



# The High Commissioner's Global Initiative on Somali Refugees (GISR)



## Report of the High-Level Panel on Somali refugees

*Geneva, 13-14 November 2013*

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For further information and background documents, see [www.unhcr.org/GISR](http://www.unhcr.org/GISR)

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## 1. Introduction

A High-Level Panel on the Somali Refugee Situation was convened by the High Commissioner as part of the Global Initiative on Somali Refugees (GISR). The GISR is an over-arching process which aims to rally the international community to address the most pivotal problems and imperatives of the Somali refugee situation, with an emphasis on finding viable and durable solutions. The Initiative is interested in the situation of Somali refugees globally but considers particularly Somali refugees in nearby States (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Yemen) as well as the situation in Somalia.

The High-Level Panel consisted of international experts in refugee and humanitarian affairs, members of the Somali diaspora, Somali returnees, civil society leaders, academics, businessmen, and former diplomats with extensive knowledge of the East and Horn of Africa. For UNHCR, the High Commissioner, the Deputy High Commissioner, and the Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa facilitated the conversation. See Annex 1 for the list of Panel members. This report is a summary of the discussion and key conclusions from the High-Level Panel.

## 2. Setting the scene

The background paper produced for the High-Level Panel by Laura Hammond served as a platform for discussion of the Somali situation. Within the country, there are continuing and significant challenges in governance, security, state formation, the move towards federalism, institution and infrastructure-building, economic and social development, and forging a national identity. While noting that a military solution could not be the complete solution, the Panel noted that AMISOM should be supported in its endeavor to bring security to South Central Somalia. In refugee hosting countries, the primary issues are the protracted nature of the refugee situation and the varied responses of host States and communities to Somali refugees. The Panel commented on the immense heterogeneity of Somali refugees, in regard to factors such as clan affiliations, length of stay in exile, skills, education, and levels of urbanisation. The success of any solutions strategy depends on a clear understanding of these differences. Solutions must necessarily be differentiated and nuanced in response, and at the same time have a joined-up national and regional perspective.

Panelists noted with regret the current diminishing support for the Somali question from the international community. There was agreement that international solidarity and responsibility-sharing is fundamental and must be catalyzed. Donor fatigue was acknowledged as a factor, as also

the seeming intractability of the situation within Somalia. A regionally coherent approach and strategic advocacy and engagement with the core affected States is critical.

The Panel stressed the importance in the near and medium term of three things; firstly the imperative of making the refugee experience a constructive and meaningful one, secondly creating conditions within Somalia that would allow for a viable repatriation programme in the future, and finally, harnessing the strength of new actors in the search of solutions.

### **3. Building meaningful refugee lives**

All panelists agreed that there should be a strong and consistent focus on reversing suffering, stagnation, and marginalization of refugees and proactively enhancing human welfare and self-realization. Currently, the lack of human security in the lives of refugees is extreme, and addressing this should form the bedrock of any forward-thinking strategy.

The different approaches of host countries in the region towards refugee empowerment were discussed. Panelists noted with gratitude the fact that these countries continued to host large numbers of refugees from Somalia and elsewhere. Some countries take a community-based approach, providing assistance to refugees and host communities as a whole with simultaneous investment in creating the right conditions within Somalia. Some countries have adopted an open door policy, allowing Somali refugees to stay in camps giving them access to small pieces of land thus engendering self-reliance. Panelists were however more worried by the emerging situation in Kenya, with rising public anxiety and political rhetoric against Somali refugees. They urged Kenyan leaders to be on guard against anti-Somali perceptions and actions.

Some of the ideas generated by the Panel in order to improve refugees' lives were:

- a) Enhancing protection: There is a perceived weakening in the quality of asylum which has come about as a result of xenophobia and other socio-political shifts in some host countries. While recognizing host countries' frustration and concerns on security issues, the Panel said that it is important to address the often unwarranted link that is made between Somali refugees and terrorism (as evidenced in the discourse in Kenya especially since the September 2013 Westgate attack). The discourse around refugees has become increasingly securitized in some host states. The Panel lauded host countries' statements encouraging

citizens not to hold refugees responsible for all security problems, and encouraged States to be more active in this regard.

