



PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION IN KAKUMA MUNICIPALITY, TURKANA COUNTY

Challenges and Pathways to Peace



the auschwitz institute
for the prevention of genocide
and mass atrocities

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National Cohesion and Integration Commission

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	iii
Acronyms and Abbreviations	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Executive Summary	ix
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
1.1 Background and context	1
1.2 Rationale	1
1.3 Methodology	3
1.3.1 Qualitative approach	4
1.3.2 Quantitative approach	4
1.3.3 Sampling technique	4
1.3.4 Data analysis	8
1.4 Definition of key terms	9
1.5 Structure of the Report	10
1.6 Summary	11
CHAPTER TWO	12
REFUGEE DYNAMICS AND SOCIAL COHESION	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 History of refugees in Kenya	12
2.3 Challenges to peaceful co-existence in Kakuma Municipality	13
2.4 Legal and policy frameworks	14
2.4.1 International legal and policy frameworks	14
2.4.2 Regional legal and policy frameworks	15
2.4.3 Legal and Policy Frameworks in Kenya	16
2.4.4 Identified gaps and challenges	18
2.5 Summary	20

CHAPTER THREE	21
IMPEDIMENTS TO PEACE IN KAKUMA MUNICIPALITY	21
3.1 Introduction	21
3.2 Environmental Factors	22
3.2.1 Competition for Limited Natural Resources	22
3.2.2 Environmental degradation	25
3.3 Summary	27
3.4 Socio-Cultural Factors	27
3.4.1 Cultural Clash	28
3.4.2 Relational Fragmentation and Resettlement	30
3.4.3 Linguistic Divide	32
3.5 Summary	32
3.6 Security Factors	33
3.6.1 Violence between and among Refugee Groups	33
3.6.2 Violence between Refugees and the Host Community	34
3.6.3 Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	38
3.6.4 Organised and Gang-related Crime	39
3.7 Summary	40
3.8 Economic Factors	40
3.8.1 Resource Scarcity and Competition	41
3.8.2 Unequal Access and Perceived Favouritism	42
3.8.3 Limited Livelihood and Employment Opportunities	43
3.9 Summary	43
3.10 Legal, Policy Frameworks and Governance Factors	44
3.10.1 Coordination gap	44
3.10.2 Fairness in Critical Service Provision and Opportunities	45
3.10.3 Inadequate Public Participation	47
3.10.4 Legal framework	50
3.11 Summary	51
CHAPTER FOUR	53
CONFLICT LANDSCAPE OF KAKUMA MUNICIPALITY	53
4.1 Introduction	53
4.2 Impact of Conflict on Various Groups	58
4.3 Conflict Hotspot Areas in Kakuma Municipality	65

4.4 Connectors and Resilience Factors	68
4.4.1 Shared developmental challenges	68
4.4.2 Social and Relational Resilience	69
4.4.3 Economic Resilience	70
4.4.4 Institutional and Governance Resilience	70
4.5 Summary	71
CHAPTER FIVE	72
EMERGING ISSUES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	72
5.0 Introduction	72
5.1 Emerging issues	72
5.1.1 Intra-refugee issues outnumber refugee-host conflicts	72
5.1.2 Gaps in governance and service provision as key contributors to conflict in Kakuma Municipality	72
5.1.3 The Shirika Plan, a forward-looking document that lacks the Host and Refugee Buy-In	73
5.1.4 Minimal Focus in Peacebuilding Efforts and Weak Coordination Framework	73
5.2 Conclusion	73
5.3 Recommendations	74
5.3.1 National Government	74
5.3.2 County government	74
5.3.3 Directorate of Refugee Services	75
5.3.4. Kenya National Commission on Human Rights	75
5.3.5 National Cohesion and Integration Commission	76
5.3.6 Civil society	76
5.3.7 Political class	77
5.3.8 Ministry of Health	77
5.3.9 National Police Service	78
5.3.10 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	78
References	80

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AIPG	Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities
AU	African Union
CAT	Convention against Torture
CIDP	County Integrated Development Plan
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DA	Differentiated Assistance
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRS	Department of Refugee Services
EAC	East African Community
GISEDP	Garissa Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IPOA	Independent Policing Oversight Authority
KISEDP	Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex
MoH	Ministry of Health
NCIC	National Cohesion and Integration Commission
NPS	National Police Service
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
PWD	Persons with Disability
RCK	Refugee Consortium of Kenya
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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I sincerely hope that the policy recommendations from this study will lead to improved services, more responsive governance, greater security, and the recognition that your voices matter in shaping the future of your community.



Dr. Daniel Mutegi Giti (PhD)
COMMISSION SECRETARY/CEO
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Executive Summary

Kakuma Municipality, located in Turkana County, hosts approximately 305,421 refugees from over 22 nationalities. It is one of the world's most complex and protracted refugee camp environments, confronted with many challenges such as environmental degradation, resource scarcity, cultural clash, and insecurity. This community ranks as Kenya's poorest, with over 88% of its residents living below the poverty line. This marginalisation predates the presence of refugees, shaping the complex dynamics of coexistence in Kakuma Municipality.

Against this backdrop, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), through the support of the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities, undertook a research study, which sought to examine the impediments to peace and investigate the conflict landscape of Kakuma Municipality, while proffering policy recommendations for enhancing social cohesion and promoting sustainable conflict resolution among refugee and host communities.

The study used mixed approaches, employing qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Data collection primarily involved key informant interviews with 29 experts, and 12 focus group discussions with a diverse range of participants, including women, youth, members of the business community, local peace stakeholders, community leaders from both host and refugee communities, and relevant state actors. Additionally, 435 respondents were targeted for the household survey. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, while STATA and Principal Component Analysis were employed for quantitative data analysis.

