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## REFUGEE WELFARE IN KENYA: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

**ABULOGN OJULU OKELLO**

*Graduate of the Master of Education, York University Borderless  
Higher Education for Refugees Program, Dadaab, Kenya*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This paper delves into the intricate terrain of refugee welfare in Kenya, exploring the challenges faced by refugees and the solutions devised to alleviate their plight. Kenya's experience in hosting refugees offers a compelling narrative, shaped by conflicts, environmental disasters, and economic instability. Established camps like Dadaab and Kakuma strain resources and infrastructure, leading to tensions between refugees and host communities. Lack of documentation exacerbates vulnerability, impeding access to essential services and legal protections. Additionally, scarcity of clean water, insufficient food supply, inadequate shelter, and inadequate healthcare facilities compound refugee hardships. Despite government and international efforts, challenges persist, including donor fatigue and limited integration opportunities.

**This exploration of refugee welfare in Kenya highlights barriers and proposes solutions to inform future policy and practice, which is crucial for ensuring the dignity, security, and well-being of refugees both in Kenya and beyond.**

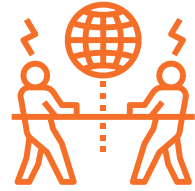
# 1. INTRODUCTION

In a world marred by inequality, injustice, and a lack of freedom, our once beautiful planet, along with its people and nature, now grapples with the ravages of war, climate change, droughts, and economic hardships. These factors, along with political persecution, ethnic conflicts, and environmental degradation, have driven a mass exodus of individuals fleeing from conflict zones, climate-related disasters, and economic adversity across the globe (Gunes 2019).

**1991 Dadaab** In Kenya, the influx of refugees has remained relentless since the establishment of its two largest refugee camps: Dadaab in 1991, and Kakuma in 1992 (Rithi 2015).

Kenya's storied history of providing refuge underscores its pivotal role in addressing the global refugee crisis. Despite Kenya's unwavering commitment to offering sanctuary to those escaping conflict, persecution, and instability, significant obstacles persist. These include strained resources and infrastructure, impacting both refugees and host communities. Alloush et al. (2017) discuss the impact of overcrowded camps with limited access to essential services such as healthcare and education, painting a stark picture of hardship and adversity for refugees in Kenya. In response to these challenges, host communities have voiced their grievances through demonstrations, often directed at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

**Tensions and conflicts between refugees and host communities have escalated in the recent past around the globe, mainly due to the scarcity of shared resources and the lack of Refugee-Host Community projects.**



In most cases, the host community views refugees as threats to resources such as land, wood, jobs and water. Anxiety grows as the refugee population increases. In the Kenyan context, the host community (the Turkana people), believe that refugees receive special treatment since they are unable to access free essential services such as education, healthcare, water, and food, which are readily available to refugees in Kakuma Camp (Ali and Ocha 2018).

Conversely, refugees lament the perceived mismanagement of resources by both the host government and UNHCR staff, citing concerns about diverted funds meant for their livelihoods. Kenya's government, in collaboration with international organizations like the UNHCR, has implemented policies aimed at addressing refugee issues and integrating them into society.

The socio-economic impact of hosting refugees has led to challenges such as reduced employment opportunities and strained public services in host areas across the four countries in this region (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda), where the host population often already struggles with limited access to basic social services, poor livelihood opportunities, and low agricultural production (Crawford and O'Callaghan 2019). Poor education levels, few jobs, and subsistence style agricultural production are common.

As Kenya's enduring status as a host country enters its fourth decade, donor fatigue looms, resulting in dwindling support as refugee camps transition from temporary to protracted settlements (Tolometi 2015). Consequently, refugees face dire circumstances, grappling with inadequate access to basic services such as water, healthcare, education, and psychosocial support.



**Within the refugee population, certain groups are particularly vulnerable, including single mothers, orphans, persons with disabilities, and unaccompanied minors, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive solutions to address refugee welfare in Kenya (UNHCR 2020).**

Yet, amidst these challenges, there have been remarkable efforts to mitigate the suffering of refugees and foster their integration into Kenyan society.

Integration, seen as one of the durable solutions for refugees alongside resettlement and voluntary repatriation, holds the promise of transforming their lives (Okello 2021). By integrating refugees into Kenyan society, opportunities arise for them to engage in farming, business ventures, and secure jobs within the private sector, government, or NGOs. However, despite being a frequently discussed topic among NGOs, refugees, and the government, tangible progress towards integration remains elusive. Today, when visiting camps like Dadaab and Kakuma, one cannot help but notice the prevalence of churches; they have come to serve as beacons of hope for refugees, offering glimpses of a better future when political institutions fail to fulfill their promises.

While numerous policy initiatives and grassroots interventions have emerged to address refugee needs, many remain confined to the realm of discussions and recommendations on paper.

In this paper, I delve into the details of the challenges and solutions within the realm of refugee welfare in Kenya. Additionally, I will explore policy recommendations that serve as a pathway forward towards sustainable resolutions for Kenya's refugee population, with a specific focus on the Dadaab, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei settlement camps. The structure of this paper is designed to provide a comprehensive and detailed examination of the refugee situation in Kenya.

