

URBAN REFUGEES AND IDPs IN SECONDARY CITIES: A POLICY BRIEF



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KEY POINTS



Strengthening municipalities' ability to respond to forcibly displaced people can improve assistance in terms of quality and time of response. It can also create tailored integration efforts with better results for both forcibly displaced people and host communities.



Despite being part of decentralised government systems, municipal (and in the case of Turkana County, regional) authorities find themselves constrained in enacting local responses to forced displacement by particular government structures, such as how fiscal transfers are designated, and national policies on refugees.



International assistance for displaced people is rarely directed towards municipal responses in all three countries, but instead is often channeled through national or district/regional offices. This represents a key gap in the broader humanitarian and development localisation agenda across East Africa.



More data and research are needed on the locations where urban refugees settle (size and type of city and town), and how these settings affect their lives, livelihoods, and ability to integrate. Gaps in data on the urban forcibly displaced demonstrate a clear need to include urban refugees in censuses and government planning, including development and city plans, and in international programming to support the urban displaced.



Upholding and advocating for policies to recognise and support the rights of urban refugees is crucial to improving assistance, as well as their safety and well-being. This includes host countries enacting changes to incorporate UNHCR's 2009 Urban Refugee Policy and 2014 Policy on Alternatives to Camps into their national policy frameworks and continued advocacy by all actors to keep these policy shifts on the table.



Documenting and registering urban displaced people on a voluntary basis is crucial for both emergency and long-term planning. In Adama, Ethiopia, for example, a large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) were predetermined through a lottery system and registered upon arrival. The city knew how many houses to build and how many food rations to provide. It seems likely that this played a large role in the overall success of the emergency response.



There is immense value in including urban forcibly displaced people and host communities in decision-making at the local, national, and international levels. Refugees and locals should be involved as co-researchers and enumerators, including research and training as needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATION 1

Donor governments and international actors should increase the engagement of, and investment to, municipal authorities hosting urban displaced people. Strengthening the municipalities' ability to respond to forcibly displaced people can improve assistance in terms of quality and time of response and create tailored integration efforts with better results for both the forcibly displaced and host communities.



RECOMMENDATION 2

Governments, the United Nations, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), and research institutions should help increase data and evidence on the numbers, needs, and characteristics of urban forcibly displaced people and use this information to inform advocacy and practice.



RECOMMENDATION 3

Support for urban forcibly displaced people should be embedded within wider city strategies or plans for the urban poor. Doing so can increase the level of assistance displaced people receive, as well as manage social tension, promote the integration of refugees into local economies, and increase their access to public services.



RECOMMENDATION 4

States must uphold the rights of urban refugees and IDPs by revising restrictive policies towards urban settlement. Upholding and advocating for policies to recognise and support the rights of urban refugees and IDPs is crucial to improving their safety, well-being, and the amount and quality of assistance they are given. This also provides important pathways for municipal authorities and other actors to raise funding and increase assistance for local responses to forced displacement.

INTRODUCTION



Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda each have a long history of hosting refugees and asylum seekers. Uganda, one of the top ten refugee-hosting countries worldwide, currently hosts 1.3 million, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). The INGOs, national and local governments in each country presently face unique and dire challenges, including civil war, climate crisis, and Covid-19. At the same time, good practices exist in a variety of areas, such as local leadership, social integration, employment and labour market integration, education, and refugee participation.

This policy brief examines the impact of and responses to forcibly displaced people in four cities and towns in East Africa, namely Arua, Uganda; Adama, Ethiopia; and Kakuma and Lodwar Town, Kenya. It also discusses a crucial gap in research on forcibly displaced people:

**THEIR OFTEN-
UNACKNOWLEDGED
PRESENCE IN SO-CALLED
SECONDARY (NON-CAPITAL)
CITIES AND TOWNS, WHICH
TYPICALLY LACK THE
RESOURCES TO ADEQUATELY
RECEIVE THEM.**

Through examples from primary research in Uganda and Ethiopia, and secondary data collection in Kenya, this paper highlights the need for more comprehensive data and evidence on, and assistance to, forcibly displaced people residing outside of national capitals. In many cases, the needs and challenges identified are also relevant to the poor and vulnerable nationals living alongside urban forcibly displaced people. The brief concludes with recommendations for the further engagement of humanitarian, government, and other urban actors in urban assistance to displaced people.