The study revealed several key challenges affecting social cohesion in Kakuma Municipality. Firstly, resource scarcity linked to environmental factors, such as severe land degradation and deforestation, emerged as immediate conflict triggers. Refugees and host communities compete over water, firewood, and grazing land, and sometimes job opportunities, generating daily friction between and within communities. Secondly, environmental factors are compounded by socio-cultural dynamics arising from diverse nationalities, linguistic fragmentation, and the persistence of ethnic and clan-based loyalties imported from countries of origin. The findings revealed that 72.45% of refugees report feeling unsafe among fellow refugees, out of which 74.63% attribute this to inter-communal cultural differences.

Thirdly, governance and policy deficits further undermine social cohesion in Kakuma Municipality. Gaps in service provision between national and county governments, perceptions of inequality in access to services, lack of coordination among peace actors, and limited knowledge and understanding of key policies, such as the Differentiated Assistance and Shirika Plan, have exacerbated tension and conflict among the refugees and between the refugees and the host community. Lastly, security-related threats emerged as significant barriers to peaceful coexistence for both the host community and refugees. The existence of different organised criminal gangs and the ever-increasing hotspot areas within Kakuma Municipality are issues that require an urgent solution. Gender-based violence and intra- and inter-nationality violence also featured as key challenges affecting both the refugee and host communities.

Worth noting from the study is that refugee-refugee tensions exceed refugee-host tensions, meaning the host communities are not the primary barrier to refugee integration. Survey data indicate that cultural clash, resource competition, and historical trauma from countries of origin generate more friction than host-refugee dynamics, although the latter remain substantial and require targeted attention.

Yet alongside these impediments, the study documents important connectors and resilience factors that sustain cooperation and prevent overall disintegration amongst communal members. Social and relational connectors, including intermarriage, cultural exchanges, religious forums, and sports, enable interactions between and across ethnicities and nationalities. Economic resilience emerges through trade exchanges, which facilitate mutual dependency in material survival. Institutional and governance resilience operates through the innovative arrangements the community develops in response to specific challenges. The Commission acknowledges that while these mechanisms do not erase tension, they function as important buffers that absorb shock and forestall the escalation of everyday friction into sustained violent conflict.

The study identifies significant gaps in institutional architecture, specifically the absence of an organisation specifically mandated for peacebuilding actively working within the region, and the fragmentation of civil society efforts that duplicate initiatives and undermine collective impact. Emerging issues that demand urgent attention include the lacuna in capacity building and sensitisation on the Shirika Plan, which risks opening up space for misinformation and giving room for politicians to politicise the framework for personal gain; and the escalating responsibility of key duty bearers, particularly the County Government of Turkana, to improve the lives of residents of

Kakuma Municipality. Overall, the study emphasises that development in Kakuma Municipality cannot proceed without peace, and that peace cannot be achieved through material provision alone. It requires deliberate, sustained investment in the social fabric of inter-communal relations.

Generally, the study urges the County Government of Turkana to prioritise equitable service delivery to host communities and refugees. The current reality, where the hosts are unable to access basic amenities, while refugee numbers increase daily, is unsustainable as it destabilises inter-communal relations and provides fertile terrain for political manipulation, thereby disrupting peace and cohesion within the Municipality. The national government should increase budgetary allocation to refugee management and comprehensively strengthen the Department of Refugee Services. Without adequate resourcing and institutional capacity, progressive frameworks such as the Shirika Plan remain aspirational documents rather than operational realities.

The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on Administrative Justice should launch a comprehensive investigation into allegations of injustice and discrimination in service delivery and ensure accountability for the violation of basic human rights.

There is a need for humanitarian organisations, CSOs and responsible government agencies to collaborate immediately on integrated mental health and psychosocial support programming that addresses both current trauma from policy failures and unresolved historical trauma from countries of origin. This is an essential infrastructure for peace, as untreated trauma ends up affecting the entire population living within the Kakuma Municipality. The civil society, likewise, should focus on transcending the fragmentation that duplicates initiatives and waters down collective impact, and operate on a unified advocacy model.