- b) Moving from 'dependency' to 'empowerment': The Panel stressed the importance of moving from a dependency approach centred on a care and maintenance model, to one where refugee empowerment was at the forefront. This approach needs to infuse all spheres of refugees' lives, thus making them active agents for change rather than merely passive recipients of aid. This will necessitate an emphasis on improving education and livelihoods, and moving away from the model of closed, unproductive camps to more open and integrated models which encourage development and self-reliance.
- c) Increase refugee participation: Panelists emphasized the need to ensure that refugees participate fully and genuinely in programming, implementation of activities and in the finding of solutions. The involvement of women and youth was encouraged and should be keenly and consistently sought, work opportunities within camps should be offered to refugees, and platforms should be built to consistently facilitate full participation.
- d) Create productive and safe refugee camps: While camps are not an ideal model of refugee hosting, where they are needed, the Panel felt they should be made as safe and productive as possible. More efforts should be made to create an environment where refugees could acquire skills, earn livelihoods, and actualize their potential. The training that refugees have received over the years should be used strategically for their own benefit as well as the benefit of the refugee community as a whole, and where possible host communities too. The Panel suggested, for example, the use of cash grants to inject money into the economy, which could enable entrepreneurs to create and enlarge businesses and thereby create useful economic activity.
- e) Building refugee-host community relations: Structured opportunities for host communities and refugees to develop and share skills would be welcome. This may be in the form of skills transfer programmes, joint cultural activities, etc. Such initiatives would help break down antipathy and build human trust and potential. As an example, while food assistance can help refugee populations, the use of cash assistance can help refugees and host communities by fostering economic activity. The Panel also felt it would be better to adopt a holistic 'area approach' (e.g. North Eastern Kenya, Eastleigh) rather than a 'camp approach', as this would automatically bring benefits to host communities and refugees simultaneously.
- f) Developing leadership: Panelists felt that the leadership potential of refugees should be strengthened, which would help the community to enhance the quality of asylum as well as effectively prepare for return to Somalia, and indeed help make return more successful

when it does take place. Women and youth should be actively included in leadership programmes.

- g) Recognise the value of mobility: The Panel noted that Somali refugees use mobility as a coping mechanism in the face of long-term indefinite displacement. Somalis (both refugees and diaspora) travel back and forth between Somalia and their host countries. They do this to facilitate family business, or review first-hand the situation in Somalia, or invest their resources (skills or capital) in rebuilding the country. Panelists advised that such movements should be formally recognized and enabled, rather than discouraged. Opening up mobility will potentially empower more refugees to return and help to rebuild Somalia, bringing more stability and prosperity to the region.
- h) Harnessing Somali resilience: The Panel commended the resilience of Somali populations around the world, and acknowledged their potential role as drivers for change in Somalia. They felt this resilience could be a genuine ally in the search for solutions. It is perhaps not being developed enough, nor is it being tapped and encouraged to its full potential.
- i) Increasing access to micro-finance: The Panel specially noted the importance of micro-finance schemes to encourage the entrepreneurial skills of Somali refugees and generate much-needed development in Somalia. They emphasized that particular attention should be paid to including youth and women in micro-finance schemes.
- j) Focused livelihoods training: The Panel stressed the importance of enhancing livelihood opportunities and skills amongst refugees as this is crucial for building self-reliance and dignity. They felt that livelihoods training should be intelligently designed, in such a way as to offer useful and relevant opportunities in future. It is important to understand the livelihood/ employment opportunities which will emerge in Somalia in the coming 5-10 years (assuming the political and security situation remains stable). This baseline can then be mapped against skills already available within the refugee/ IDP communities. The gaps between the skills which will be needed in Somalia, and the skills available amongst refugees, will facilitate the creation of targeted and relevant livelihoods training. This would also increase chances of productive and successful returns.

#### **4. Examining repatriation**

There has been a semblance of increasing political stability in Somalia. The presence of AMISOM has increased security to some extent, and new institutions are slowly emerging. These positive developments will hopefully be sustained, but concern was expressed by the Panel that without the

right support, these developments could equally reverse. Further, long-term conflict and state collapse have resulted in desperate shortages of infrastructure at all levels, from education to health to water and sanitation to roads and governance/ regulatory apparatus. If refugees return to a State with continuing insecurity and a shortage of infrastructure, return will not be sustainable and may indeed lead to further waves of displacements.

There was a clear consensus among panelists that large-scale repatriation will not be advisable in the near future. Security and preparedness within the country are not yet adequate, and the Government does not have the resources necessary to take on the immense responsibility of reintegrating a million returnees, in addition to managing a further million IDPs. A premature and rushed repatriation effort could further destabilise the country, putting pressure on the fledgling government, detrimentally affecting millions of lives, and creating huge setbacks in the tentative gains which have been made so far on the road to recovery.

