39,094	9
Lebanon (1990)	19,766	1,582	8
Nigeria (2004)	107,352	7,534	7
Ghana (1994)	19,404	1,133	6
Indonesia (1999)	36,022	1,250	3
Indonesia (2004)	35,040	347	1
Ethiopia (2003)	92,711	476	1
Colombia (2005)	576,948	2,026	0
Russian Federation (2004)	184,260	630	0
Turkey (1999)	250,723	591	0
Russian Federation (1996)	334,628	669	0
Algeria (2002)	15,741	15	0
Philippines (2000)	46,763	—	0

SOURCE: Authors' calculations from UNHCR Population Statistics.

Table C.5 shows the cumulative refugee return starting in Y_0 (Chapter Two and the remainder of the appendix use a measure of cumulative refugee return in year 1), which appears in this table under "Cumulative Number. of Refugee Returns (Y_1–Y_{10})." In nearly one-third of cases, over 20 percent of the cumulative postconflict refugee return took place in Y_0. In Iraq (1991), Serbia (1999), Myanmar (1995), and South Africa (1990), the four most lopsided cases, more people returned in Y_0 than in the next ten years combined.

Table C.6 gives an example of inconsistencies in the reporting of refugee return data. According to UNHCR statistics, the number of Filipino refugees declined from 45,482 in 2000 to 970 in 2010. This looks like 98 percent of refugees returned over the course of the decade. But according to the same UNHCR statistics, only three refugees returned in those years. Thus, officially, 0 percent of refugees returned to the Philippines in the ten years after the end of its conflict. The data, including resettlement and naturalization data, do not account for what happened to the nearly 45,000 other refugees.

TABLE C.5

Different Measures of the Percentage of Refugee Returns

Case	Number of Refugees in Y_0	Cumulative Number of Refugees Y_0-Y_{10}	Refugee Returns in Y_0	Cumulative Number of Refugee Returns (Y_1-Y_{10})	Cumulative Number of Refugee Returns, Including Y_0 (Y_0-Y_{10})	Cumulative Percentage of Refugee Returns (Y_1-Y_{10})	Cumulative Percentage of Refugee Returns, Including Y_0 (Y_0-Y_{10})	Refugee Returns in Y_0 as a Percentage of Cumulative Returns in Y_0-Y_{10}
Philippines (2000)	45,482	46,763	3	—	3	0	0	100
Iraq (1991)	1,321,853	1,448,528	1,336,812	169,960	1,506,772	12	104	89
Serbia (1999)	172,509	523,119	807,139	193,942	1,001,081	37	191	81
Myanmar (1995)	152,298	208,039	66,004	40,300	106,304	19	51	62
South Africa (1990)	14,783	14,923	4,710	3,128	7,838	21	53	60
Algeria (2002)	12,107	15,741	14	15	29	0	0	48
Azerbaijan (1994)	299,095	429,406	29,000	39,094	68,094	9	16	43
Eritrea (2000)	376,851	511,747	51,005	71,456	122,461	14	24	42
Ethiopia (1995)	100,987	135,326	34,973	65,362	100,335	48	74	35
Afghanistan (2002)	2,510,294	6,568,644	1,957,958	3,663,364	5,621,322	56	86	35
Tajikistan (1993)	70,108	163,977	18,325	34,400	52,725	21	32	35
Indonesia (2004)	27,919	35,040	135	347	482	1	1	28
Congo (1998)	17,143	93,823	25,250	67,133	92,383	72	98	27
Chad (1992)	66,381	228,729	9,810	31,490	41,300	14	18	24
Ethiopia (2000)	66,410	93,963	2,936	10,002	12,938	11	14	23
Tajikistan (1996)	107,503	132,360	6,713	26,531	33,244	20	25	20
Chad (2000)	54,962	87,128	2,619	12,309	14,928	14	17	18
Burundi (2003)	531,637	651,131	82,402	418,084	500,486	64	77	16
Liberia (1990)	735,689	1,100,859	99,970	517,745	617,715	47	56	16
El Salvador (1989)	39,582	50,919	3,150	16,480	19,630	32	39	16
Turkey (1999)	44,012	250,723	108	591	699	0	0	15
Georgia (1993)	6,012	58,068	1,001	6,708	7,709	12	13	13
Rwanda (2001)	84,513	266,436	21,596	152,929	174,525	57	66	12
Russian Fed. (2004)	108,100	184,260	54	630	684	0	0	8
Liberia (2003)	353,344	429,705	21,000	324,263	345,263	75	80	6
Ethiopia (2003)	62,677	92,711	30	476	506	1	1	6
Ethiopia (1992)	313,129	357,276	11,995	196,370	208,365	55	58	6
Rwanda (1998)	77,743	288,243	10,918	198,938	209,856	69	73	5
Nigeria (2004)	23,890	107,352	364	7,534	7,898	7	7	5
Myanmar (1992)	245,130	385,577	8,530	234,201	242,731	61	63	4