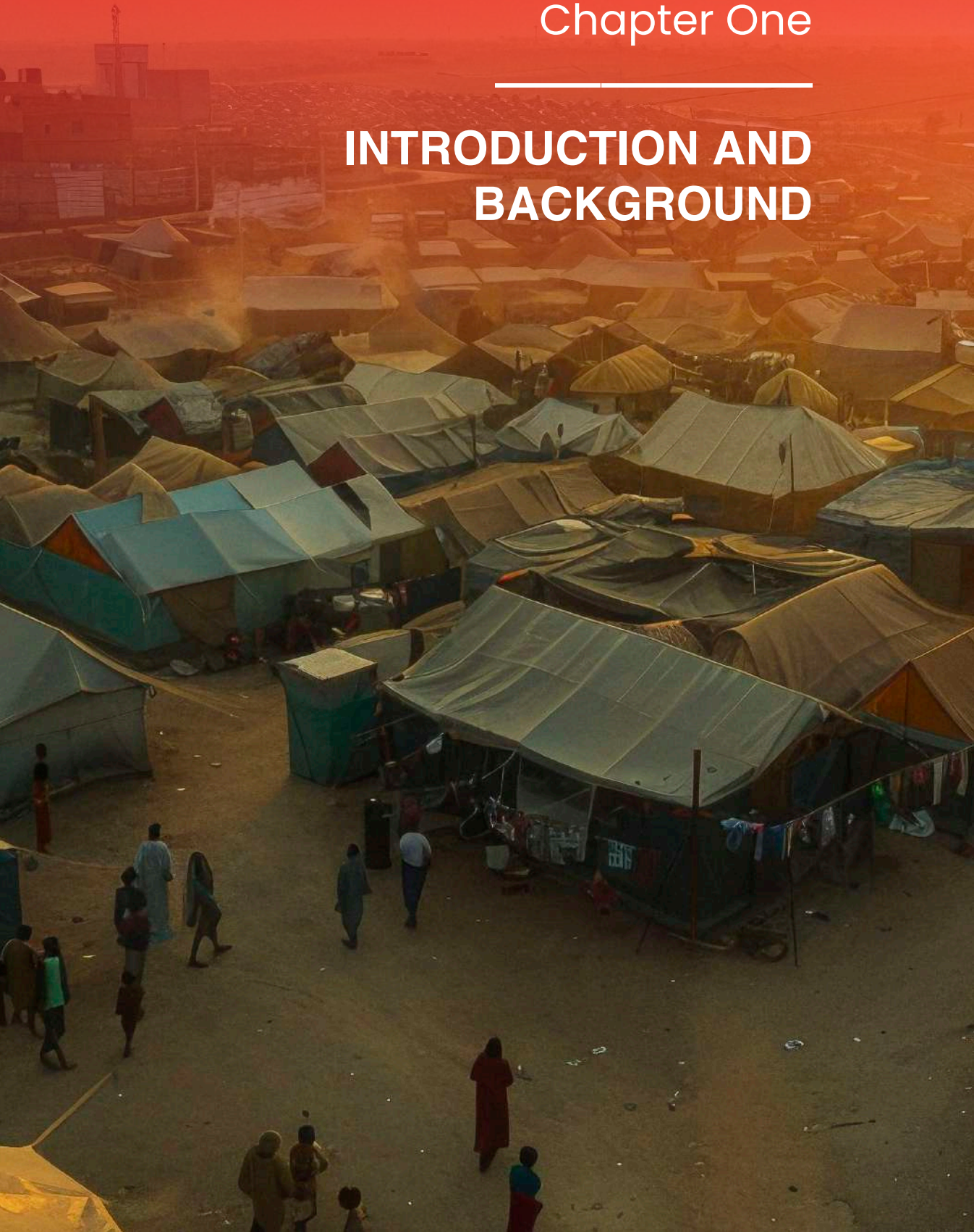
We urge the faith-based organisations to immediately leverage their unique positions of trust and daily contact with diverse populations to demonstrate and encourage inter-communal cooperation. The study findings have revealed that these platforms are the most durable infrastructure for peace available in Kakuma Municipality. The faith community is, therefore, not just a neutral service provider but an active shaper of social relations, where strangers become neighbours.

Most importantly, members of the political class should resist the temptation to instrumentalise the refugee plight for personal gain to avoid amplifying ethnic tensions, and perpetuating the structural violence likely to keep these populations in dependency and despair.

Generally, this study argues that sustainable peace in Kakuma Municipality requires a complete shift in thinking. It is not a temporary problem to be managed, but a permanent urban reality to be intentionally designed, with social cohesion as the cornerstone of governance, investment, and intervention. Global displacement is rising, and Kenyans, the refugee community and the international community at large should pursue durable peace through collective, coordinated action to prevent suffering and promote development.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND



1.1 Background and context

Kenya ranks as the fifth-largest refugee-hosting country in Africa and 13th globally, with approximately 849,625 refugees as of 30th April 2025 (DRS, 2025)¹. Kenya's role as a host nation for refugees has deep historical roots that extend back to the colonial era, serving as a significant destination for both economic migrants from across the continent and forcibly displaced persons within the region. However, the early 1990s marked a significant period with an unprecedented influx of refugees fleeing widespread coups, civil unrest, and protracted conflicts in neighbouring countries such as Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia.

By 1992, the country was accommodating over 420,000 refugees, predominantly Somalis displaced by the devastating civil war following the collapse of the Siad Barre regime. In response to this humanitarian crisis, the Government of Kenya, in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other aid agencies, established 15 temporary refugee camps across various locations to facilitate critical humanitarian assistance. These initial sites included Mandera, Banissa, Elwak, Ifo, Hagadera, Dagahaley, Swaleh Nguru, Utange, Marafa, Hatimy, Jomvu, Kakuma, and Thika. By 1998, prompted by logistical challenges, operational complexities, and burgeoning populations, the government of Kenya undertook a strategic decision to consolidate these facilities. Refugees were progressively relocated to the larger Dadaab and Kakuma camps, which have since remained the primary designated reception and assistance centres. Currently, Kenya's refugee management framework is centred on these two gazetted camps, Dadaab and Kakuma Municipalities, located in Garissa and Turkana Counties, respectively.

1.2 Rationale

The country has established several refugee camps, with Kakuma being one of the most prominent and longstanding. Located in Turkana County, Kakuma Municipality hosts 305,421 refugees primarily from South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among other countries. The large influx of refugees over the years has placed considerable pressure on Kenya's resources and infrastructure, creating complex social dynamics within the surrounding host communities. The geographical location of Turkana, one of Kenya's marginalised regions, further accentuates challenges related to resource sharing, employment opportunities, and social integration (Nabunganga & Ndung'u, 2020).

Kakuma Town, located in Turkana County, presents a complex social landscape characterised by tensions between the refugee and host communities. These tensions

¹ <https://refugee.go.ke/sites/default/files/2025-05/Kenya%20Statistics%20Package%20-%2030%20April%202025.pdf>

primarily stem from competition over limited resources, employment opportunities, and essential support services (Kumssa et al., 2009; Nabeny, 2025). Both refugees and host community members struggle to access scarce resources such as water, grazing land, and job opportunities, leading to competition and resentment (Kumssa et al., 2009). This situation is further fueled by perceptions of inequality and competition, with each side feeling they are in direct rivalry with the other for the few available resources necessary for their livelihoods and survival. The Turkana people feel they have not meaningfully benefited from the refugees' presence, despite giving up land and pastures for the camp's construction (Nabeny, 2025). The perception that refugees receive guaranteed support from UNHCR, while locals struggle with meagre government assistance, fuels further resentment (Nabeny, 2025).