The Introduction sets the stage by providing background information on the refugee situation in Kenya, explaining the significance of the study, and outlining the key objectives of the paper. The Research Methodology section outlines the methods and approaches used to gather and analyze data. Following this section, the UNHCR and NGO Services section provides an overview of the services offered by UNHCR and its partners in Kakuma, Dadaab, Nairobi, and Kalobeyi settlement camp, highlighting their scope and impact. The Challenges Faced by Refugees in Kenya section is subdivided into seven subsections, each addressing a specific challenge: lack of refugee documentation, lack of clean water, insufficient food supply, inadequate shelter, inadequate health facilities, limited job opportunities, and lack of access to education. Finally, the paper concludes by summarizing the key findings and offering recommendations to improve the conditions for refugees in Kenya.

This paper will make several significant contributions to the literature on refugee welfare. First, it provides a detailed analysis of the services provided by UNHCR and NGO in the refugee camps and in the urban environment, offering insights into their effectiveness and areas needing improvement. Second, by categorizing and examining the specific challenges faced by refugees – such as lack of documentation, insufficient food supply, and limited access to education – it highlights the multifaceted nature of refugee hardship.

This detailed understanding helps to identify gaps in current support systems and suggests targeted interventions. Lastly, the chapter's comprehensive approach in combining empirical data with practical recommendations bridges the gap between academic research and policy implementation, contributing to more informed and effective strategies for enhancing refugee welfare.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method employed in this study involved conducting interviews to gather information in Kakuma, Kalobeyei, Nairobi, and Dadaab. Interviews were chosen as the preferred method for data collection due to their effectiveness in qualitative research, allowing participants to share their experiences and insights. Semi-structured interviews were selected to provide flexibility for both the interviewer and the participants, enabling open-ended questions and facilitating a 'give and take' interaction. This approach allowed participants to express themselves in their own words and at their own pace. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. While some participants were proficient in English, translators were utilized to overcome linguistic barriers in Dadaab, Kakuma and Kalobeyei since they are multilingual settlements.

As a refugee who has lived in camps, I have a deep understanding of what has been taking place there. My time spent in Dadaab, Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and Nairobi has allowed me to easily identify my target participants. Consequently, the participants for this study were selected from the refugee population. I extended personal invitations to the selected participants and met with them before the interviews to establish an environment of trust. For those in Dadaab, initial meetings were conducted prior to the interviews. Based on their willingness to participate, I scheduled the interviews accordingly.

The interview process varied slightly across locations, with Dadaab participants connected through Zoom meetings. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in other locations.

**Participants were selected to ensure diversity, encompassing both genders, refugee staff, unemployed individuals, and national staff from different organizations, with the aim of capturing a comprehensive range of perspectives.**

In Dadaab, ten participants were selected, including five women and five men, who were interviewed between May 4 and May 5, 2024. In Kakuma, 11 participants were interviewed between April 21 and April 23, 2024. In Kalobeyei, 11 participants were interviewed between April 25 and April 27, 2024. In Nairobi, 11 participants were interviewed between April 29 and May 2, 2024. In Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and Nairobi, the participants included two refugee staff serving as incentive staff, two unemployed individuals (one male and one female), and three national staff (one female from DRA, one from Peace Winds Japan, and one male head teacher in Kalobeyei).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed to accurately capture the information shared by the participants. Each interview transcript underwent analysis to identify major ideas and shared themes. In this analysis, I evaluated the content of both the collected data and relevant literature, identifying specific relationship patterns (Best 2003). The collected data from the field and explored literature were critically assessed to ensure quality and relevance to the research questions. Patterns of similarities and differences were identified, findings were interpreted considering the research locality, recommendations were formulated, and the work was presented for peer debriefing to ensure trustworthiness before final submission. Subsequently, meaning was extracted from each interview, and these meanings were grouped based on relevance. Pseudonyms were employed to safeguard the identity of the participants.



### 3. UNHCR SERVICES IN KAKUMA, KALOBEYEI, NAIROBI, AND DADAAB

As mentioned earlier, resources are limited in the Dadaab, Kakuma, Nairobi and Kalobeyei settlement camps, making it challenging to distribute aid effectively.

**These camps host over 87% of the refugees assisted by the UNHCR, the main organization responsible for providing assistance and protection to refugees and other persons of concern (Sytnik 2012). However, accessing UNHCR services can be a difficult process for beneficiaries.**

First, scheduling an appointment with a UNHCR officer is an arduous and lengthy process.

To begin, refugees must ensure their phone number is active in the UNHCR database by updating their phone number through a process called enrollment and providing their details to the officer in charge. The system then verifies their phone number, and once confirmed, they can book an appointment, which typically takes a minimum of three weeks.

The most challenging part of booking an appointment is queuing for an appointment, as many refugees seek to benefit from these services. Some refugees go to the UNHCR gate in the evening and must sleep there to secure a spot.

Names are recorded three times during the night: once in the evening, at midnight, and early in the morning for confirmation. This process ensures that refugees get a slot for the day's limited appointment spaces, as only 30 people are allowed to book appointments each day.

Once inside the compound, refugees can speak to a UNHCR officer to request assistance, report a protection case, or inquire about the three durable solutions: resettlement, repatriation, and integration. Most refugees approaching the UNHCR are seeking resettlement, although this option is difficult to attain.

While in Nairobi, refugees are not allowed to visit the offices of the Department of Refugee Services (DRS) and UNHCR directly. Instead, they are required to book an appointment through the hotline 1517 to access services such as new asylum registration, renewal of refugee identification, reporting lost identification cards, resettlement case confirmation, refugee status determination interviews, and other refugee services. When calling the hotline, an interpreter answers the call, collects the necessary details, and informs the caller that they will receive a message from the office. However, this message can take a long time to arrive, sometimes taking three weeks or more.

