Mobility in the African Great Lakes
Unravelling conflict and patterns of migration

International Migration Institute

IMI

UNIVERSITY OF **OXFORD**

It is widely understood that people migrate as a result of a complex mix of motivations and stimuli based on their personal aspirations and abilities, the local social context, and more structural conditions, such as the state of economic growth or the labour market. However, in areas affected by conflict and crisis, such as the Great Lakes region of Africa, any movement tends to be labelled as a response to violence, and those who move are counted as displaced. The influence of mundane socio-economic processes – like family formation, educational attainment, or urbanisation – on the decision to migrate becomes obscured.

In reality, even in such extreme conditions, the line dividing forced and voluntary migration is blurred. While people may be categorised in different ways for the application of policy, these distinctions may say little about the aspirations, experiences or interests of those who move. In this two-year project, we seek to move beyond the crisis framework that dominates examinations of human mobility in the Great Lakes region, and we set out to analyse this complex mix of motivations that can be identified in any person's movements.
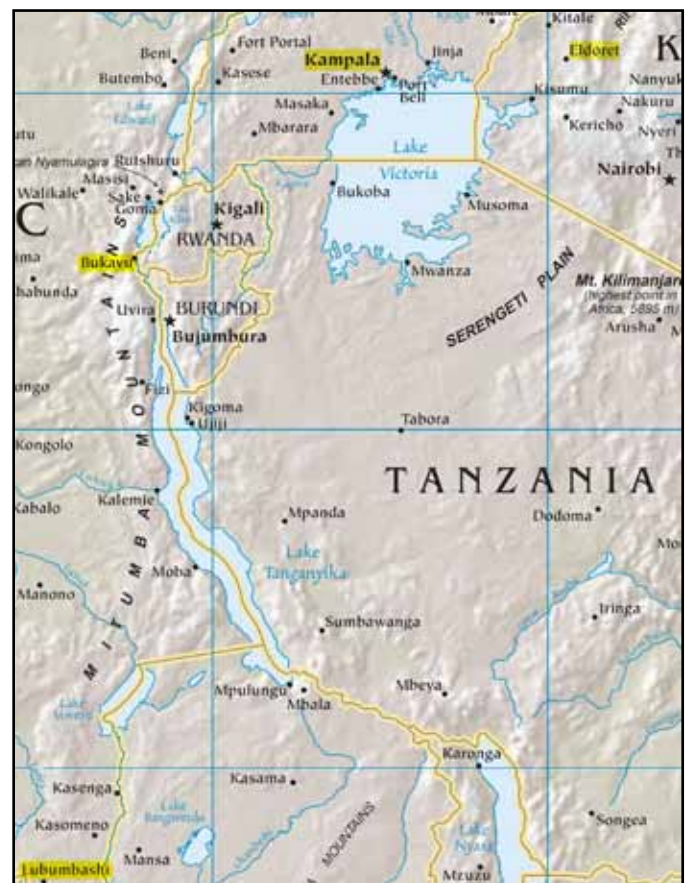
Project objectives

The objectives of the Mobility in the African Great Lakes Project are:

- To identify migration patterns in the region and understand the extent to which they might be impacted by conflict, the extent to which they impact migration decision-making during displacement, and the extent to which pre-existing migration patterns are re-established as conflict subsides.

- To document and analyse mobility associated with broader social processes including seasonal and rural–urban migration; migration for education, marriage, or employment; and trade related mobility.

- To conduct research in up to three urban areas: Bukavu or Lubumbashi (DR Congo), Kampala (Uganda), Eldoret (Kenya).

- To develop a methodology and conceptual framework to analyse mobility patterns throughout the region – and potentially in other conflict settings.

Mobility in conflict and crisis

The project is concerned with the migration and mobility generated or stimulated by underlying socio-economic factors – such as uneven geographies of economic opportunity, socio-cultural practices and norms, to food prices, hyperinflation, rural decline or drought – which continue alongside (and interact with) factors explicitly associated with conflict, such

as insecurity and violence. We will operationalise the study of mobility in conflict and crisis settings by analysing it on three dimensions:

- *Cultural practices and tradition* – the socially sanctioned norms about mobility, such as expectations for moving at different stages of life (eg. marriage) or seasonal migration practices.

- *Personal ideals* – individual notions about the 'good life', reflected in people's ideas about living in rural or urban areas, or their desire for education or particular forms of employment.

- *Ordinary, routine practices of mobility* –the aggregate norm reflecting how people actually move, perhaps in contravention of cultural practices and traditions.

Research design

The following research questions guide the research. What aspects of migration and mobility are seen as features of everyday socio-economic life in the Great Lakes region? How are these movements being affected by the conflict and violence in the Great Lakes region? What is the role of mobility in facilitating post-conflict rehabilitation?

These research questions will answered through empirical research in three towns and cities across the Great Lakes region (Bukavu or Lubumbashi in DR Congo, Kampala in Uganda and Eldoret in Kenya).

The fieldwork will be undertaken in four phases:

Phase 1: Literature review and preparation for field research: critically review of the existing literature on underlying migration patterns and displacement in the context of conflict from across the world; refine the theoretical framework to operationalise the study of mobility in conflict and crisis.

Phase 2: Collection and analysis of existing data sets: collect and analyse existing data on contextual factors that shape migration dynamics, including data on regional migration stocks and flows within countries in the Great Lakes region and East Africa, outbreaks and degrees of conflicts and crises, labour markets, formal and non-formal education systems, and rates of urbanisation.

Phase 3: Primary data collection – surveys, interviews, and life histories: conduct initial survey of migrants to establish a broad picture of migration processes at work; in-depth qualitative interviews and life histories to develop a more detailed picture of complex migration dynamics and rationales; semi-structured interviews with stakeholders that work with migrants and refugees.

Phase 4: Data analysis and dissemination: analyse data sets to unearth personal and collective understandings and practices of mobility patterns in the wider Great Lakes region; organise a regional workshop to share and gain feedback on the preliminary analyses with stakeholders and will disseminate its findings.

Project team

The IMI researchers currently working on the project are Oliver Bakewell, Naluwembe Binaisa, and Ayla Bonfiglio.

The International Migration Institute will work closely with the following project partners on all aspects of this project:

International Refugee Rights Initiative, Uganda

Refugee Law Project, Uganda

Moi University, Kenya

University of Lubumbashi, DR Congo

Contact

T: +44 (0)1865 271901

E: irene.binaisa@qeh.ox.ac.uk

W: www.imi.ox.ac.uk