A targeted pilot repatriation project to support spontaneous returns would at this moment be better advised. It would not be advised at this stage to support spontaneous returns to all parts of Somalia, but only to carefully selected areas which have been prepared in terms of livelihoods and security. Rigorous monitoring and accompaniment should be undertaken during the return process to ensure that difficulties are dealt with immediately and effectively, ensuring the safety of vulnerable populations. The Panel stressed also that urban refugees, in addition to camp-based refugees, should have access to any voluntary repatriation programmes.

The Panel emphasized that the search for solutions for refugees and for IDPs must progress side-by-side, as the success of the two is deeply intertwined.

The Panel emphasized that it was crucial to move in the coming years from the humanitarian approach which dominates the involvement of the international community in Somalia at present, to a more developmental approach with a longer-term vision to rebuild Somalia constructively, and at the same time prepare refugees for sustainable returns. This will, the Panel agreed, serve to create pull factors which draw refugees back into the country, which would be the most positive form of lasting returns.

The Panel highlighted the importance of giving prior consideration to issues of land ownership. Inevitably, during the many years of conflict and displacement, land has become a vastly complicated and contested matter. Mechanisms to establish ownership and resolve disputes should

be instituted with urgency so that these factors do not later trigger further conflicts and displacements.

The Panel emphasized the importance of raising refugees' awareness on the Tripartite agreement signed between the Somali government, the Kenyan government, and UNHCR. They felt there may currently be some misunderstandings as to its exact implications, as also some fear that the agreement signals the start of a forced repatriation process, which it does not.

The Panel reflected on the need to more fully explore the barriers to return from the perspective of different refugee populations. This will illuminate the changes required in order for the prospect of returning home to become more attractive, and more sustainably realized.

The Panel emphasized that as long as conditions for large-scale return remain unfavourable, opportunities for resettlement to third countries should continue, and where possible be stepped up. Current resettlement states as well as new potential resettlement states were called upon to show more solidarity and share responsibility by increasing numbers and types of refugees resettled.

## 5. Role of key actors

The Panel felt that engagement with traditional actors should continue and be increasingly coordinated. These actors include States, regional inter-governmental agencies (such as IGAD, AU, ECA), donors, development agencies, and current and potential new resettlement States. The Panel very strongly emphasized that under GISR, dialogue must be opened up with non-traditional actors who are extremely crucial in the Somali context. These actors are, most particularly, the diaspora and the private sector.

The Panel felt that potential synergies between the private sector and the humanitarian world had not been adequately explored. A short video interview with Per Hegennes of the IKEA Foundation was screened during the meeting. It illustrated the broadening role of the private sector in improving refugee lives. The interview suggested that while there are challenges for the private sector in engaging with the humanitarian world in more meaningful ways than mere donations, the sense of satisfaction is very high when real and lasting impact is achieved through collaborative efforts. IKEA has been involved in designing and constructing innovative shelters for refugees,

expanding access to education and livelihoods in camps in Ethiopia, and sharing private sector business effectiveness skills with UNHCR as an organization.

The Panel remarked on the resilience of businesses in Somalia. Many have survived despite years of conflict. While risks of trafficking and smuggling should be borne in mind, there were equally opportunities for businesses to establish themselves and thrive in the new Somalia if a safe operating environment could be created.

The private sector in donor countries could be encouraged to share skills and knowledge with Somali businesses and entrepreneurs both within Somalia as well as in refugee contexts. This could take the form of skills transfer programmes or mentoring schemes which can help promote growth and productivity. Further, the private sector could be enlisted to help build humanitarian infrastructure to improve access to communities in need.

Some issues that should be kept in mind in building stronger links with the private sector were highlighted. These include the difference in orientation between the for-profit approach of the private sector and the not-for-profit imperative of the humanitarian sector, the question of what the private sector may seek to gain from working with humanitarian actors/refugees, and reputational issues for companies as well as for humanitarian actors. There was agreement that these risks needed to be well managed, but also that they were necessarily impediments to successful collaborations.