SECONDARY CITIES AND THE URBAN DISPLACED



There is an ongoing perception that urban displaced people mainly reside in capital cities in the Global South. However, this perception is largely driven by policies which do not legally recognise refugees outside of the capital or in urban areas at all, which has negative ramifications for the provision of assistance, as well as for host urban areas. Yet, as Muggah and Abdenur note, most urban refugees are moving to “poor and underdeveloped cities and slums in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East...[and] end up living in lower-income informal settlements.” [1]

Literature on urban displacement has disproportionately focused on capital cities,^[2] contributing to a perception that they are the main urban destination for migrants and displaced people. Other cities and towns experiencing displacement have received much less attention as sites of settlement and integration by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and INGOs in the Global South. Yet urbanisation increasingly occurs in secondary cities, which have a population of between 10–50 per cent of the country’s largest city and themselves are not the capital.^[3] These cities have been expected to grow by 460 million inhabitants between 2010 and 2025 – strikingly higher than the comparative growth of 270 million for megacities.^[4]



"TOWNS - ESPECIALLY BORDER TOWNS IN COUNTRIES OF FIRST ASYLUM - ARE AT THE FRONTLINE OF REFUGEE DISPLACEMENT AND ARE OFTEN WHERE REFUGEES SETTLE OR SPEND LONG PERIODS OF TIME."^[5]

At the same time, secondary cities may not have the same levels of industry or access to government resources as capitals or larger cities. They have also largely remained out of view of international donors and humanitarian agencies working with refugees and other displaced people, in part due to a lack of robust data and accurate numbers of forcibly displaced residents. Based on discussions with mayors and other municipal authorities of these cities and towns, there is more and more evidence demonstrating that refugees and displaced people often enter these smaller cities,^[6] yet less research has been conducted on their experiences and those of their hosts compared to those entering capitals.

Emerging international actors in refugee assistance such as Cities Alliance and Slum Dwellers International are seeking to raise the profile of migrants and refugees in secondary cities, informal settlements, and their host communities, particularly because, like other cities, secondary cities often find themselves unequipped to deal with large numbers of displaced people. This can result in unplanned urbanisation and a lack of resources for both locals and the displaced, and other negative ramifications for cities themselves and those who enter them seeking refuge.

The following sections provide information on how cities and towns in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya are addressing both internal and cross-country displacement, as well as the impacts of urban forcibly displaced people on urban centres.

COUNTRY SNAPSHOT: URBAN INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN ETHIOPIA



Ethiopia has a history of internal displacement. IDPs have been recorded since 2017 and have exceeded 1 million people each year due to conflict and disasters, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

In 2018, over 3 million people were internally displaced, the world's highest figure at the time (IDMC-GRID 2019: 9). In 2018, about 90 per cent of IDPs lived in rural areas, with 75.6 per cent in camps and 24.4 per cent with host communities, many in urban or peri-urban areas.



Urban IDPs and the Tigray Region

This research in brief was written in 2020–2021, as the crisis in Ethiopia escalated. Since November 2020, several thousand people have died, and millions are displaced due to conflict and ongoing civil war between the regional Tigrayan People's Liberation Front and the federal government of Ethiopia.

The urban IDP population in Ethiopia was comparatively low until the conflict in Tigray. Now, urban IDPs are on the rise. However, the conflict has made it difficult to research and obtain consistent data; few reports have assessed the situation and shared public information or findings. However, numerous pressures on urban areas to assist IDPs, especially financially, in the midst of ongoing crisis is evident. The functionality of local governments is at best questionable due to a disconnect between government bodies as the conflict continues, leaving civilians and vulnerable groups, like IDPs, unprotected.



THE CASE OF IDPs IN ADAMA: AN EXAMPLE OF LOCAL RESPONSE

In 2018, about 1,340 registered households, as well as many unregistered IDPs, fled ethnic conflict in the Somali region of Ethiopia to seek safety in Adama, the capital of the Oromia region, approximately 100 km southeast of Addis Ababa. The IDPs, who were mainly ethnic Oromo, arrived in Adama over the course of several months. The sudden and huge influx of IDPs put immense pressure on the city's capacity to provide the necessary support.