In view of ongoing tensions and conflicts between refugee and host communities in Kakuma Town, driven by competition over scarce resources, perceived inequalities in aid distribution, and cultural differences, which undermine social cohesion and community stability, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) with support from the Auschwitz Institute for the Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities (AIPG) and in collaboration with the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK), and the Department of Refugee Services (DRS), conducted a study to examine the conflict drivers prevalent in Kakuma Municipality. Some of the specific objectives included unearthing challenges, connectors and resilient factors that impede peaceful coexistence; and making recommendations to address the identified issues.

Specifically, the study sought to:



1.3 Methodology

The study, adopting a pragmatic research paradigm, used a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies to examine conflict drivers and articulate viable solutions for peace and stability in Kakuma Municipality, Turkana County.

The study adopted a pragmatic research paradigm as its philosophical foundation, given its emphasis on practical, meaningful change and utility. This approach distinguishes itself from conventional research methods by prioritising actionable outcomes over mere data accumulation and analysis. Within the pragmatic framework, the central research question inherently dictates the philosophical and methodological approach, fostering collaborative knowledge generation involving both researchers and participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods design, where both quantitative and qualitative data collection occurred simultaneously during the same research phase. The results from both components were analysed independently before being synthesised for comprehensive interpretation. Mixed methods, as defined by Bryman, involve integrating diverse research techniques from multiple philosophical perspectives to address complex research questions effectively (Bryman, 2016). The mixed-method research approach was chosen to leverage the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research designs, aiming to comprehensively analyse the complex and dynamic nature of cohesion and integration between the refugee and host communities in Kakuma Municipality. Given the intricate nature of cohesion and integration, the mixed-method approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, while enhancing the study's quality and ensuring validity and reliability through triangulation (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

1.3.1 Qualitative approach

In terms of the qualitative approach, the study adopted the Participatory Action Research (PAR), emphasising active engagement and collaboration with community members and stakeholders to generate in-depth insights into social cohesion dynamics in Kakuma Municipality. Data collection primarily involved 29 key informant interviews (KIIs) with experts and 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) with a diverse range of participants, including women, youth, members of the business community, local peace stakeholders, community leaders from both host and refugee communities, as well as relevant state actors. This participatory approach aimed to foster local ownership of the research process, ensuring that the perspectives and experiences of those directly affected by community interactions are central to the findings. Through this methodology, the study facilitated meaningful dialogue, promoting shared

understanding and identifying practical, community-driven solutions to enhance social cohesion and peaceful coexistence in Kakuma Municipality.

1.3.2 Quantitative approach

The study incorporated quantitative methodologies to systematically measure and analyse the issues hindering social cohesion between refugees and host communities in Kakuma. The quantitative design involved the use of a questionnaire structured in a 5-point Likert scale format, allowing respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with specific issues (Bryman, 2016). The project team worked closely with local enumerators to collect quantifiable data on perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to conflict drivers, common concerns, and inter-group relationships. This approach was paramount for several reasons: it allowed for the establishment of the prevalence and magnitude of specific challenges within and between the communities, offering a robust empirical foundation. Through descriptive statistics, the methodology determined the percentage distribution of various reported issues and sentiments, disaggregated by crucial demographic factors like nationality (refugee vs. host community), age, and gender, to highlight divergent experiences.

1.3.3 Sampling technique

This study utilised purposive sampling for the qualitative design and stratified random sampling for the quantitative design. Purposive sampling was chosen for the qualitative phase due to the anticipated limited number of participants. They were intentionally selected based on their suitability to address the research questions and expertise in cohesion issues within the complex Kakuma Municipality context (Frey, 2018). These participants consisted of community members from both the host and refugee communities (including special groups such as women, youth and persons with disabilities (PWDs), business community, leaders, and civil society organisations, including refugee-led, state and non-state actors, including humanitarian organisations.

For the quantitative design, the study employed a stratified random sampling technique, targeting individuals above 18 years of age from the entire Kakuma Municipality. Local enumerators were engaged to carry out the process, ensuring a diverse representation of expert knowledge in the local language and the Kakuma Municipality area. In the quantitative design, the sample size was determined using the formula proposed by Yamane (1967):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where;

n = sample size

N = the study population

e = the margin of error in the estimation (0.05)

Therefore, the sample size,

$$n = 306,963 / (1 + 306,963 (0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 306,963 / (1 + 306,963 (0.0025))$$

$$n = 306,963 / (1 + 1.8025)$$

$$n = 306,963 / 2.8025$$

$$n = 383$$

Source: Yamane (1967)

A total of 435 questionnaires were administered to members of the refugee and host communities within Kakuma Municipality. A demographic breakdown of the participants surveyed revealed a near-equal gender distribution, with 51.26% female and 48.74% male, with the majority of them being refugees (61.84%) compared to locals (38.16%). Nationalities were diverse, with Kenyans representing 38.16% of the respondents, followed by other nationalities from South Sudan (16.09%), Somalia (12.87%), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (9.89%), as well as other nationalities constituting smaller proportions, as shown in the Figure 1 below:

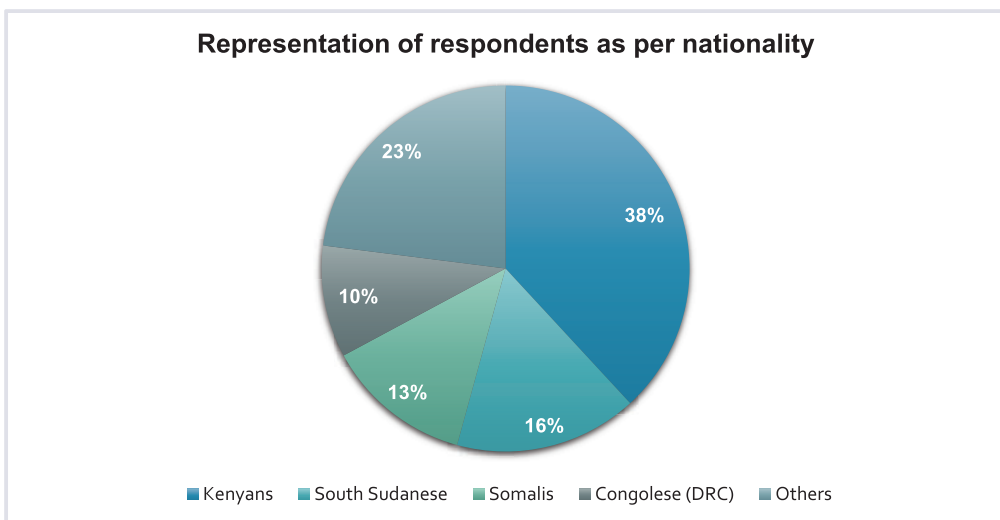


Figure 1: Representation of survey respondents as per nationality

The age profile was largely adult, with the 25-35 age group constituting the largest segment (42.99%), followed by 36-50 year-olds (32.18%) and 18-24 year-olds (16.55%), while those aged 51 and above formed the smallest group (8.28%). Educational attainment indicated a substantial portion with no formal education (41.94%), followed by secondary level (27.88%), tertiary level (16.13%), and primary level (14.06%) as demonstrated in the Figure 2 below:

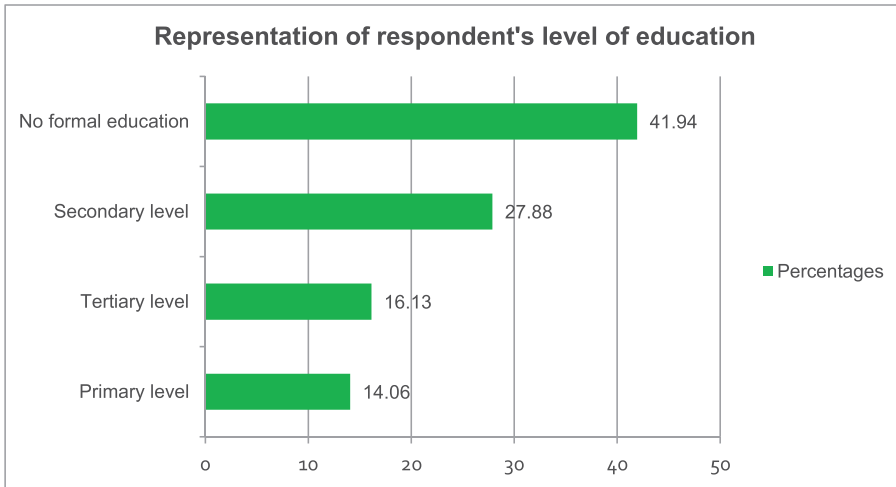


Figure 2: Representation of survey respondents as per level of education

Geographically, respondents were spread across nine regions within Kakuma Municipality as shown below:

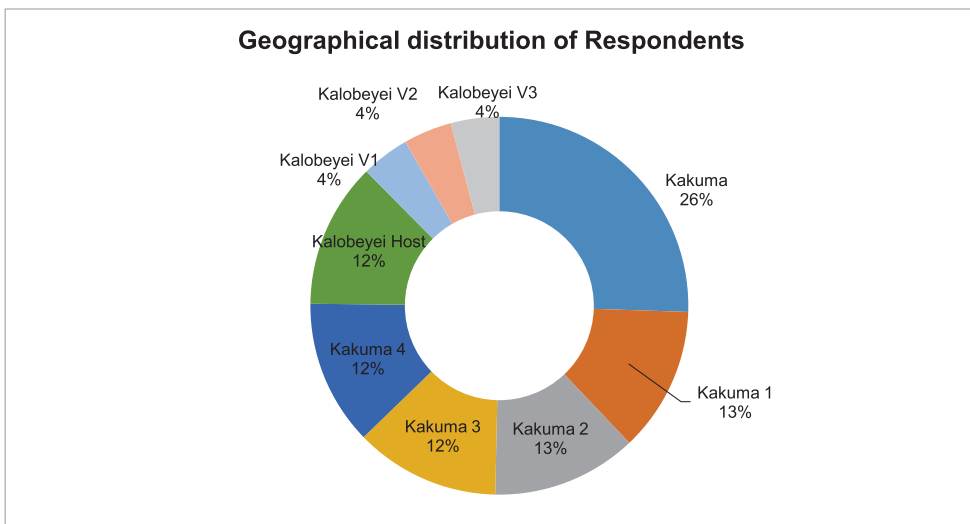


Figure 3: Representation of survey respondents as per geographical distribution

1.3.4 Data analysis

Two key approaches were used in data analysis. The thematic analysis approach was employed for the qualitative research design, recognised for its effectiveness in identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Nowell et al., 2017). Specifically, the study adopted the thematic analysis framework as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2019). This conceptualisation involves a six-step process that emphasises capturing rich, detailed, and nuanced interpretations of data. These steps included familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the identified themes, defining and naming themes, and ultimately producing a comprehensive research report. This approach aimed to systematically organise qualitative data and derive meaningful insights across different dimensions of the research phenomena. The analysis further incorporated insights from scholars such as Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), who emphasised a thorough exploration of the dataset to identify recurring patterns, and Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012), who advocate for a comprehensive approach that considers individuals, settings, and temporal contexts.