The Panel agreed that the Somali diaspora was a vibrant, empowered and resourceful community which is already active in supporting Somalia through significant remittances, and through some attempts at expertise-sharing. The Panel recommended an exhaustive mapping of the Somali diaspora across the world (current mapping exercises are fragmented) to identify what skills, expertise and other resources they may be able and willing to contribute to support Somali refugees. The Panel also noted that there was benefit from raising diaspora members' awareness of the situation faced by Somali refugees and IDPs, as this may motivate them to engage more.

Specific areas where private sector and diaspora could add value were suggested as construction, electrical and plumbing work and associated trades, micro-finance, entrepreneurship, marketing and resource mobilization. These are some of the areas in which employment opportunities will emerge as Somali infrastructure is rebuilt in the coming years, and refugees could be trained to take up

these opportunities as they arise. However, the Panel recommended that a robust labour markets projection in Somalia would be necessary to ascertain forthcoming labour needs more accurately.

The Panel suggested that new non-traditional donors should be enlisted to support future work on Somalia. Islamic organisations were noted as a particular potential source which has so far not been tapped adequately.

The Panel called for further discussions with the above actors to develop new modes of collaboration to ameliorate the Somali refugee situation.

## 6. Guiding principles

The Panel agreed the core principles which would underpin UNHCR's future action with regard to Somali refugees:

1. The Somali Federal Government's commitment must be at the forefront of efforts regarding Somali refugees, and the international community must at the same time engage regional administrations within Somalia.
2. Solutions for Somali refugees will be differentiated to reflect their diverse needs.
3. International protection must be offered to Somali refugees as long as they need it.
4. All return must be voluntary, safe and dignified. A realistic repatriation programme will be piloted, and implemented where conditions permit.
5. Refugee camps should be opened up through increased opportunities for self-reliance and mobility.
6. Refugee participation will be maximised in all actions.
7. Refugees will be seen as assets, not burdens; self-reliance activities can help activate their potential and also prepare them for eventual return.
8. Host communities and communities to which refugees will return should also be given support, as they too are affected by the Somali refugee situation.
9. New actors will be engaged in finding solutions: including the private sector, the Somali diaspora, women's groups, and development agencies; their contributions may be in asylum countries as well as in Somalia.
10. Modern forms of communications will be used to enhance refugee lives.
11. Resettlement opportunities must be expanded, States are encouraged to consider offering more possibilities for resettlement.

12. States should consider naturalization for long-staying refugees.
13. Solutions for refugees and IDPs should be developed in a joined-up fashion, as they will affect each other.
14. The xenophobia faced by Somali refugees around the world must be challenged.

## 7. Conclusion and way forward

The key imperatives in the search for durable solutions for Somali refugees were identified by the Panel as:

1. Moving forward in line with the agreed guiding principles;
2. Maintaining asylum and protection as long as needed;
3. Creating transformative change for refugees and host communities;
4. Increasing international commitment and resources;
5. Finding solutions which are viable, sustainable, and likely to be accepted by the broad range of actors involved with Somali refugees;
6. Creating global solidarity in support of Somali refugees' search for solutions.

The Panel proposed that these imperatives be concretised in the form of a comprehensive framework enumerating the priorities to guide the international community's future work with Somali displaced people. This agreement is hereinafter referred to as a compact, although it may eventually be named differently. The compact should recognize the rights, dignity and responsibilities of the displaced people, States, and the international community and should be aimed at articulating a strategy to ameliorate the currently sub-optimal lives of over 2 million displaced Somalis.

While anchored in a shared set of principles (described above) and centred on the rights and dignity of people, the compact would also outline a comprehensive regional plan and allow for a customized set of solutions to respond to the varied situations of Somali refugees and of host countries. It will reflect the following:

- a) In Somalia: This will include the selection of pilot areas for spontaneous returns, the links between refugee returns and IDPs, and the conditions necessary for successful large-scale repatriation when the time is right. Although not within UNHCR's direct mandate, the importance of state-building, national security, and governance will be stressed and the primacy of the Somali government in achieving these forefronted.

- b) Regional plan: This will be an interconnected, comprehensive strategy reflecting the complex web of factors involved in successfully managing and resolving the Somali refugee situation. It will cover the regional dimension of the Somali refugee problem, stressing the importance of continued protection, regional political dynamics etc.
- c) Customized plans for each asylum country: This will detail country-specific solutions to respond to specific national policy contexts. These may include varying emphases on voluntary repatriation, vocational training, out of camp policies, investments to increase livelihoods opportunities for refugees and hosts, and the specific situation of urban refugees.
- d) Global dimensions: This will reference the wider supra-regional factors that are of relevance to the Somali refugee situation, including the diaspora, the global labour market, Somali trans-localism, and trafficking and smuggling, to think about how these may affect the search for solutions for Somali refugees.