In some cases, refugees who have not received a message still show up at the main gate of the DRS office on General Mathenge Road. Without an invitation message, they are not allowed inside the office. However, the location of General Mathenge Road is far from where many refugees live, such as those in Ruiru and Kiambu, who pay 500 Kenyan shillings for transport to reach the office.

This situation creates significant difficulties for refugees in Nairobi, highlighting the need for the UNHCR to improve its system.

In contrast, in Dadaab refugees can go to the main gate of the UNHCR compound and wait for UNHCR and DRS staff to report to their offices. Refugees are then allowed inside the compound to wait in a shaded area until they are assisted.

Other NGOs, such as the Red Cross Kenya and the World Food Programme (WFP), encounter similar challenges in providing services. Unlike the UNHCR and DRS in Nairobi, these organizations do not use a computerized appointment system. Instead, refugees must present themselves early in the morning and queue for many hours to receive assistance. This process is fraught with difficulties, adding to the strain on refugees as they wait for the essential services they need. These bureaucratic hurdles and logistical challenges significantly affect refugee welfare in Kenya.



**The struggle to access necessary services exacerbates the already difficult living conditions in the camps, contributing to stress and uncertainty.**

Addressing these inefficiencies is crucial to improving the welfare of refugees, ensuring they receive timely assistance and support, which is vital for their dignity, security, and overall well-being.

## 4. CHALLENGES FACED BY REFUGEES IN KENYA

Participants highlighted different themes and concerns depending on their locations. Below, the results of the study are presented under seven key themes:



**lack of refugee documents**



**lack of clean water**



**insufficient food supply**



**inadequate shelter**



**inadequate healthcare facilities**



**limited job opportunities**



**lack of access to education**

In Kakuma, participants reported significant delays and obstacles in obtaining necessary documentation, which hindered their access to services like third country opportunities, scholarships, and work permits. Many refugees expressed concerns about the inadequate food rations, leading to malnutrition and food insecurity. The interviews highlighted the overcrowded living conditions and poor quality of shelters, which were not suitable for the harsh weather conditions.

Residents of Kalobeyei faced severe shortages of clean water, affecting their health and hygiene. Similar to Kakuma, food scarcity was a major issue, with rations not meeting the nutritional needs of the population. There were significant barriers to education, including costly school fees and a lack of educational materials, which limited the educational opportunities for children and youth. Participants highlighted the prolonged and arduous process of securing appointments with the UNHCR, as well as the intense competition and long waits faced by refugees seeking aid from various organizations, leading to heightened stress and uncertainty in already difficult living conditions.

In Nairobi, the participants highlighted the critical importance of refugee documentation, highlighting its role in establishing identity, nationality, and legal status, which are essential for accessing education, healthcare, employment, and legal protection.

The majority of participants who have businesses in Nairobi reported experiencing harassment because most of them operate without a business permit. A key finding from the refugees in Nairobi is that rental issues are a significant problem. Often, refugees' rented rooms are locked by landlords due to unpaid rent. As a result, both children and parents sometimes go without food and shelter.

Finally, in Dadaab, participants highlighted the restriction on refugee movement due to Kenya's encampment policy. Participants interviewed in Dadaab highlighted that refugees are not allowed to leave the camp and travel to Nairobi, underscoring the significant limitations placed on their mobility. Participants mentioned the problem of limited access to higher education opportunities for students who did not achieve a university entrance grade of C+ or above. As a result, many youth turned to substance abuse and theft. There were a few health posts in Dadaab with adequate staff but no medication. Participants reported that many healthcare staff have opened private clinics within the camp and are diverting hospital drugs to these clinics for profit.

#### **4.1 LACK OF REFUGEE DOCUMENTS**

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The importance of acquiring refugee documentation cannot be overstated, as it serves as the primary means of establishing identity, nationality, and legal status for individuals forced to flee their homes. Without valid documentation, refugees in Kenya face numerous barriers in accessing education, healthcare, employment, and legal protection (Nakueira 2019).

**The lack of official recognition and legal status leaves refugees vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, and even arrest, further compromising their overall welfare and posing significant challenges for those seeking safety and stability.**

Legal and administrative barriers, as well as the denial of access to essential services and rights, exacerbate the already difficult journey of refugees. It is imperative to address these challenges and find solutions to ensure that refugees are able to rebuild their lives with dignity and security (Action for Refugee Life 2022). Furthermore, the lack of documents also hinders their access to basic rights, including the right to work, the right to education, and the right to healthcare. Without proper documentation, refugees are often marginalized and excluded from society, unable to fully integrate and contribute to their host communities.

The refugee crisis in Kenya has been a significant and longstanding issue, with thousands of refugees from neighboring countries seeking safety and asylum within the country's borders. The ongoing crisis has impacted the welfare of both the refugees in Kenya and the host communities, posing numerous challenges for the Kenyan government, humanitarian organizations, and the refugees themselves (Tolometi 2015).