The voices and stories captured during data collection were documented in a documentary film, which serves as a powerful visual record and advocacy tool for social cohesion within Kakuma Municipality. The participatory nature of the research ensured that the findings are not only academically robust but also practically relevant, providing actionable recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders.

Quantitative analysis was done using STATA 18 for detailed analysis. Charts were generated using the standard Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, and the data were summarised through descriptive statistics. The analysis also examined patterns and observable relationships between different variables that represented social cohesion. Then, depending on further queries, made use of inferential statistical tests using Correlation and Regression analyses. This method offered valuable insights into the interdependence of variables, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships within the research data. This rigorous quantitative framework provided an evidence-based understanding of the 'what' and 'how much' of the cohesion challenges, offering insights for developing targeted and effective interventions in the complex Kakuma context.

The outcome was a Research Report that was subsequently subjected to internal validation by NCIC, AIPG and RCK, before being externally confirmed by stakeholders drawn from representations of community members drawn from both the host and refugee communities, as well as state and non-state actors.

1.4 Definition of key terms

To ensure clarity and consistency throughout this study, the following section defines key terms and concepts as operationalised within the study:

Asylum seeker

An asylum-seeker is an individual who has fled their country of origin and applied for asylum in another country, but their claim to refugee status has not yet been processed. While not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee, every refugee was initially an asylum-seeker.

Differentiated Assistance

Differentiated assistance is an approach that prioritises tailored humanitarian and development assistance based on individual needs and capacities rather than registration status. It aims to reduce dependency on aid, while upholding the principles of do no harm and inclusive community engagement for sustainable impact (WFP, 2025)

Integration

Integration denotes the inclusion of refugees into the social, economic, cultural and institutional life of the host society, enabling them to access services, contribute economically and participate in community life on similar terms as hosts (Debbarma, 2025)

Shirika Plan

The Shirika Plan is a granular plan to transform refugee camps into integrated settlements that support the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees and host communities in Garissa, Turkana, and urban areas. The end state of this phase is that the refugees will eventually stop relying on aid and become self-sufficient through the whole-of-society approach that includes refugees and host communities

Social cohesion

In the context of this study, social cohesion refers to the trust, cooperation, sense of belonging and shared identity or mutual respect amongst refugees, and between refugees and host communities

Refugee

The Refugees Act 2021 defines a refugee as an individual who, being outside their country of nationality or habitual residence, possesses a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, and is consequently unable or unwilling to seek protection from their home country. This definition also extends to stateless persons under similar circumstances of persecution, as well as those compelled to leave their habitual residence due to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination, or severe disturbances to public order in their country of origin.

1.5 Structure of the Report

This report is structured into five comprehensive chapters. Chapter One sets the background and tone by demonstrating the context of refugees and refugee management in Kenya. Chapter Two comprehensively reviews the existing literature, synthesising current discourse on refugees and social cohesion that underpins the analysis. Chapter Three examines the impediments to peace in Kakuma Municipality, analysing the environmental, socio-cultural, governance, and security factors that undermine social cohesion and perpetuate conflict between refugee and host communities. Chapter Four documents the connectors and resilience factors that facilitate cooperation and mutual support, highlighting the social, economic, institutional, and cultural mechanisms through which communities deal with challenges and sustain interdependence. Chapter Five concludes the report by presenting emerging issues, concludes the study by synthesising reflections, and offers recommendations aimed at building sustainable peace and inclusive development in Kakuma Municipality and Turkana County in general.

1.6 Summary

This chapter has laid the groundwork for understanding critical aspects of refugee and refugee management in Kenya. Additionally, the chapter provides a clear rationale for this study, emphasising its role in fostering overall social cohesion and stability between refugees and the host communities in Kakuma Municipality, Turkana County. It also outlines the methodology that was adopted, in a bid to ensure a systematic and rigorous approach to the research. Furthermore, key terms and concepts are defined to provide clarity and context, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The chapter sets the stage for a detailed examination of the existing literature and policy landscapes, underlining the necessity for a thorough assessment of refugee management not just in Kenya, but within the region and globally.

Chapter Two

REFUGEE DYNAMICS AND SOCIAL COHESION



2.1 Introduction

This chapter situates refugee dynamics and social cohesion within Kenya's broader policy and governance context, examining the historical evolution of refugee reception from 1992 to the present, the operational challenges to inter-communal harmony in Kakuma Municipality, and the legal and policy frameworks that structure this space. The analysis further exposes how existing policies fall short in addressing the needs and rights of refugees, ultimately affecting their integration and well-being within host communities in Kakuma Municipality.

2.2 History of refugees in Kenya

Kenya's long history as a host nation for refugees dates back to its accession to international conventions such as the 1951 UN Convention² and its 1967 Protocol³, and the 1969 OAU Convention⁴, which expand the scope of protection and acknowledge the evolving realities of forced displacement for refugees. Early refugee influxes in the 1970s saw Kenya hosting Ugandans displaced by political instability. However, the 1990s marked a significant shift in Kenya's refugee policy with major influxes from Somalia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan (Ali & Ocha, 2018), leading the government to move from an initial open-door policy to a more restrictive encampment policy around 1991, centralising refugees in designated camps (Nanima, 2021). The reasons driving refugees to seek shelter in Kenya over the years include conflict, persecution, food insecurity, and the consequences of climate change, such as drought and floods. The camp provides essential shelter, protection, and basic services to these displaced populations, offering a temporary refuge amid ongoing regional conflicts and instability (Lojo-Rodríguez & Pereira-Ares, 2024).