It was suggested that UNHCR play the part of a catalyst, creating a global partnership to carry through a wide-ranging plan of action as set out in the compact. The Compact will be a living plan, periodically reviewed and adjusted in response to changing circumstances. It will pay attention to marginalized groups especially women, the disabled, and minorities who may each have specific needs at each stage of displacement. It will also look at the issue of how young people may respond and adapt to return. It will be cognizant of the fact that young people may become prime targets for recruitment by Al-Shabaab and other militia, in the absence of other alternatives. The Panel called for special attention to be paid to education, livelihood opportunities, and economic development for Somali refugees.

The High Commissioner proposed an international event aimed at mobilizing the international community. Towards this, consultations would be pursued in a structured manner, in particular with the core six governments, namely Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda and Yemen, but also with other key stakeholders and key actors including Somali refugees, Somali civil society, Somali business community, diaspora, media, host communities, donors, traditional institutional partners and other UN and NGO humanitarian organizations, and international financial institutions.

The event will seek to mobilise the international community's support towards the joint plan of action. Towards this, the Panel suggested that UNHCR consider organizing a media-supported high level mission of UNHCR and the Panel to assess the situation on the ground in Somalia.

UNHCR will develop a road map of events to be held under the GISR. The viability of convening the High Level Panel annually to assess progress will be considered. A final note of caution from the Panel was on the importance of managing expectations so that the GISR maintains its focus as an overarching process of dialogue and agreement-formation.

In the coming months, UNHCR will undertake a series of actions under the GISR and within its broader Somalia operations. It will:

- a) Develop a road map for the GISR, detailing the events that will be organized under the initiative. These will include a regional conference with affected states, and a larger global event with all stakeholders.
- b) Continue to vigorously advocate for maintaining asylum space in the region for as long as needed.
- c) Design and implement a pilot repatriation programme on a purely voluntary basis.
- d) Design initiatives to make the lives of refugees more productive and enhance self-reliance.
- e) Hold further dialogues with the stakeholders, particularly the Somali diaspora and the private sector, to enhance their participation in the search for solutions.
- f) Draft an agreement in consultation with stakeholders containing shared principles, commitments and actions, to frame future work in relation Somali refugees, and seek to have it agreed by the international community.
- g) Design a toolkit of interventions designed to ameliorate the situation of Somali refugees and transform their lives positively.