While most of the focus on internal displacement in Ethiopia remains on the Somali region (which hosts the majority of the country's IDPs), significant lessons can be learned from Adama's response. In the absence of large-scale international assistance, a little-known campaign to address the needs of IDPs led to a multi-level response from federal, regional and – in particular – local urban actors. Ultimately, under the auspices of the city administration, all 28 sectoral government bureaus, hundreds of private sector actors, 18 kebeles (neighbourhood districts), 243 iddirs (community-based associations), and many local NGOs and individuals participated in supporting and settling the IDPs. This may be a unique instance of an entirely Ethiopian collective and largely local effort to operate successfully at this scale and within such a short period of time.

In response to the city's call for action, local community associations and many private sector actors contributed to the construction of houses to settle IDPs in three new settlements, with a fourth settlement constructed before the IDPs arrived. Every registered IDP household in Adama received a private resettlement house with documents confirming their tenancy. In addition to free housing, Adama city has provided free healthcare and education for IDPs. Adama city has constructed a school, Sena Seba, within the resettlement area to educate IDPs from kindergarten to fourth grade. The school is free for every IDP and aims to provide education for younger IDPs (between the ages of 4 and 13) within close distance of their homes.



Challenges from a lack of urban IDP voluntary registration

It is evident that many more IDPs arrived in Adama independently of the registered 1,340 IDP households. Undocumented arrivals did not have access to housing or food rations, thereby increasing their vulnerability. This affected not only the IDPs themselves, but locals and those mandated to care for them, such as clinics and hospitals that at times had more patients than they could treat.

Based on our research, no effort to document and register these IDPs took place, meaning that the city could not adequately support them or understand the true extent of the demand they placed on local infrastructure. Enabling the means for documentation, registration and information dissemination is crucial in such situations; this could be delivered either by the municipal government or in collaboration with an established, trusted NGO.



The need for integration support for IDPs

Initially, many stakeholders such as host city administrations and local communities showed solidarity to support the IDPs. However, gradually problems between local communities and IDPs started to arise, which have in part been traced to issues over land usage and ownership. These conflicts demonstrate the importance of finding suitable locations for settlement sites and the need for clear communication by authorities regarding IDP-designated sites both prior to and after resettlement, as well as moderated forums for communication between IDPs and locals. It also illustrates the need for assistance actors to focus on integration for IDPs, a topic that has commonly been more associated with refugees.



Takeaways from Ethiopia's response to urban displacement

As rates of both forced migration and urbanisation rise, more and more IDPs and refugees will enter secondary cities like Adama. Following some of the good practices undertaken by the city offers possibilities to increase the coordination and level of responses in other urban areas to benefit both displaced people and locals.

For example, a cascading communication approach like that used in the Adama response, in which a single message was shared widely between the national, regional, and local governments with a variety of actors, could be used to spread the word about particular skill sets in a displaced population to a local or regional audience.

Formalising individual and business donations, particularly those above a certain amount, by making them tax-deductible may increase some actors' willingness to donate. Finally, registering all forced migrants upon arrival in cities can facilitate the assistance that is offered to them by providing better knowledge of how many have returned and the demographics and needs of those who remain.



COUNTRY SNAPSHOT: URBAN REFUGEES IN UGANDA



"THE FACT IS THAT
URBAN REFUGEES EXIST."

- Arua Deputy Town Clerk

Uganda is widely considered to be one of the world's most progressive host countries, allowing refugees the right to work and freedom of movement and promoting self-reliance through national strategies since the 1990s. As of late 2021, Uganda hosts a whopping 2,259,536 refugees, driven in large part by ongoing conflict in South Sudan. Indeed, South Sudanese refugees make up the majority of refugees in the country (over 1.2 million) followed by Congolese, Burundians, and Somalis.

In recent years, Uganda has received increasing international attention for the livelihoods and self-reliance opportunities it affords refugees. Uganda was one of UNHCR's priority countries for livelihoods initiatives, for example, driven by the 2014–2018 Global Strategy for Livelihoods and is a pilot country of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The country has also gone a step further to include refugees in the National Development Plan II. This has translated into the Settlement Transformative Agenda (STA) and the subsequent Refugee and Host Population Empowerment Strategy (ReHoPE).