The presence of this large refugee population has increased the pressure on Kenya's resources and infrastructure, particularly through the demand for services such as healthcare, education, and housing. These needs have strained the capacity of the Kenyan government, resulting in tensions between refugees and the host community. In addition, the lack of documentation also makes it difficult for refugees to prove their legal status and limits their rights and access to legal protections in Kenya, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

In most cases, refugees are at risk of being caught by police if they are found in town without proper identification, or if they violate the encampment policy by leaving the camp without the appropriate travel documents issued by the Department of Refugee Services. These travel documents are granted only for specific reasons, such as seeking medical treatment that is unavailable in the camp, pursuing education, following up on resettlement, or visiting family. Without these documents, refugees risk being arrested, brought back to the camp, taken to court, or having to pay bribes to the police for their release (Sytnik 2012).

**This encampment policy forced refugees to remain in the camps against their wishes. The Kenyan government enforces these restrictions to prevent refugees from becoming stranded in Nairobi, where they might struggle to afford rent and basic living expenses.**

Additionally, the encampment policy was implemented to prevent terrorism in Kenya, following government concerns that the Dadaab refugee camp had been used as a hideout for terrorists (Njogu 2017).



**This measure severely impacts the social welfare of refugees, leading to feelings of hopelessness and despair as they are unable to pursue their aspirations**

**beyond the camps and improve their living conditions.**

As such, the issue of refugee documentation is of critical importance in addressing the welfare of refugees in Kenya and plays a crucial role in the security and stability of the refugees in the country. It helps in the identification and verification of refugees, which is essential for the management of refugee populations and the prevention of security threats. Although the DRS claims that upon arrival, the documentation process takes three months, the wait for obtaining these papers can take years due to backlogs and funding constraints. The importance of refugee documentation cannot be overlooked or overstated, as it is fundamental to the overall welfare and protection of refugees in Kenya. Without proper documentation, refugees face countless challenges in accessing essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment.

## 4.2 LACK OF CLEAN WATER

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In refugee camps like Kakuma and Dadaab, access to water is one of the major needs for refugees to live better lives. No one survives without water. Reliable access to water in the camps is essential for farming, drinking, religious activities, and maintaining the environment, making it one of the most critical services in the camps (Dakkak 2023). In Kakuma refugee camp, UNHCR and the government of Kenya are the main actors in charge of water supply. However, UNHCR is not directly involved; instead, they partner with Peace Winds Japan to manage the direct water supply to refugees. In Dadaab refugee camp, Care International Kenya supports UNHCR in providing access to water for refugees.

The provision of water in Kakuma faces numerous challenges. Frequent conflicts occur at tap stands where refugees line up for water, exacerbated by limited access schedules (KANERE 2019). Kakuma hosts thousands of refugees who rely on only six main boreholes to supply water to the Kalobeyei settlement camp and the host community. The host community, including those with livestock such as goats and camels, also require water due to the dryness of Turkana land and the insufficient water supply from the government. Consequently, they often tamper with the main pipeline that supplies water to Kalobeyei, sometimes causing water shortages for several days to weeks.

During these shortages, refugees are compelled to dig holes in water canals (Laga) to find drinking and cooking water. Additionally, groundwater can be saline and poor quality, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases.

Additionally, the continuous influx of asylum seekers exacerbates the water scarcity problem. Water is sometimes trucked into the camps from Kakuma main town, but its quality can be poor, and drivers often sell it at a profit.

**The lack of clean water leads to severe health problems, including waterborne diseases like cholera, which, alongside malaria, is one of the main diseases in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, further worsening the already dire living conditions in the camps (Mahamud et al., 2012).**



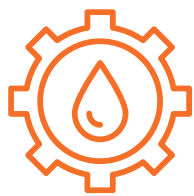
Business owners in the camps, such as shop and hotel owners, also contribute to the problem by purchasing large quantities of water, thereby preventing others from accessing it. Some even resell the water, further limiting its availability.

The experience in Dadaab refugee camp can be different. Refugees in Dadaab depend on borehole water, but time allowed for fetching water is very limited and causes some households to go without water after missing their allocated time.



The existing water infrastructure is insufficient and often subject to damage or sabotage, further complicating the water supply (Mugumya et al. 2020). In November, illegal borehole sinking near Ifo camp contaminated a dam, leading to a temporary water crisis. UNHCR and CARE have since installed water purification systems at the dam, which are now operational.

In refugee camps, the absence of water severely affects daily activities such as cooking, cleaning, and personal hygiene, illustrating the gravity of the situation.



**There is a pressing need for sustainable water management solutions, such as better infrastructure, desalination projects, or partnerships with technology companies to provide long-term solutions.**

Specific policies and initiatives by the Kenyan government and international organizations could significantly improve water access in refugee camps. A joint assessment conducted in 2008 by UNHCR, UNICEF, and CARE in seven Kenyan refugee camps found that while quantities of water available met minimum emergency standards, the quality of water in both camps and host communities was often below the acceptable quality, due to contamination during collection, transport, and storage. This contamination leads to waterborne diseases like diarrhea and cholera for thousands of refugees each year, particularly children.

The limited access to resources afforded to the refugees is a persistent problem for people living in camps. It has negative implications for every aspect of life, including difficulty in finding clean water, sufficient food, and adequate shelter. Clean water is an essential element necessary for life and good health. Unfortunately, many refugees have only limited access to water, and the quality of it rarely meets minimum standards for drinking and cooking.