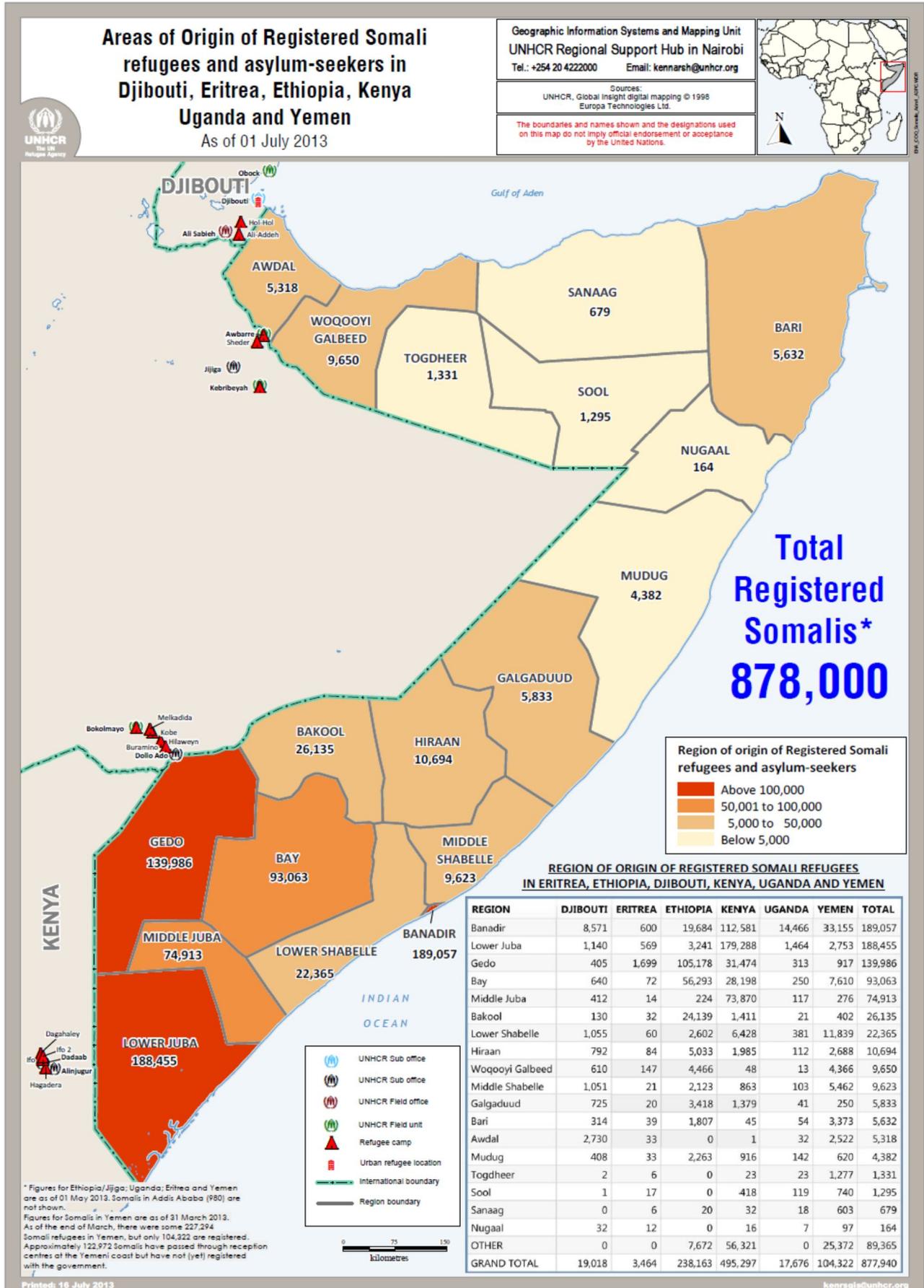
## Annex 1: High Level Panel members

1. Mohammed Abdiker (Director of Operations and Emergencies, International Organization for Migration)
2. Mohammed Affey (former Kenya ambassador to Somalia)
3. Dr Mag teerey Ibrahim Ahmed (Djibouti nominee, professor of development studies)
4. Ibrahim Al-Adoofi (Former Yemen ambassador to UN in Geneva)
5. Jeff Crisp (Senior Director, Refugees International)
6. Abdirashid Duale (CEO, Dahabshiil group)
7. Ilwad Elman (Director of Programs and development, Elman Peace Centre, Mogadishu)
8. Afyare Elmi (Assistant Professor, Qatar University)
9. Dr Abdulcadir Giama (Founder-president, Galkayo Medical Foundation)
10. Laura Hammond (Senior lecturer, School of Oriental and African Studies)
11. Osman Hassan (Somalia nominee, consultant on conflict resolution)
12. Abdulkadir Issa (Ethiopia nominee, previous career with refugees in Horn of Africa)
13. Jakob Kellenberger (former President, ICRC)
14. Lucy Kiama (Kenya nominee, Executive Director, Refugee Consortium of Kenya)
15. David Lambo (former Director, UNHCR Regional Bureau for Africa)
16. Ayan Mahamoud (Director, Kayd Somali Arts and Culture, London)
17. Augustine Mahiga (former UN Special Representative to Somalia)
18. David Miliband (President and CEO, International Rescue Committee; former UK foreign Secretary)
19. Scholastica Nasinyama (Uganda nominee, Executive Director, InterAid Uganda)
20. Kathleen Newland (Director of Migrants, Migration, and Development and refugee Protection Programs, Migration Policy Institute)
21. Elisabeth Rasmusson (Assistant Executive Director, World Food Programme)
22. Ahmed Samatar (Professor, Macalester College)
23. Eric Schwartz (Dean, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota)
24. Cees Wittebrood (Head, West/ East/ Southern Africa and Indian Ocean Dept, DG ECHO)

### UNHCR

1. António Guterres, High Commissioner
2. T. Alex Aleinikoff, Deputy High Commissioner
3. George Okoth-Obbo, Director, Regional Bureau for Africa

Annex 2: Areas of origin of Somali refugees and asylum seekers



Figures shown in this map should be considered provisional. Data source: UNHCR Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda and Yemen.