In contrast to the policies of many major refugee-hosting countries, Uganda is indeed a generous host. It is little known that refugees are only considered refugees if they are living within settlements or are legally registered in Kampala, the capital. In other cases, they are generally referred to as 'non-citizens' or 'migrants' and are not considered eligible for special assistance. This means that a significant, but unknown, number of urban refugees in Uganda remain unassisted – despite significant needs.

According to UNHCR, there are over 92,000 urban refugees in Uganda (UNHCR 2021). However, refugees residing in Kampala alone are estimated to be 300,000 according to Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) (Saliba and Silver 2020). The number differs due to the fact that KCCA takes into account "those who are registered in settlements but nonetheless spend considerable amounts of time living in Kampala" (Saliba and Silver 2020). The number also includes household members of refugee families who have not yet gone through the official asylum process (Saliba and Silver 2020). However, in general, non-registered refugees or those registered elsewhere are not eligible for assistance, leaving a large gap in support for those that may need it most.



URBAN REFUGEES IN ARUA, WEST NILE

Arua District in Western Uganda hosts approximately 250,000 South Sudanese refugees – an estimated 24 per cent of its population.

A town since 1974, Arua officially gained city status in 2020,¹ although it is often still referred to as a town by its inhabitants. Arua sits in between three refugee settlements – Adjumani, Bidi, and Imvepi – which are some of the largest in the country, and it is only 75 km from the border with South Sudan. In part due to this proximity, Arua government officials estimate that many of these refugees reside in and outside of Arua city (some say the city has tripled in size), although an exact figure cannot be provided as refugees have traditionally not been included in the formal government census.²

In 2020, however, a census of Central Division, Arua, conducted by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, AVSI Foundation and Cities Alliance, and financed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), found that after interviewing 11,662 householders, more than 10 per cent of the population in that division were refugees.³ Given this and other research identifying many refugees living outside of Central Division (which was chosen as it represents Arua's previous municipal borders) the figure for the town as a whole is likely much higher. This number matters because, as discussed further below, urban refugees in Arua live largely without government or other assistance.

¹ Arua city. 2021. Homepage, website. Available at: <https://aruacity.go.ug/about/>.

² Interview, Mayor of Arua, 2 February 2020.

³ Uganda Bureau of Statistics. 2020. Arua Census Report. Uganda Bureau of Statistics, Government of Uganda.



Lack of urban programming for refugees

Interviews with members of Arua municipality and INGOs with offices in Arua reveal a lack of tailored programmes to meet refugees' needs, while refugees themselves in Arua explain that they receive no government or INGO support.⁴ Interestingly, a range of INGOs have offices in Arua, and none of those interviewed had urban programmes. Instead, they operated solely in one of the three nearby refugee settlements due to the government's lack of legal recognition of urban refugees.

It was noted by several organisations that although the poorest refugees usually stayed put in the settlements, it was often those with the most security needs, ranging from ongoing persecution by armed actors or discrimination due to being LGBTQ+, or extreme vulnerabilities such as disabilities, that came to urban areas. The lack of support for refugees in urban areas, therefore, represents a lack of assistance for some of those who need the most assistance and protection.

⁴ Surveys with urban refugees, #1-24. Collected August and September 2020 as part of ongoing research in Arua, Uganda, led by this paper's author.



Challenges for urban refugees in Arua

Urban refugees face myriad challenges. The rising cost of rent, food, and transport were cited as the biggest challenges, along with the limited freedom of movement and the closure of schools. Many of these challenges are faced by the urban poor in Arua, as well, while others such as the closure of schools affected all parents and children in the city. One South Sudanese refugee, a mother of two, explained, "Living in Arua is really so challenging in that rent is so expensive for me to afford a good house for my family. Landlord keeps increasing rent charges, which made me to move to where I am right now. The high prices in the market on food items have been hard, especially during the Covid-19 lockdown, yet the food I receive from the settlement cannot sustain my family to the end of the month."⁵



Impacts of urban refugees on Arua

At the same time, the large number of urban refugees in Arua has a large impact on the city itself, particularly felt in sectors such as education and health, overviewed on the next page.

⁵ Interview, S.S.