Lastly, in terms of weather, Kakuma, Dadaab and Kalobeyei are located in a semi-arid area. Not only is there a lack of water, but the soil properties make the situation worse. On one side, the infiltration levels are low, increasing the flood risk and jeopardizing the provision of underground water as underground stores dry up and are not refilled. On the other hand, the soil makes agriculture difficult as the soil becomes less and less fertile, losing quality year after year (Yarza Pérez 2017).

### 4.3 INSUFFICIENT FOOD SUPPLY

The decline of general food security throughout the country due to poor rains, depreciating economic conditions, and decreased humanitarian funding has impacted refugees as well. High global food prices and the devaluation of the Kenyan shilling have greatly affected the humanitarian food pipeline to Kenya.



**In 2021, the World Food Programme (WFP) reported a global ration reduction to 52 percent for refugees in Kenya due to underfunding.**

World Food Programme, 2021

This reduction in rations has led to negative coping strategies, including skipping meals, reducing portion sizes, and migrating to urban areas in search of food and work (Kinyua 2005).

The global increase in refugee migration, particularly in Africa, is largely driven by conflicts. In Kenya, refugees are continuously arriving in Kalobeyei and Ifo 2 in Dadaab. However, the influx of refugees coincides with a global funding crisis, making it challenging for donors to fully support refugee camps like these. The World Food Programme (WFP), responsible for providing food aid, utilizes an electronic transfer system called Bamba chapa to allocate funds for refugees in the Kalobeyei settlement (WFP 2024). In 2017, when refugees from Dadaab were relocated to Kalobeyei due to insecurity, the UNHCR, in collaboration with WFP, introduced electronic money transfers, initially providing refugees with 2000 shillings per person. However, due to funding constraints, this amount was reduced to 1050 shillings in June 2024, causing considerable tension within the camp and prompting refugees to protest against the decision (Ngasike 2024). In hopes of addressing the issue of food insecurity and reducing dependence on WFP, the settlement program, particularly in Kalobeyei, aimed to promote self-reliance among refugees by facilitating agricultural activities. However, the arid land in Turkana is not conducive to farming. To address this issue, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) dug large holes to collect rainwater for irrigation and distributed one thousand water tanks to each household. Unfortunately, many of these water tanks are now missing, as some refugees sold them to purchase additional food, highlighting the ongoing struggle with insufficient food supply within the camp.

It is recognized that the WFP is under enormous strain to solve global hunger, and one of the places that they have sometimes had to cut food rations is in the refugee camps. In recent years, the WFP has launched emergency appeals for funds, warning the public that they will have to cut rations to refugees in Kenya and several other countries due to insufficient funds (WFP 2021).

**This inability to live a life of minimum acceptable standards has caused many refugees to either return to extremely insecure and unsafe situations in their country of origin or to push for the right to be self-sufficient and lift their reliance on aid and food donations.**

This is a difficult process that many countries are reluctant to allow, as refugees essentially move from a dependent to a more independent existence as they take matters into their own hands.

Many refugees are not able to work to earn money to buy food, which makes them dependent on food distributions. This situation leaves them in extremely vulnerable positions if the food pipeline is ever broken. In addition, many have had to sell portions of their food rations in order to meet other needs such as school fees, resulting in negative impacts on the physical health of families.



**Oftentimes the available foods such as maize and cooking oil lack sufficient nutrients and energy, meaning**

**refugees have the minimum to stave off starvation, but are forced to survive for long periods on inadequate food sources.**



Inadequate nutrition has a huge detrimental impact on the health of the population, affecting both physical and mental development. As a result of the WFP's inadequate food distribution systems, there is a high level of poverty within the camps, which led to an emergence of illegal activities, creating greater insecurity amongst the refugees. Some refugees have opted to sell their allocated food rations instead of consuming them. Others are resorting to more drastic actions such as brewing and distributing illicit alcohol, theft, banditry, or assault and battery.

These activities are all symptoms of the high levels of poverty, in which the frustration felt by refugees leads them towards desperate acts.

**According to the data from the United Nations World Food Program, the food security situation amongst the refugees worsened in 2022 due to funding shortages from all sources, resulting in a reduction in size and period of assistance entitled for in-kind food rations (Haider 2022).**

Feeding practices for infants and young children, care practices, and WFP nutrition supplementations for preventing and treating moderate acute malnutrition cases have deteriorated due to the unavailability of supplementary and therapeutic food on the market. This situation is in part caused by a high dependency on food aid and a reduction in opportunities for self-reliance.

## 4.4 INADEQUATE SHELTER

The provision of adequate housing is recognized under international human rights law as a fundamental right, enshrined under Article 25(1) of the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Housing is an essential aspect that significantly impacts an individual's quality of life, health standards, and psychological well-being (Masinde 2016). The issue of inadequate shelter for refugees in camps such as Kakuma, Dadaab, and Kalobeyei is multifaceted and challenging. Refugees, who flee their homes with few to no possessions, arrive at these camps in desperate need of housing and other necessities. Agencies like Peace Wind Japan and the Norwegian Refugee Council play critical roles in providing shelter, but the solutions are often temporary and insufficient (Peace Winds America 2018). UNHCR, along with governmental and private donors, are the main bodies supporting these implementing agencies in both Kakuma and Dadaab (Norwegian Refugee Council 2012).

The types of houses in Dadaab, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei vary greatly based on the nature of the camps.



