

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF REFUGEES IN KAKUMA CAMP, KENYA

The Kakuma refugee camp in Turkana West was established to accommodate refugees residing in the area. Kakuma comprises four subcamps, with the first one formally established in 1992 and subsequent ones built to manage new arrivals. Forty percent of Kenya's refugee population reside in Turkana West, where host communities face widespread poverty. Social and economic interactions between refugees and hosts have helped to improve wellbeing and boost the local economy. Nevertheless, both communities continue to face poor living conditions. Understanding the socioeconomic characteristics of refugees and hosts is central to identifying the factors that limit livelihoods and informing programming to overcome them. The Kakuma Socioeconomic Survey 2019* was initiated to fill socioeconomic data gaps and has produced insights that contribute to detecting the vulnerabilities of both communities. It is thus a comprehensive tool for policymaking and programmatic response. Highlights of the survey and its policy implications are presented in this summary. Early results of rapid response phone surveys on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic's impact are also presented.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The Kakuma camp hosts over 156,000 refugees, mainly from South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, most of whom arrived after 2007.

61 percent of refugees in Kakuma are 18 years old and younger, compared to 59 percent in Turkana County and 50 percent nationally. While most refugees are men (54 percent), those aged 30 and older are mostly women.

Over half of refugee and Turkana households are headed by women (56 percent and 52 percent, respectively), compared to 32 percent nationally. Refugee households led by women tend to be larger and have more dependents than those led by men. The refugees' dependency ratio is 1.2 (6 dependents for every 5 working-age adults), while it is 1.4 in Turkana County and 0.9 in Kenya overall.

Refugees and hosts community members in Turkana County are more likely to be disabled than Kenyans on average (4 percent, 3.8 percent, and 2.9 percent, respectively). In Kakuma, women are more likely to be disabled than men. Visual disability is the most common among refugees, while for hosts, difficulty in walking, or climbing steps is most prominent.

POVERTY PROFILE

68 percent of refugees in Kakuma and 72 percent of Turkana hosts are poor, and both populations are highly food insecure. In comparison, 37 percent of Kenyans are poor at the national level. Poor households are larger in size, have more children, and tend to be headed by persons with little or no education. The poverty incidence among refugees and hosts may increase given resource constraints derived from new emergencies, mainly the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating the extreme fragility of both populations. Already, 83 percent of refugee households are highly food insecure, while 86 percent of Turkana households had to cope with not having enough food or money to purchase it (WFP, 2016).

The poverty rate among refugees varies according to sex, country of origin, and time of displacement. Most refugees in households led by women are poor. Households that have been displaced since 2008 or before are less likely to be poor than those displaced in 2012–2014. However, the poverty rate drops for those displaced since 2015 or later.

EMPLOYMENT AND LIVELIHOODS

Among the working-age population, just 20 percent of refugees are employed, compared with 62 percent of Turkana hosts and 71 percent of Kenyans overall. The unemployment rate among refugees is 2 percent, compared to 3 percent and 2 percent for Turkana hosts and Kenyans overall, respectively. An overwhelming 78 percent of refugees are outside the labor force, compared with 35 percent of Turkana hosts and 26 percent of Kenyans overall. Among refugees outside of the labor force and unemployed, the main reported obstacles for securing a job are lack of adequate skills and lack of opportunities, while the main support needed is training.

*The survey is comparable to the Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey (KIHBS) 2015/16 and Kenya Continuous Household Survey.

ACCESS TO SERVICES & HOUSING

82 percent of refugees attend primary school, compared to 48 percent in Turkana County and 82 percent nationally. Secondary school attendance is lower, at 14 percent among refugees, 9 percent in Turkana County and 38 percent nationally. The low secondary school attendance rates among refugees and hosts can be partly due to the reduced number of secondary schools in the Kakuma area, costs with accessing education, and early marriage (particularly among girls). Long walking distances from Turkana settlements to camp schools may also explain the low attendance.

13 percent of refugee households and 12 percent of Turkana hosts have access to the electrical grid or a generator, compared to 42 percent nationally. The main sources of lighting in Kakuma are battery lamps, candles, or torches (51 percent), which are the second main source of lighting for Kenyans at the Turkana (31 percent) and national level (41 percent).

Refugee households have nearly universal access to water, though 84 percent report persistent water shortages. Among Kenyans, 63 percent of Turkana households and 73 percent nationally had access to improved sources of water. Access to improved sanitation facilities is also higher among refugees (78 percent) compared to Turkana (32 percent) and national hosts (65 percent).

Only 11 percent of refugee households own a regular bank account, notwithstanding facilitation by UNHCR and partners to open bank accounts. Men-headed households and households displaced before 2008 are more likely to own bank and mobile banking accounts.

88 percent of the poorest refugee households live in overcrowded conditions compared to 49 percent of the least poor. At the Turkana County level, 91 percent of the poorest versus 33 percent of the least poor experience overcrowding.

POLICY INSIGHTS

The survey has generated numerous practical implications for policymaking and response. A few key ones are highlighted here:

- Food insecurity can be addressed by shifting from in-kind to cash assistance. A host community's food needs must be addressed through national programs, avoiding refugee-exclusive assistance.
- Support strengthening of refugees' job-related skills and match them to market and community needs. Engaging the private sector can enhance access to the labor market for both communities.
- Support transition to secondary school by (i) removing barriers and developing flexible programs that accommodate livelihoods and seminomadic lifestyles, (ii) creating more classrooms, (iii) providing information on schools and requirements to join, (iv) reducing fees and providing scholarships, (v) combating early marriage, (vi) second chance education programs for women and providing childcare, and (vii) assistance conditional on school enrolment. ■

Comprehensive analysis of all indicators covered in the survey, including skills profile, access to credit, and social cohesion, is presented in the full report available [here](#).

COVID-19'S IMPACT

The World Bank's Kenya Rapid Response Phone Surveys (RRPS) on COVID-19's impact included displaced populations living in Kakuma, other camps and in Nairobi. In the first round of the RRPS (May/June 2020), it found that even though UNHCR and its partners had prepared facilities to respond to the pandemic, 65 percent of camp-based refugees report lower access to health facilities after the outbreak compared to before the outbreak (March 2020), mainly due to fear of infection and unavailability of medical staff. This compares with about 3 in 10 nationals.

The pandemic has resulted in nearly zero school attendance. Online learning or technology-mediated learning on TV, radio, educational apps, and smartphones are not accessible for many children, especially those in rural areas and camps.

Employment rate of camp refugees fell to an alarmingly low 6 percent due to the pandemic, while the national employment rate fell to 51 percent. Among self-employed camp refugees, 92 percent experienced declines in business revenue.