› EDUCATION

The impact of refugees on many primary and secondary schools in Arua is profound. As the Municipal Education Officer explained,

"THE STANDARD CLASSROOM SIZE IS 55 CHILDREN, BUT NOW WE SEE 78 CHILDREN ON AVERAGE. WE USED TO HAVE ONE DESK FOR THREE CHILDREN, BUT NOW IT IS FOR FIVE...THE SITUATION WE ARE DEALING WITH IS NOT A NORMAL ONE."⁶

The head of the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in Arua noted the need to improve facilities for schools in urban areas like Arua, due in part to the increased demand of refugees. Needs include more textbooks, desks, toilets – and, critically, more teachers.⁷

Beyond classroom size, one of the challenges described was the lack of specialised programmes for refugees – ‘children from conflict’ – who often need specialised social, emotional, and educational support. In part, many children had skipped years of schooling due to conflict in their home country, so are often far older than their grade level. There is a need for programmes to account for this. This was echoed by several head teachers interviewed, as well, who described the challenge of helping students catch up in school when class sizes were so big. However, one head teacher at a secondary school noted, there was a very low-drop-out rate for refugee students, who clearly wanted to learn.

⁶ Interview, A.M., Municipal Education Officer.

⁷ Interview, OPM Arua.

⁸ Interview, Oli Health Centre, C.

› HEALTH

Refugees interviewed commonly discussed healthcare as both a reason for coming to Arua, as well as a service directly in need of improvement. Multiple local Ugandans also mentioned the need for better healthcare, although they did not attribute the challenge to refugees directly. At Oli Health Centre, the main health centre in Arua, the senior nurse explained that before the 2016 influx of South Sudanese refugees into the town, funds were more or less adequate. However, since then, the funding and the infrastructure has been strained. Refugees come for pre- and ante-natal services, for medicine and emergency help, and there have been outbreaks of diseases to treat in refugee communities in and around Arua, most recently measles.

The head doctor asked,

"BUT WHY SHOULD I DENY SOMEONE MEDICINE JUST BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT CAPTURED IN A NATIONAL BUDGET?"⁸





TAKEAWAYS FROM UGANDA'S RESPONSE TO URBAN DISPLACEMENT

This research finds that refugee-hosting municipalities in Uganda face a chicken-or-egg dilemma: according to the government of Uganda, so-called 'self-settled refugees' in urban areas beyond the capital are not considered refugees, who are defined as those living in a formal refugee settlement.

This stance in turn leads to a lack of data on those urban refugees that have settled regardless of policy. In these situations, 'spontaneously settled' refugees in urban areas are at best invisible and at worst targeted. Of course, being invisible and in need is hardly a best-case scenario for either refugees or the cities and towns hosting them.

Because they are not formally counted as urban inhabitants, no additional funding is allocated to yearly budgets to account for the increased demand on services that this significant number of people create.

If urban refugees were properly accounted for in censuses, the municipalities in which they reside would in theory receive more resources from the central government to support their populations, including refugees. The case of urban refugees in Arua demonstrates a clear need to include urban refugees in censuses and government planning, including development and city plans, and in some cases direct more international programming and support to the urban displaced. Adequate data would allow adequate urban planning.

COUNTRY SNAPSHOT: COUNTY AND MUNICIPAL REFUGEE RESPONSES IN KENYA



When people hear of refugees in Kenya, they are more likely to imagine the sprawling complex of Dadaab, long the world's largest refugee camp, than refugees walking freely in cities.

While the Republic of Kenya has a long history of rural-urban migration, economic-driven migration across borders, and forced migration, much of the international focus on refugees has remained on those in camps. However, forced migration to Kenya includes that to urban areas, and increasingly camps themselves are being compared to – or are even in the process of becoming – formal cities.

Similar to its neighbours, Kenya is also one of the top refugee-hosting countries in Africa. As of the end of June 2021, Kenya is home to more than 521,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers; 44 per cent and 40 per cent reside in Dadaab and Kakuma camps, respectively (UNHCR 2021). Currently, most refugees are from Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Ethiopia (UNHCR 2021). Refugees living in urban areas account for 16 per cent (slightly over 82,000), currently all registered in Nairobi only (O'Callaghan et al. 2019). However, although there is a lack of official data, unregistered refugees reside in other urban areas, as evidenced by various accounts and studies.

Despite hosting a significant number of refugees, the Government of Kenya has a restrictive and encampment-based approach. In fact, the 2014 law introduced by the government regarding refugees who resided outside of settlement camps without government permission has legitimised it as a criminal offense.