Table C.5—Continued

Case	Number of Refugees in Y_0	Cumulative Number of Refugees Y_0-Y_{10}	Refugee Returns in Y_0	Cumulative Number of Refugee Returns (Y_1-Y_{10})	Cumulative Number of Refugee Returns, Including Y_0 (Y_0-Y_{10})	Cumulative Percentage of Refugee Returns (Y_1-Y_{10})	Cumulative Percentage of Refugee Returns, Including Y_0 (Y_0-Y_{10})	Refugee Returns in Y_0 as a Percentage of Cumulative Returns in Y_0-Y_{10}
Lebanon (1990)	6,993	19,766	50	1,582	1,632	8	8	3
Sierra Leone (1991)	142,614	904,390	12,980	412,655	425,635	46	47	3
Angola (2001)	470,625	626,040	13,120	441,026	454,146	70	73	3
Iraq (1997)	707,338	2,951,753	10,438	391,116	401,554	13	14	3
Russian Fed. (1996)	173,723	334,628	17	669	686	0	0	2
Uganda (2004)	31,963	36,915	91	5,361	5,452	15	15	2
Sierra Leone (1999)	490,061	531,650	3,502	269,929	273,431	51	51	1
Ghana (1994)	14,289	19,404	13	1,133	1,146	6	6	1
Somalia (1992)	797,120	1,029,861	4,918	431,169	436,087	42	42	1
Serbia (1991)	45,823	1,158,398	7,500	978,336	985,836	84	85	1
DR Congo (2003)	453,465	929,922	3,169	430,359	433,528	46	47	1
Indonesia (1999)	9,020	36,022	8	1,250	1,258	3	3	1
Uganda (1991)	39,386	103,879	60	18,154	18,214	17	18	0
Colombia (2005)	60,450	576,948	5	2,026	2,031	0	0	0
Chad (2006)	36,300	70,605	20	8,927	8,947	13	13	0
Bosnia Herz. (1995)	769,753	1,062,630	815	427,047	427,862	40	40	0
Liberia (1996)	784,008	1,172,632	737	682,781	683,518	58	58	0
DR Congo (1993)	74,826	620,007	124	165,513	165,637	27	27	0
Sri Lanka (2001)	122,420	180,361	14	32,232	32,246	18	18	0
Mozambique (1991)	1,316,636	1,567,693	340	1,217,046	1,217,386	78	78	0
Nigeria (2001)	6,084	34,325	2	8,002	8,004	23	23	0
Angola (1994)	282,577	701,480	49	439,349	439,398	63	63	0
Rwanda (1991)	431,240	4,818,371	140	3,213,693	3,213,833	67	67	0

TABLE C.6

UNHCR Statistics on Philippines

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Refugees	45,482	45,467	45,608	412	434	465	886	1,552	1,354	993	970
Refugee returns	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Resettlement	0	0	5	0	5	0	112	9	9	0	0
Naturalization	64	73	84	77	83	98	100	92	176	85	0

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There are 30 million refugees around the world. Humanitarian agencies aim for one of three durable solutions for them: voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement, with repatriation being the preferred solution. However, the authors find that only one-third of refugees return home after ten years. Returns have not kept pace with new displacement. The status quo is a growing global population of displaced people living in limbo without full citizenship rights, and with their host countries experiencing ever-greater political and economic strains of hosting them. The need to find new solutions to facilitate safe refugee return has become more urgent.

The authors aim to address this need by examining barriers to, and facilitators of, the safe and sustained return of refugees. The authors examined evidence from the literature about refugee returns; conducted interviews with global experts; examined cross-national data trends from 53 cases; and conducted case studies of refugee returns in the Western Balkan countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, as well as the Kurdistan Region–Iraq, involving focus groups with returned refugees.

The authors found that, despite the intent of global humanitarian and development communities, most refugees are unable to return or find another durable solution even after decades of displacement. The authors offer recommendations to governments, donors, and international organizations, recommending that the three durable solutions be pursued in combination with, and accompanied by, efforts to develop a greater menu of interim solutions with robust international support to promote the well-being of refugees and their host communities.

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