

SUMMARY

UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF REFUGEES IN URBAN AREAS OF KENYA

Approximately 81,000 or 16 percent of the 500,000 registered refugees in Kenya live in urban areas. The actual number is likely higher as many refugees do not register with UNHCR or the government. Due to the fact that urban refugees are dispersed and highly mobile, there is scarce data and limited understanding of their living conditions. This lack of understanding hinders efforts to enhance socioeconomic opportunities for them and the host communities. Addressing the risks and vulnerabilities faced by urban refugees and their hosts requires narrowing existing data gaps to inform policy options, including ones that enhance socioeconomic conditions and livelihoods opportunities.

UNHCR and the World Bank undertook the Kenya Urban Socioeconomic Survey 2020-2021 to close the data gap on urban refugees. Understanding their socioeconomic needs takes on added urgency with the potential closures of Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, the largest in Kenya, which may result in refugee influxes into urban settings. The urban survey is comparable to the national Kenya Continuous Household Survey (KCHS) 2019, and provides one of the first comparable analysis on the economic lives of urban refugees and hosts in Kenya. It is also comparable with the 2018 Kalobeyei and 2019 Kakuma socioeconomic survey, rendering the urban results comparable with camp-based refugees. This document provides a summary of the full report.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

89 percent of urban refugees reside in Nairobi while 4 percent live in Nakuru and 7 percent in Mombasa. Most had fled conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Somalia. Refugees' counties of residence vary by country of origin. While Nairobi hosts a population from a wider variety of countries, refugees in Nakuru are mainly from South Sudan and those in Mombasa tend to be from Somalia.

45 percent of urban refugees are 18 years old or younger, compared to 32 percent of urban hosts. Nakuru's population is the youngest, where 55 percent of refugees and 41 percent of hosts are 18 years old or below. In contrast, only 1.8 percent of the refugee population and 0.72 percent of urban nationals are elderly (65 and above). These differences in age distributions across populations are particularly important when considering dependency ratios and needs according to age.

Most refugee and host households are headed by men (59 percent and 68 percent, respectively), except in Nakuru where refugee women head 61 percent of households. Households headed by women tend to have higher dependency ratios than those headed by men. Nakuru-based refugee households, which are majority-led by women and overall younger, have the highest dependency ratios.

The incidence of disability is higher among refugees than urban hosts (7 percent and 1.4 percent, respectively). Refugees in Mombasa and Nairobi are more likely to be disabled compared to refugees in Nakuru. The most common disability for refugees and urban hosts is visual impairments (38 percent of refugees and 44 percent of nationals) followed by mobility difficulties (33 percent of refugees, 34 percent of nationals). Disabled population face difficulties to access education and livelihoods opportunities.

EMPLOYMENT AND LIVELIHOODS

Less than half (42 percent) of working-age refugees are employed. Most of the employed are wage workers (73 percent) and self-employed (59 percent). Refugee women (33 percent) are less likely to be employed than men (50 percent). Refugees in Nakuru are the least likely to be employed (12 percent) compared to refugees in Nairobi (43 percent) and Mombasa (35 percent). Survey respondents interested in waged-employment say access to documentation and training are needed to secure employment. Among those interested in self-employment, the majority say that access to loans and business training will be useful.

ACCESS TO SERVICES AND HOUSING

Refugees face high levels of food insecurity (60 percent), especially in Nakuru (68 percent) which also has high dependency ratios, indicating more young refugees are at risk of malnutrition. To cope with the lack of food, most refugee households ate less preferred foods (80 percent). Adults in 34 percent of households ate less so that children could have more food. Livelihoods and targeted food security programs are critical to help refugees

secure adequate income, prevent malnutrition and thus, protect human capital. Mobile cash transfers can be a cost-effective instrument in urban settings to mitigate food insecurity in the short-term.

Access to improved drinking water is higher among urban refugee households (91 percent) than hosts (71 percent), though 72 percent of refugee households report insufficient drinking water supply. In Mombasa, access to improved drinking water is alarmingly low for hosts (17 percent compared to 76 percent for refugees). When it comes to improved sanitation, most refugees (84 percent) and hosts (99 percent) have access, though 86 percent of refugee households share toilets with other households. Increased investment in integrated water, sanitation and hygiene service delivery can further enhance access to improved water and sanitation and improve health outcomes for urban refugees and national households.

37 percent of refugee households, mostly those headed by women, live in overcrowded housing compared to 19 percent of urban hosts. Reducing overcrowding is key to preventing stress, domestic violence, and the spread of infectious diseases. Increasing funding for national housing programs could address national households' needs while including refugee communities can help reduce overcrowding.

A quarter of refugee households and 10 percent of host households, mainly those headed by women, use biomass (charcoal) for cooking. As pricing of non-biomass fuels is a binding constraint, subsidizing improved biomass and non-biomass fuels while making them more easily accessible can help prevent negative health impacts associated with air pollutants, especially for women and children under age five.

Net school enrollment rates are among refugees. The net primary enrollment rate is 69 percent (68 percent boys and 70 percent girls) while the net secondary enrollment rate is 28 percent (31 percent boys and 24 percent girls). The main barriers to education are the cost of transport, books, uniforms, lack of birth certificate and other indirect costs. As the lack of birth certificates is a constraint for some, inclusion of refugees in the National Education Management Information System by allowing alternative documentation will be key. Second chance education programs which allow for flexible timetables and provide childcare and early childhood education may also improve attendance rates.

78 percent of refugee households own a bank account but access to formal sources of loans is low. In 98 percent of households where refugees own a bank account, such an account is individually owned. Despite documentation requirements to buy a SIM card in Kenya, most refugee households (83 percent) own a mobile banking account. Only 4 in 10 households reported access to loans, with family and relatives being the most common source (40 percent), while formal financing sources are barely used (1 percent).

Refugees who recently interacted with a host community member tend to have more positive perceptions of social cohesion. Fostering interactions and collaborations where refugees and hosts can work towards shared goals can enhance social cohesion. Strengthening communication mechanisms between refugees, local organizations, and the government could be instrumental to allow refugees and hosts to raise their concerns and improve perceptions of social participation.

93 percent of refugee households wish to leave Kenya though less than 1 percent want to return to their countries of origin. With most refugees planning to leave Kenya, it is important to continue facilitating access to information on resettlement, repatriation and integration to help form realistic expectations on requirements, security conditions, and employment opportunities. Despite these ambitions of wanting to leave Kenya, the average urban refugee has resided in Kenya for 7 years.

POLICY PRIORITIES

The survey has generated numerous practical implications for policymaking and response. While food insecurity is alarmingly high among refugees, their employment rates are also very low. Short-term priorities focused on food security, access to water, sanitation and housing will alleviate severe living conditions for highly vulnerable groups. Medium-term priorities should expand livelihoods opportunities, strengthen employment and entrepreneurial skills, ease access to education, foster social cohesion, and ensure access to information on movement options. Collaborations between the private sector, governments, humanitarian, and development partners will be essential to enable the creation of job markets. Further research on the employment activities of urban refugees is needed to understand important barriers and help overcome them.