Building on the 2006 legislation, Kenya enacted the 2021 Refugee Act, which broadened the rights afforded to refugees from the East African region, including enhanced freedom of movement and work. This legislative reform reflected Kenya's dedication to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and its pledges to institute comprehensive refugee integration socially, culturally, and economically, by ensuring access to national public services.

Kakuma Refugee Camp was established in 1992, specifically to accommodate the thousands of Sudanese fleeing the second Sudanese civil war. The camp was initially set up after approximately 7,000 people arrived in Lokichoggio near the Sudanese

² Key legal document that defines who qualifies as a refugee and outlines the protections afforded to refugees and the obligations of states to uphold these rights

³ An international legal instrument that expands the scope of protection and acknowledges the evolving realities of forced displacement

⁴ A regional legal framework designed to address the needs and rights of refugees within the African context

border in 1991; later, the camp was relocated to Kakuma Town in June 1992 (Alix-Garcia et al., 2017). This area, formerly a traditional watering and meeting point for Turkana pastoralists, became the site for what would grow into one of Africa's largest refugee settlements (Brankamp, 2021). The camp is located in a remote, semi-arid desert environment in Turkana County, approximately 120 km from Lodwar and 130 km from the South Sudan border. The name Kakuma, in the local Turkana language, means 'the place of the giant tortoise' (the Turkana word for tortoise is akumurae) (Vemuru et al., 2016). It was a seasonal communal gathering ground where various Turkana adakars (family groups or sub-clans) would bring their livestock to graze and access water during the wet season.

Kakuma Municipality refugee camp currently hosts approximately 305,421 refugees as of 30th April 2025 (DRS, 2025). UNHCR joined forces with the Kenyan government to manage Kakuma refugee camp since its establishment in 1992. Initially, the Kenyan government, facing financial constraints, handed over full control of refugee protection and the refugee screening process to UNHCR following the arrival of the Sudanese and the camp's relocation in June 1992 (Alix-Garcia et al., 2017). UNHCR then served as the primary manager of the camp for 25 years, from 1992 until 2016. Since 2016, there has been a shift towards a more collaborative approach, with the Kenyan government actively retaking key responsibilities in refugee protection, and both entities, alongside local authorities and partners, guiding initiatives such as the Kalobeyei settlement (Betts et al., 2019).

2.3 Challenges to peaceful co-existence in Kakuma Municipality

The conflicts in Kakuma are dynamic in nature, informed by a pattern of recurring tensions among the refugees and between the refugee and host communities. Conflict is experienced between the refugee and host communities, as well as amongst the different groups of refugees. Inter-group conflict among refugees arises from several triggers, including resource sharing and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Ethnic and cultural differences among the diverse refugee populations further exacerbate internal conflicts, as individuals struggle to assert their identities and safeguard their interests in an overcrowded environment (Betts et. al., 2022). Resource scarcity, particularly competition for water and pasture, exacerbates tensions, especially as nomadic pastoralists cross borders in search of these resources (Kumssa et al., 2009). Feelings of economic disparity also fuel conflict between the refugee population and the host community, who perceive refugees as being privileged due to the aid they receive. Vemuru and others (2016) note that the Turkana host community perceive the actions of NGOs, UN agencies, and the government as unfair due to the distribution of aid or resources, resulting in tensions. These conflicts ultimately result in economic hardship, social disruption, and psychosocial stress, with women

and youth disproportionately affected. The presence of the refugee population has implications for national policies on migration, development, and security, making it crucial to understand how to better manage refugee-host relations to foster peace and social cohesion while ensuring sustainable development for both refugees and host communities.

2.4 Legal and policy frameworks

Legal and policy frameworks for refugee protection provide the formal architecture through which rights, responsibilities and governance arrangements are established. These structures strongly influence whether refugees and host communities can live together in harmony (Betts, 2010). In some contexts, such as Kakuma Municipality, these frameworks matter not only for humanitarian protection, but also for social cohesion, integration and sustainable development (Al-Hamad et al., 2025). The section below explores the global, regional and local dimensions of the legal and policy framework governing refugee management.

2.4.1 International legal and policy frameworks

The international legal framework defines the core rights and responsibilities in refugee management, shaping state policies and, consequently, affecting social cohesion (Bhura, 2025). The 1951 UN Convention and its 1967 UN Protocol collectively define who qualifies as a refugee, enshrine the fundamental principle of non-refoulement, and outline a catalogue of minimum rights, which in many circumstances include access to courts, work, and education (Vorvornator, 2024). This framework is further supported by broader human-rights treaties such as the Convention against Torture (CAT) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), with Kenya being a State Party to the 1951 UN Convention and its 1967 UN Protocol, having acceded in the 1960s. CAT and the ICCPR complement obligations relevant to refugees' physical security, liberty and civil-political rights (protection against torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; due process rights against detention; freedom of expression and association) (Alexander, 2024).

At the normative level, international refugee and human-rights law promotes two cohesion-friendly principles: non-discrimination (equal treatment of refugees with respect to fundamental rights and access to basic services) and security of status and legal predictability (procedures for status determination, appeal and legal remedies) (Quddus et al., 2025). When implemented, these principles reduce perceptions of unfair advantage or exclusion that commonly drive local tensions. Host communities are less likely to resent refugees if services and rights are allocated transparently and if refugees have legal avenues for work, movement and participation (Quddus et al., 2025).