**In Dadaab and Kakuma, when refugees and asylum seekers arrive, they are given a plastic sheet, poles, timbers, and plots of land to build their houses alone, without much support from agencies apart from non-food items.**

Within four months, the plastic sheet used for roofing often tears due to the harsh temperatures in Kakuma and Dadaab, reducing its lifespan to less than four months (Teferra 2022). The problem with Kakuma's plastic housing is exacerbated by the actual structure of the tents, as it is covered on the top and surrounded by plastic sheets, making refugees vulnerable to theft. For example, thieves use knives and razors to gain access inside the houses at night to steal phones and other valuables. Some individuals even believe that thieves use magic to penetrate the houses without waking the residents. In Dadaab, houses are covered with plastic sheets but surrounded by kamoras (small trees) sold by Somalis, which provide some protection against thieves. However, the plastic sheets sometimes leak during the rainy season.

**In Kalobeyi, refugee structures are built permanently and vary in size (sizes one to three have one room, while size four and above have two rooms, a living room, and a kitchen).**

Refugees who were relocated from Dadaab or who arrived in the settlement before 2022 were given the opportunity to have these houses. Those who arrived later were provided with iron sheets and plastic sheets. While refugees appreciate these building structures, they come with numerous challenges.



**Since the houses are made of stone, they absorb heat during the day, making it difficult to sleep at night. Some refugees experience**

**health issues such as heart attacks and excessive sweating due to these extreme temperatures.**

Overall, refugees frequently face inadequate shelter that fails to protect them from extreme weather conditions. The challenges are compounded by limited resources, skilled labour, and land in refugee-hosting areas. Moreover, as new conflicts and crises arise in neighboring countries, the influx of refugees exacerbates overcrowding in camps, leaving little space for new arrivals and straining existing resources.

**To address these issues, it is crucial to implement more sustainable and resilient housing solutions.**

This could involve investing in durable materials that withstand harsh climates, employing innovative construction techniques, and ensuring that new housing developments are designed with the refugees' safety and comfort in mind. Additionally, increasing collaboration between international organizations, governments, and private donors can help mobilize the necessary resources and expertise. By prioritizing the provision of adequate, long-term shelter, we can improve the living conditions of refugees, providing them with the stability and security they need to rebuild their lives and move towards a more hopeful future.

## 4.5 INADEQUATE HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

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The healthcare situation in Kakuma and Kalobeyi refugee camps presents significant challenges that require urgent attention and innovative solutions. The primary issues revolve around the global health framework, Kenya's primary healthcare system, specific refugee healthcare needs, UNHCR funding, the absence of medicines, and the distribution of medical professionals. Globally, health is a critical concern, especially in refugee camps where populations are vulnerable and often in poor health upon arrival (World Economic Forum 2023). In Kakuma and Kalobeyi, the global standards for health services are difficult to maintain due to resource constraints. Refugees face numerous health issues, including malnutrition, infectious diseases, and psychological trauma. Meeting global health standards requires substantial investment and coordination among international agencies, NGOs, and the Kenyan government.

Kenya's primary healthcare system is decentralized, with 47 counties managing their own healthcare services. In theory, this allows for tailored healthcare services that meet local needs (Gikonyo and Kiruthu 2021). However, in practice, the system is plagued by inconsistencies and resource disparities. Refugee camps like Kakuma and Kalobeyi are particularly affected due to their remote locations and the immense pressure on the local health infrastructure. UNHCR plays a pivotal role in funding and supporting healthcare services in refugee camps. Despite their efforts, funding is often insufficient to meet the growing needs.

The healthcare facilities in Kakuma and Kalobeyi are under-resourced, leading to inadequate medical care. Refugees frequently face long wait times, limited access to specialists, and a shortage of essential medicines.

One of the most pressing issues in Kakuma and Kalobeyi is the absence of adequate medicines. Chronic shortages mean that even basic treatments are often unavailable. This absence exacerbates health problems, leading to preventable complications and higher mortality rates. The supply chain for medicines is disrupted by funding shortages, logistical challenges, and regulatory hurdles. Moreover, Kenya suffers from a severe imbalance in the distribution of medical professionals.



**Approximately 80% of medical professionals are based in urban areas, despite only 28% of the population, including refugees, living in these areas (Jemutai et al. 2021).**

This leaves a significant gap in rural and remote regions like Kakuma and Kalobeyi. The shortage of healthcare providers means that refugees often seek medical help from surrounding local communities, where cultural and language barriers can lead to misdiagnoses and incorrect treatments.

In Kenya, the private healthcare sector operates on a 'pay-for-service' basis and is often prohibitively expensive. Public healthcare facilities, while not charging for consultations, suffer from poor standards of care. This includes inadequate diagnostics, lack of medicines, and a general expectation for patients to provide basic medical supplies.



**Refugees, who typically lack financial resources, are thus caught in a dilemma between high costs and poor quality of care.**

To address these challenges, several steps have been taken. Increasing international funding and support from UNHCR and other donors is crucial to improving healthcare services in the camps. Streamlining the supply chain for medicines to ensure a consistent and reliable supply of essential drugs is also necessary.

Additionally, focusing on training more healthcare workers and incentivizing their deployment to rural and refugee camp areas can help mitigate the shortage of medical professionals. Leveraging technology, such as telemedicine and mobile health clinics, can bridge the gap between urban and rural healthcare services. Strengthening local healthcare systems through collaboration with local governments can enhance the capacity of public healthcare facilities in and around refugee camps.