Prior to the 2006 Refugee Act, Kenya lacked a national refugee legislation (O'Callaghan et al. 2019). The 2006 Refugee Act recognised

"STATUTORY AND PRIMA FACIE REFUGEES"

(O'Callaghan et al. 2019).

Following the act, the Department of Refugee Affairs (DRA) was established, which in 2016 changed to Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS) (O'Callaghan et al. 2019). The RAS is responsible for several major services, including Refugee Status Determination (RSD), registration, protection, documentation, repatriation, and relocation (RAS, Kenya).





TURKANA COUNTY

Turkana County illustrates many of the challenges of forced displacement, urbanisation, and climate change.

Refugees, migrating pastoralists, and other rural-urban migration for economic survival makes up the so-called 'crisis migration' in the county. According to the Turkana County government, increased urbanisation is driven by rural-urban migration and the 'diminishing prospects of livelihoods' from traditional pastoralism.⁹

Climate issues such as droughts have caused people to move to the cities in search of urban-based opportunities, especially youth. Young people of Turkana County increasingly migrate to urban centres in search of changing livelihoods, access to education, and trainings.

⁹ County Government of Turkana (CGT). 2018.





Kakuma refugee camp

The Kakuma refugee camp, the largest in Kenya, was established in 1992 in the northwest corner of the country, an arid, desert-like region and one of the poorest and most remote.¹⁰ As of June 2021, 212,461 people lived in Kakuma, with the majority coming from South Sudan and Somalia.¹¹ Many residents were born into displacement and have lived in Kakuma for over 25 years.¹² Kakuma is often linked with “long-term aid dependency, particularly given regulatory restrictions on freedom of movement and right to work.”¹³ While Kakuma is a refugee camp, it also experiences similar challenges as other dense urban areas. These include overpopulation and stresses on resources due to overuse and climate change.

¹⁰ Vemuru et. al., 2016.

¹¹ UNHCR, 2021.

¹² O’Callaghan et al., 2019.

¹³ Betts et. al., 2019.





Kalobeyei settlement

Turkana County also hosts the Kalobeyei settlement. A site near Kalobeyei Township was allocated to the Turkana County government in June 2015, and the World Bank and UNHCR developed the Kalobeyei Integrated Social and Economic Development Programme (KISEDPP) to

“DEVELOP THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND SERVICE DELIVERY AT KALOBEYEI.”

The settlement was created with a vision of establishing a structure that would encourage interaction and eventually integration between host and refugee communities in this marginalised region.

The Kalobeyei settlement was even designed as an ‘urban centre’ in collaboration with UNHCR and Turkana County, with the aim in part to address overcrowding in Kakuma camp and support refugees’ transition from an aid-based model to a self-reliance model.¹⁴ It presents a unique example of a settlement built with the intention of gaining municipal status and an interesting model of both refugee assistance and urban expansion. As UNHCR states,

“THE SITE IS TO BE DEVELOPED AS AN URBAN CENTRE, USING THE SAME DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING TECHNIQUES, DEVELOPERS, ASSESSMENTS ETC. AS FOR CITIES...”¹⁵

¹⁴ Betts et. al., 2018.

¹⁵ UNHCR. 2021. Kalobeyei settlement. Webpage, available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/ke/kalobeyei-settlement>.





Examining the impact of closing Kakuma on Turkana County

While the Kalobeyei settlement is still in a newer phase, Kakuma camp may be in its final one. In 2021, the Government of Kenya announced it planned to close the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps. While the current closure date is not yet known, the possibility of camp closures in the near or distant future comes with huge considerations for refugees, locals, and Turkana County itself.

First and foremost are refugees' safety and access to protection. This is particularly worrying given ongoing instability in Somalia, as well as other countries where refugees in Kenya originate. Furthermore, there is a risk that closing these camps initiates a model for other major refugee-hosting countries eager to reduce their obligations to refugees. One refugee living in Kakuma explained of the planned closure:

"IF IT HAPPENS, IT WILL BE...DISASTER. I WOULDN'T KNOW WHERE TO GO. I DEPEND ON WHAT NGOS AND THE UN PROVIDE...IT'S A PROBLEM MENTALLY, IT IS STRESSFUL. I CAN'T LIVE ELSEWHERE IN KENYA BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE THE CORRECT PAPERS." ¹⁶

¹⁶ Interview, refugee in Kakuma camp.

