

# Ethiopia's Migration and Refugee Crises: Regional & International Law Reflections

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# Overview of Ethiopia's Migration and Refugee Context

Ethiopia hosts the largest refugee population in Africa, with over 900,000 refugees, primarily from neighboring countries of South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea.

## Relevance of the Topic

- Migration is a pressing issue in Ethiopia, driven by conflict, economic factors, and climate change.
- Understanding the legal framework is crucial for policy and humanitarian responses.



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# Key Drivers of Migration and Displacement in Ethiopia

## Historical Context

Ethiopia has a long history of displacement due to wars, political conflicts, and famine. Traditionally, Ethiopians have migrated for work, education, and asylum.



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# Key Drivers of Migration and Displacement in Ethiopia

## Key Drivers of Migration

- Political instability and ethnic conflict.
- Economic challenges, including high unemployment rates.
- Climate change-induced droughts and resource scarcity.

## Major Migration Routes

- Routes to the Middle East through the Gulf of Aden.
- Routes to Europe via North Africa.
- Internal displacement due to conflicts and environmental issues.



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# The Refugee Crises in Ethiopia

## Ethiopia as a Host Country

- Over 900,000 refugees (UNHCR 2024 data) from South Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan. Ethiopia's open-door refugee policy has made it a key player in regional migration.

## Major Refugee Groups

- South Sudanese fleeing civil war.
- Eritreans escaping forced military conscription.
- Somalis and Sudanese escaping conflict.
- Environmental disasters.

## Promoting Solutions

- Ethiopia's Refugee Proclamation (2019) grants refugees rights to work and movement.
- Shift from camp-based to integrated settlement approaches.



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# International Legal Frameworks for Refugee Protection

## 1951 Refugee Convention

Ethiopia is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, which defines who is a refugee and outlines international obligations for their protection.

## 1967 Protocol

Ethiopia also ratified the 1967 Protocol, extending the Refugee Convention's applicability to refugees fleeing persecution after 1951.

## Definition of Refugee under International Law

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of [their] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail [themselves] of the protection of that country."



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# National Legal Frameworks for Refugee Protection

*Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019*

Ethiopia's Refugee Proclamation No. 1110 /2019 is one of the most progressive refugee laws in Africa aligning with international and regional refugee frameworks.

- Refugees can work in formal employment, including in industrial parks and economic sectors.
- Can engage in self-employment and business activities.
- Refugees no longer required to live in camps. Can reside in towns and cities if they can support themselves.
- Refugee children can enroll in Ethiopian schools like Ethiopian nationals.
- Refugees can open bank accounts, receive loans, and engage in financial transactions.
- Refugees with long-term residence in Ethiopia can apply for naturalization.



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# National Legal Frameworks for Refugee Protection

The Agency for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) was the Ethiopian government agency responsible for managing refugee affairs. It has since been rebranded as the Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS). RRS currently manages refugee camps and reception centres across Ethiopia.

## **The RRS is responsible for:**

1. Refugee Status Determination (RSD) – Assessing asylum claims and granting refugee status.
2. Camp Management – Overseeing the operation of refugee camps across Ethiopia.
3. Provision of Services – Ensuring access to food, health, education, and other essential services.
4. Security and Protection – Safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees.
5. Coordination with UNHCR & NGOs – Partnering with international agencies to deliver humanitarian aid.
6. Voluntary Repatriation & Resettlement – Facilitating the safe return of refugees to their home countries or resettlement in third countries.



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# Challenges in Ethiopia's Refugee Response and Policy

## Security Concerns

- Ethiopia's borders with Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea are porous, leading to uncontrolled movements of migrants and traffickers. Cross-border conflicts, such as the Ethiopia-Sudan al-Fashaga dispute, contribute to instability. The Ethiopia-Somalia border faces threats from al-Shabaab militants, impacting refugee security. Increased cases of human trafficking and smuggling networks along major migration routes.



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# Challenges in Ethiopia's Refugee Response and Policy

## Socio-Economic Impact on Host Communities

- Increased demand for healthcare, education, and clean water in refugee-hosting regions like Gambella and Region 5 (Somalia). Refugees entering local labor markets compete with citizens for scarce employment opportunities. Urban informal economies are saturated, driving down wages. Heavy reliance on international aid, which is inconsistent and inadequate.



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# Challenges in Ethiopia's Refugee Response and Policy

## Security Concerns

- Cases of forced deportations in violation of international refugee protection norms. Refugees face movement restrictions and detention in some regions due to security policies. Overcrowded and under-resourced camps make refugees vulnerable to extremist recruitment.

## Human Rights Concerns

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# Impacts of Migration and Displacement on Local Communities

## Pressure on Resources

- Refugee influxes can strain local resources, such as water, land, and healthcare services.

## Social Tensions

- Competition for resources can lead to social tensions between host communities and refugees.

## Economic Impacts

- Refugees' presence may affect local labor markets and economic opportunities.





# Ethiopia's Role in Regional and Global Migration Governance

## IGAD's Migration Action Plan

- Promotes coordinated migration policies among member states.
- Strengthens border management and refugee protection.
- Supports labor migration frameworks to enhance economic opportunities in the region.

## Ethiopia's Participation in Global Refugee Policies

- One of the pilot countries for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).
- Commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees, including job creation initiatives.

## Bilateral and Multilateral Agreements

- Agreements with the EU and Gulf countries on labor migration and protection.
- UNHCR and IOM partnerships for refugee assistance and voluntary repatriation.



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# Emerging Trends and Future Outlook

## **Political Instability & Forced Displacement**

Ongoing conflicts in Tigray and Amhara may trigger new refugee flows. Internal displacement remains a significant challenge.

## **Climate Change as a Driver of Migration**

Droughts and floods are forcing people to migrate internally and across borders. Need for climate adaptation policies in migration governance.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Strengthening legal frameworks to ensure better refugee protection. Enhancing regional cooperation for burden-sharing. Increasing investment in integration and livelihood programs for refugees.



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# Opportunities for Sustainable Integration of Refugees in Ethiopia

## Refugee Labour Rights and Economic Inclusion

- Refugees have the right to work, but implementation is limited due to bureaucratic hurdles.
- Streamline work permit procedures to allow refugees to integrate into formal employment.
- Provide land-use rights for refugees engaged in agriculture and small businesses.
- Extend equal pay protections to prevent exploitation.



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# Opportunities for Sustainable Integration of Refugees in Ethiopia

## Expanding Freedom of Movement

- Fully eliminate encampment policies and allow urban residency permits.
- Expand integration programs for housing, education, and healthcare access.

## Legal Changes

- Establish a binding African Union refugee rights enforcement mechanism, similar to the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights.
- Require AU member states to harmonize national refugee laws with the OAU Convention.



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# Thank you!