



WAITING FOR RESETTLEMENT

INCREASING TRANSPARENCY IN THE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS IN KENYA

Photo of Dadaab Refugee Complex. UNHCR Kenya, www.unhcr.org/ke/dadaab-refugee-complex.

BACKGROUND

Because of a massive shortage of resettlement spaces around the world compared to the need for resettlement, thousands of refugees wait many years for resettlement, including in Kenya. Kenya has one of the largest refugee populations in Africa, with refugees from Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other countries. Most of these refugees live in two camps: Dadaab and Kakuma.

Many camp residents have spent decades living in these camps or were born in the camps, with few opportunities for repatriation, local integration, or resettlement. In this research project, we explored the impacts of this waiting time and the camp residents' experiences of resettlement.

BY THE NUMBERS

2.9 MILLION

Refugees estimated by UNHCR to need resettlement in 2025 (UNHCR 2024)

< 5%

had access to resettlement in 2023 (UNHCR 2024)

836,905

Refugees and asylum-seekers in Kenya (UNHCR 2025)

30+ YEARS

Length of displacement for some refugees in Kenya

10+ YEARS

Length of the resettlement wait for some participants

METHODS

This study was a co-produced research project with researchers living in Kenyan camps. Most studies about refugee resettlement focus on the people who have arrived in resettlement countries like Canada or the United States. This study is different: we talked to people who are still living in Kenyan refugee camps. We conducted focus groups and interviews in September and October 2023 with 50 refugees living in the Dadaab camps and 25 refugees living in Kakuma Refugee Camp or Kalobeyi Settlement. Participants shared with us their experiences of the resettlement process and their thoughts on how resettlement impacted their communities.



**“You cannot access the resettlement office. You cannot talk to them; you cannot go and talk about your case [...] if you send an email, they don't respond. There's no office”
(Somali man in Dadaab).**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Camp-wide impact: Refugees who **are not yet resettled and may never be resettled are still impacted** by resettlement processes.

2. Communications breakdown: Refugees experience a **lack of clarity, transparency, and communication** in the resettlement process.

- Some refugee participants in Kakuma were unsure if they had a resettlement case.
- Refugees with resettlement cases in progress received few updates on their cases and could not follow up to inquire about their cases.

3. Psychological impact: The **prolonged uncertainty and lengthy timeframe** of the resettlement process have negative consequences for the lives and mental health of refugees.

- Some participants had resettlement cases in processing for more than 10 years.
- Community members often put their lives on hold while waiting for resettlement, missing out on opportunities for education, work, business, and marriage.
- Refugees report mental health challenges affecting them personally or other members of the community, sometimes to the severity of suicide, related to the prolonged uncertainty of the resettlement process or resettlement rejections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR UNHCR & RESETTLEMENT COUNTRIES

STRENGTHEN TRANSPARENCY AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Provide one-time and regular **updates to refugees in the resettlement process** about the status of their cases, the likelihood of their cases proceeding to the next stage, and the estimated timelines, to increase transparency, reduce the mental health impacts of prolonged uncertainty, and help refugees plan their lives.
- **Establish mechanisms for refugees to inquire about the status of their resettlement cases** (e.g. physical office, phone line, email line, web portal).
- Continue to communicate information about resettlement using the social media **platforms** that refugee community members are already using to exchange information, such as the Qolka Runsheeg Bufis Facebook group for Somalis in Dadaab.
- Communicate how **policy changes** from UNHCR or from resettlement countries impact refugees with resettlement cases in progress.

SHORTEN PROCESSING:

- **Shorten processing times** for refugees who have had resettlement cases in progress for more than 5 years, especially for those whose cases have been in progress for more than 10 years.

FURTHER READING

For more details, please see our new open access article [The “not yet” and “never” resettled: individual and communal waiting strategies among refugees in Kenyan camps](#)

UNHCR. 2025. “Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Kenya.” Operational Data Portal, March 20, 2025. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/ken>.

UNHCR. 2024. “Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2025.” Geneva: UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/projected-global-resettlement-needs-2025.pdf>.

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