Closures will also have significant ramifications on the regions that host the camps. For example, the growth of Kakuma-Kalobeyi town is uncertain, as the future of the settlement itself is of course strongly linked to the presence of refugees. One report states:

“[H]UMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS IN THE AREA HAVE NOT CREATED SUFFICIENT RESILIENCE CAPACITY TO ENSURE MINIMUM NEGATIVE IMPACTS IN THAT EVENTUALITY [OF THE CAMP CLOSING]. FUNDAMENTALLY, KAKUMA-KALOBYEI NEEDS TO BE IMAGINED BEYOND A REFUGEE-BASED ECONOMY, WITH A FOCUS ON INVESTING IN THE LONG-TERM SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOCAL AREA.

HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT THE CASE WITH THE SECONDARY CITIES LIKE ELDORET, KITALE AND LODWAR, AND OTHER SMALL TOWNS IN THE REGION WHERE RURAL-URBAN MIGRATIONS ARE THE MAIN DRIVERS OF URBANISATION, AND WHERE HUMANITARIAN INFLOWS ARE NOT DETERMINANTS OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE LOCAL ECONOMIES.”¹⁷

While Kakuma-Kalobeyi is still a refugee settlement, there is the ongoing prospect of Kakuma being elevated to the status of a municipality, which was initially planned for last year, but has not yet materialised.

Other examples of camp closures from Kenya suggest that refugee-hosting regions may experience economic decline due to aid withdrawal and a loss of refugee-related international investments. For example, after a temporary camp in the town of Lokichoggio was closed in 1992 and the camp relocated to Kakuma town, Lokichoggio struggled economically as a result of the loss of refugee-based operations. In Turkana, one could imagine a similar challenge compounded by the loss of the significant international recognition and political capital the region has gained through its engagement with refugees. At the same time, the unique arrangement of the Kalobeyi settlement and its potential for city status could offer an important model for integrating refugees and hosts in camps and settlements even after they officially close.

¹⁷ UN-Habitat. 2021. Socio Economic Development in Turkana West, Kenya Research Briefing: Urbanization in North Rift Kenya.

CHALLENGES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE SUPPORT

While both Kakuma and Kalobeyei are in remote regions of Kenya, they have strong links to both the government and international actors. Kenya's status as a pilot country for the CRRF, the related emergence of KISED, and the development of the Kalobeyei settlement illustrate this.

However, despite the stated importance of local engagement in the CRRF and the mention of refugees and KISED in the Turkana County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP), in reality Turkana County is excluded from much of the funding and governance of refugee assistance. It does not, for example, directly manage CRRF funding, illustrating a key tension between localisation in rhetoric and in practice.

One community representative of the CRRF in Kenya explained,

"THE FUNDING OF CRRF IS NOT VISIBLE - EVEN MINISTERS SAY THEY HAVE NOT HEARD OF FUNDING IN KAKUMA. THE CRRF FUNDING GOES THROUGH THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, BUT IT DOESN'T DROP DOWN TO LOCAL LEVELS LIKE IT SHOULD. SO, IT IS A GOOD IDEA BUT IT'S NOT VISIBLE...WHEN I WAS IN UGANDA EVERYONE WAS TALKING ABOUT IT, BUT HERE IN KENYA, WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT CRRF, NO ONE KNOWS."¹⁸

18 Interview, Kenya





When one considers existing tools to address ongoing and arising challenges, the CRRF and by extension KISEDPA come to mind. Both lay out pathways for sustainable development and assistance to refugees and hosts alike – aims which are clearly needed in Turkana County. However, it appears that limited autonomy over the CRRF process and funding exists in Turkana, limiting both planning and implementation.

This appears to be in contrast to devolution, which is seen as an opportunity to institutionalise local management and offers a means to promote urban and other development in the region. Turkana County – like many others in Kenya – struggles with municipal financing challenges, which direct CRRF funding could in part address.



TAKEAWAYS FROM KENYA'S REFUGEE RESPONSE IN TURKANA

Turkana County illustrates many of the challenges of forced displacement, urbanisation, and climate change.