Addressing these issues requires a coordinated approach involving the Kenyan government, international agencies, and local communities. By implementing these strategies, we can improve the healthcare outcomes for refugees in Kakuma and Kalobeyi, ensuring they receive the care and support they need to rebuild their lives.

## 4.6 LIMITED JOB OPPORTUNITIES

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The issue of limited job opportunities for refugees in Kenya presents a multifaceted challenge that exacerbates their already precarious living conditions. In Kenya, many local citizens, including those with impressive educational credentials, struggle to secure employment (Timmis 2018). This competitive job market leaves even fewer opportunities for refugees, who face additional barriers. While organizations such as the UNHCR and various NGOs do create job opportunities, these positions are often prioritized for Kenyans from other regions and the host communities around the refugee camps, further marginalizing refugees. A significant hurdle for refugees is the difficulty in obtaining necessary documentation, such as work permits (Nyamori and Ndwiga 2022).

**The process is fraught with restrictions and bureaucratic red tape, making it hard for refugees to gain legal employment. Furthermore, Kenya's encampment policy severely restricts refugees' movement, preventing them from seeking better job opportunities elsewhere in the country (Ngendakurio 2022).**

Within the camps themselves, corruption is rampant in hiring practices. Oftentimes those who can pay bribes can secure jobs, regardless of their qualifications, sidelining deserving candidates who lack financial resources.

The limited job opportunities encourage refugees who have attained higher education to consider returning to a homeland that they barely remember and that offers minimal prospects for sustainable living. In response to these dire circumstances, some refugees attempt to find work in neighboring countries like Uganda, Ethiopia, and South Sudan, where linguistic and cultural similarities exist. However, this move is fraught with risks, including the potential for insecurity and forced recruitment into militia groups. Additionally, refugees face societal challenges, including negative perceptions among Kenyans who believe that refugees are taking their jobs (Ali, Imana, and Ocha 2017). This sentiment has sometimes erupted into violence, with outbreaks targeting refugees in cities like Nairobi, Nakuru, and Mombasa. Such incidents not only threaten the physical safety of refugees but also restrict their ability to move freely and seek employment.

The 2006 Refugees Act theoretically grants refugees the same employment rights as other foreign nationals, contingent upon obtaining work permits. However, in practice, the issuance of these permits has been significantly curtailed as part of government efforts to control the refugee influx

**This restrictive policy environment leaves refugees with limited avenues to build a livelihood, compelling them to live in a state of perpetual uncertainty and dependency (Luseno and Kolade 2023).**

The compounded effects of bureaucratic barriers, societal hostility, and restrictive policies highlight the urgent need for more inclusive and supportive frameworks to improve refugee welfare and integration in Kenya.

#### 4.7 LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Refugees in Kenya face significant barriers to accessing quality education, primarily due to a lack of infrastructure and financial resources. Education is crucial for the successful development of refugee children, enabling them to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities. However, multiple factors deter access to education for refugee children in Kenya.

According to the principles outlined in education frameworks within the African Union (AU), education is deemed a fundamental human right and plays a critical role in the world.

**For displaced communities worldwide, access to education is often hindered by various challenges, including political instability, limited resources, and discriminatory practices (Sifuna and Sawamura 2010).**

Policies related to education within the frameworks of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the African Union (AU) emphasize the importance of inclusive education for all, including refugees. Despite these policies, the implementation remains inconsistent across the continent.

In Kenya, the constitution and human rights frameworks underline the right to education for all children, including refugees (Nanima 2021). However, the reality on the ground is starkly different. Refugee children in camps such as Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and Dadaab often attend schools run by the UNHCR or other NGOs. These institutions, despite their best efforts, struggle with limited resources and are often unable to provide quality education.

The UNHCR and the Global Compact for Refugees emphasize the importance of education for refugees, aiming to integrate them into national education systems and improve educational outcomes. However, these efforts face numerous challenges. One of the most pressing issues is the quality of education provided in refugee camps.



**one in five refugee children will not complete primary education**

and the numbers dwindle further at higher levels with only

**1%**

**of refugee children progressing to tertiary education.**

United Nations, 2018

Organizations try to ensure that the provision of education provision in refugee camps is free because life in the camps is difficult and affording school and tuition fees is nearly impossible for refugees.

Organizations try to ensure that the provision of education provision in refugee camps is free because life in the camps is difficult and affording school and tuition fees is nearly impossible for refugees. However, in Kalobeyei, Kakuma, and Dadaab camps, parents are required to pay for their children's high school fees. In Kakuma and Dadaab, many refugees can afford these fees as these camps have been in existence for nearly thirty-three years and the lives of refugees in these camps have improved, with many families now having relatives abroad through third-country resettlement opportunities via UNHCR. Additionally, many refugees run small businesses or work with NGOs as incentive staff, enabling them to fund their school fees. In contrast, refugees in the Kalobeyei camp, which was established in 2016, are new to the environment and still building their lives. As a result, they struggle to pay the required 3,000 Kenyan shillings per student, and many are forced out of school due to this financial barrier. Beyond that, opportunities for pursuing higher education after completing secondary school remains an even greater challenge. Consequently, I have witnessed parents and students being sent home due to an inability to pay school fees. These issues are further exacerbated by the strict food rations that were discussed earlier. Education is a key factor in improving refugees' futures and their communities.

**The absence of refugee students in school can lead to a loss of hope, which is crucial for surviving life in the camps. Refugees live on hope; without it, life in the camp would be unbearable.**



UNHCR, along with various education partners, including universities both within Kenya and abroad, strive to provide higher education opportunities (Wright and Plasterer 2012). In camps like Kakuma, Dadaab, and Kalobeyei, students who perform well in secondary school are eligible for scholarships. For example, the DAFI program offers scholarships to those with a minimum grade of C+ for Kenyan universities, while international universities, such as those in Canada, often require a B+ or higher (Arungu 2013). However, students who achieve lower grades, such as a C or below, are frequently excluded from these scholarship opportunities.

After completing their studies, refugees who graduate from institutions outside Kenya often face difficulties when applying for jobs or returning to their home countries to seek employment. One major issue is the authentication of degrees obtained from foreign universities. The process of verifying educational documents, particularly those obtained through distance learning or online programs, can be complex and time-consuming. Many graduates find themselves unable to secure jobs due to the lack of authenticated documents from the respective foreign ministries. Additionally, even within Kenya, employers are often reluctant to recognize degrees obtained from foreign institutions, making it difficult for refugees to find employment. The overall job market for refugees in Kenya is highly challenging, as legal documents like work permits are required but are notoriously difficult to obtain. Despite policies that theoretically allow refugees to receive work permits, the actual process is fraught with obstacles and often requires additional support and resources (Hansen 2018).

**These barriers highlight the urgent need for more streamlined processes and better support systems to help refugees access higher education and employment opportunities both within Kenya and internationally.**

As a result of these barriers to education, youth in refugee camps have limited opportunities for higher education. These issues are further compounded by a lack of qualified teachers and youth workers, who are often unemployed despite their crucial role in fostering the next generation's success. The influence of media on education is also a concern, as it can both positively and negatively impact refugee children's educational aspirations and opportunities. Without hope for the future, some refugee youth turn to substance abuse as a coping mechanism, which results in new challenges for themselves and the community (Muthikwa 2018).

In conclusion, improving access to education for refugees in Kenya requires a multifaceted approach.

**It is essential to enhance the infrastructure and funding for refugee education, ensure the proper implementation of inclusive policies, and address the quality of education provided.**

Additionally, there needs to be a concerted effort to integrate refugees into the national education system, offering them the same opportunities as other children in Kenya. Only through such comprehensive measures can we hope to secure a brighter future for refugee children in Kenya and beyond.

## 5. CLOSING REMARKS

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There are some signs of a more pro-refugee Kenyan civil society emerging. The very fact that Kakuma News Reflector (KANERE), an independent news magazine produced by refugees and Kenyan journalists operating in Kakuma Refugee camp, has been allowed to exist and become an active voice is a positive step. An award-winning film by a Kenyan woman, "For a Few Beautiful Souls," has drawn attention to refugee issues through the story of a Somali girl. This is the sort of cross-border cultural 'invasion' that Kenya needs before policy and attitudes can really begin to change. The prospects for all these hopeful signs, however, are contingent on the international political climate and the face of terror in East Africa. The Kenyan government cannot be held solely responsible for xenophobia towards Somali refugees when it is in the global interests of Western states to stigmatize and securitize all things Muslim and Somali. But it is to be hoped that the international community will show more willingness to understand the situation and work towards policies that are not made with a short-term mentality and at the expense of refugees.

Kenyan refugees and other marginalized groups have had to face the consequences of decentralization policies that have created local fiefdoms and undermined central government. However, it is precisely the decentralization process that may provide a chance for more inclusive policies at the local level.

The refugee situation in Kenya is complicated, not least by the conflicting needs of different groups and the policies of foreign states and organizations. No quick solution is expected, and the UNHCR must work within the constraints of international policy and public opinion. But it is a cause for optimism that new approaches to refugee welfare can emerge from the shadow of the encampment and that a more open and inclusive refugee policy is possible in Kenya. With the right encouragement, the KANERE program suggests that the two can be mutually supportive and that there are feasible alternatives to encampment.



## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by refugees, including the lack of documentation, clean water, sufficient food supply, adequate shelter, healthcare facilities, job opportunities, and access to education, requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach from governments, international organizations, NGOs, and local communities. Here are some recommendations and policy changes to consider:

1



Streamline and expedite the process for obtaining refugee documents to ensure that all refugees have legal status and access to services.

2



Invest in water infrastructure projects such as boreholes, wells, and water treatment facilities to ensure access to clean and safe water for refugees and host communities.

3



Implement food assistance programs, including food distribution and nutritional support, to address hunger and malnutrition among refugees.

4



Develop sustainable housing solutions, including upgrading existing shelters and constructing new refugee settlements, to provide safe and dignified living conditions.

5



Increase investment in healthcare infrastructure and personnel to improve access to primary healthcare, maternal care, mental health services, and emergency medical treatment

6



Foster partnerships with local businesses and industries to create job opportunities for refugees, including vocational training programs and initiatives to support entrepreneurship and self-employment.

7



Ensure that all refugee children have access to quality education by building schools, providing teacher training, supplying educational materials, and implementing initiatives to overcome barriers to enrollment, such as language and transportation challenges.

8



Strengthen coordination among government agencies, international organizations, NGOs, and local stakeholders to ensure that policies and programs are aligned and effectively implemented. Additionally, increase funding for refugee assistance programs to meet the growing needs of displaced populations.

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