Today, Turkana County – and indeed the overall refugee response in Kenya – finds itself at an uncertain crossroads. While plans are being drawn up to address the eventual closure of Kakuma camp, for example, little information has been made publicly available, and many are hopeful that it ultimately will not be forced to close. Through the influx of refugees and the humanitarian and development interventions that have accompanied it, Turkana County has experienced both economic growth and development. At the same time, ongoing underinvestment in the region and growing climate change-related challenges place pressure on hosts and refugees alike. This in turn contributes to tension and challenges in integration.

At the same time, some practices from Turkana suggest the value of further focusing on developing integrated policies and interventions for refugees and host communities that enhance spatial-economic integration and connectivity in the region. One could imagine that such a focus could be either hindered or made all the more necessary by the planned closure of Kakuma camp. Maintaining this focus is imperative, however, for both Kakuma camp and the towns surrounding it that suffer from underdeveloped infrastructure and poor provision of basic services, including (in urban areas) inadequate and unaffordable housing, exacerbated by urban poverty and high unemployment. More attention paid to addressing these areas has the potential to assist both refugees and local hosts. However, as this case illustrates, deeper involvement of local county officials and other local actors is needed to actually develop the local governance that many of the plans related to refugee response in the region promote.



CONCLUSION



As these examples have shown, municipal good practices exist in a variety of different areas, including local leadership, social integration, employment, and labour market integration. The case of IDPs in Adama, Ethiopia, illustrates both the potential for assistance at the local and regional level, as well as the challenges that even displaced nationals face in integrating into a new location.

The challenges of the municipality and urban refugees in Arua, Uganda, illustrate in particular the importance of documenting the presence of urban refugees – and acting on this information in terms of adjusting budgets, directing funds towards urban areas, and providing comprehensive support to municipalities hosting large numbers of refugees.

Similarly, the impact of Kakuma-Kalobeyi on Turkana County, Kenya, as well as the expected impact of the camp closing on urban areas in the county, illustrate the nuanced relationship of hosting refugees on counties and municipalities, with refugees representing sources of tension as well as positive attention and investment.

A clear finding that emerges from the case studies is the value of documenting actual numbers of urban forcibly displaced people and assisting them accordingly. If urban refugees were properly accounted for in censuses, for example, the municipalities in which they reside would in theory receive more resources from the central government to support their populations, including refugees. The provision of support could then reflect the actual number of those in need, while also potentially shedding light on the contributions that some refugees already offer urban areas, such as taxes.

International organisations might have the information needed to develop urban programmes in cities and towns they do not currently operate in.

The current gaps in data that preclude these possibilities from becoming reality demonstrate a clear need to include urban refugees in censuses and government planning, including development and city plans, and in cases direct more international programming and support to the urban displaced. However, it should also be acknowledged that data collection and subsequent dissemination is impacted by policy positions and priorities; a country that does not legally allow refugees to reside in cities, for example, is unlikely to collect data on their existence. This reinforces the broader need to continue advocacy and policy engagement regarding UNHCR's 2009 Urban Refugee Policy and 2014 Policy on Alternatives to Camps, and the rights to urban refugees that they promote.

When considering the case studies together, one clear takeaway is the importance of analysing not just the 'local' level of cities, but instead how cities are emplaced within districts, regions, and ultimately countries. In each case, internal politics significantly influenced how municipalities respond to displaced people. In many ways, Adama's IDP reception represents a good practice of coordination and collaboration between the municipal, regional, and central government, illustrating how assistance can be obtained through clear messaging and coherent aims. A similar good practice can be found in Arua Municipality's Community Development Forum (CDF), which brings together representatives from different sectors and groups, including refugees. It offers a way to raise issues, consider solutions, and also act as a platform for engagement with outside actors such as humanitarian and development agencies. At the same time, it is evident that 'the local' is of course multi-layered and complex, with different actors holding different and sometimes competing interests and agendas.

Indeed, it is sometimes due to this that funding has not flowed to 'local levels', representing a key area for ongoing discussion with municipalities, donors, and city actors alike.

Taken together, the diverse case studies of responses to urban displacement in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda illustrate several key lessons and recommendations for major refugee-hosting countries' central and municipal governments, UNHCR, INGOs, and other key stakeholders. Above all, more recognition of the urban forcibly displaced through research, collaboration, and assistance can increase the success of those entering cities, as well as the success of the locals and municipalities seeking to support them.



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Further Resources

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