2.4.2 Regional legal and policy frameworks

At the continental level, the African Union (AU) established the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention governing the specific aspects of refugee problems in Africa (1969) to address refugee protection across Africa, complementing the global 1951 Refugee Convention (Meity & Utami, 2024). Under this Convention, asylum is recognised as a humanitarian act, and Member States commit to receiving refugees, granting temporary residence if needed and ensuring against return to danger (non-refoulement). Crucially, Article IV articulates a non-discrimination clause: refugees must be protected without discrimination on grounds of race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion (Vorvornator, 2024). This regional instrument provides legal legitimacy, within the African context, for protection, asylum and solidarity, offering a normative foundation for refugee inclusion and, by extension, potential social cohesion with host communities.

Separately, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention, 2009) addresses internal displacement (Gul et al., 2025). While the Kampala Convention principally concerns internally displaced persons (IDPs), not refugees, it reinforces humanitarian solidarity, obligations to protect displaced populations and the importance of durable solutions, themes that resonate with refugee-hosting contexts. Its emphasis on assistance, local integration or reintegration, prevention of root causes and cross-state cooperation creates a broader continental legal culture of protecting displaced persons and addressing displacement's social and security implications. Together, the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention and the Kampala Convention reflect an African collective commitment to manage displacement in a way that combines protection, solidarity among states and respect for human dignity, elements that underpin the possibility of refugee-host coexistence, social cohesion and long-term integration (Dan, 2024).

Intergovernmental Authority on Development Frameworks

At the regional level in the East and Horn of Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has developed a comprehensive approach to refugee protection and durable solutions (Quddus et al., 2025). Through its IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection (latest 2024), building on the 2017 Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and its accompanying Plan of Action, IGAD Member States commit to ensuring access to essential services (education, health, livelihoods), socioeconomic integration or reintegration and self-reliance for refugees and hosts alike (Quddus et al., 2025). The 2017 Declaration shifted regional thinking from considering displacement as a purely humanitarian or security challenge to seeing it as a development and regional responsibility-sharing issue (Okello,

2024). Through this framework, IGAD seeks to harmonise policies across Member States, foster cooperation in reintegration/return and promote long-term solutions for refugees, including local integration where applicable. The establishment of the IGAD Support Platform at the 2019 global refugee forum is one concrete mechanism supporting these commitments: through the Platform, IGAD mobilises technical, financial and development support, engages private sector and civil society and tracks implementation of pledges for protection, inclusion, livelihoods and self-reliance (Quddus et al., 2025).

In June 2023, IGAD, in partnership with the East African Community (EAC), adopted the Munyonyo Declaration⁵ on Durable Solutions for Refugees in the East and Horn of Africa, expanding commitments to broader refugee populations beyond Somali refugees, addressing root causes of displacement, protection, socio-economic inclusion, local integration, return, resettlement, burden-sharing and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. This demonstrates regional policy evolution towards inclusion, integration and shared responsibility (Ginn & Tang, 2025).

The regional legal and policy frameworks discussed offer significant normative and practical avenues for enhancing social cohesion between refugees and host communities in countries such as Kenya. The commitment of Member States to non-discrimination, protection, and inclusion, as articulated through AU and IGAD instruments, establishes a legal and moral basis for treating refugees as integral to broader society, thereby reducing stigma, inequality, and exclusion. This commitment is further strengthened by IGAD's particular emphasis on self-reliance, livelihoods, and socio-economic integration, which actively supports inclusion by enabling refugees to contribute economically and socially to host communities. Such contributions intrinsically foster mutual dependence, respect, and local cohesion. Secondly, regional coordination and burden-sharing help lower the pressure on individual host countries, thereby reducing competition over resources and services that often fuel tensions between refugees and hosts. The IGAD Support Platform and regional peer commitments also open room for development-oriented interventions (education, jobs, health), benefiting both refugees and host communities, and encouraging shared growth rather than zero-sum competition.

⁵The Munyonyo Declaration on Durable Solutions for Refugees, adopted in 2023, is a regional commitment by IGAD member states and partners to address refugee issues comprehensively, emphasizing self-reliance, inclusion, and the pursuit of lasting solutions such as voluntary repatriation, local integration, and resettlement.

2.4.3 Legal and Policy Frameworks in Kenya

Kenya hosts one of Africa's largest refugee populations, and its national legal and policy frameworks shape how refugees interact with host communities, access services and participate in economic and social life (Njagi, 2025). These structures have undergone significant reforms in the last decade, particularly with the 2021 Refugees Act and a set of national and county-aligned integrated development plans. The following legal and policy frameworks govern refugee affairs in Kenya:

The Constitution of Kenya 2010

The Constitution of Kenya, 2010, provides the overarching legal framework that shapes the rights, protection and governance conditions under which refugees and asylum seekers live in Kenya. Although the Constitution does not explicitly mention refugees, its Bill of Rights applies to 'all persons', thereby extending constitutional protections to refugees, asylum seekers and other non-citizens residing within Kenyan territory (Constitution of Kenya, 2010, Art. 19-20). This broad rights framework establishes a critical foundation for social cohesion in displacement contexts such as Kakuma Municipality.

In the context of social cohesion, the Constitution provides a normative basis for equality in access to justice, participation in social and economic life and non-discriminatory service delivery. These constitutional guarantees support interactions between refugees and host communities, particularly where public services (health, education, security, water) are shared. However, gaps are inevitable where sectoral policies constrain constitutional rights, administrative practices or resource limitations. For instance, while the Constitution guarantees equality, practical restrictions on movement, delays in documentation, or uneven access to economic opportunities may limit the realisation of these rights in places like Kakuma. These implementation gaps can create uncertainty, frustration and perceptions of unequal treatment, thereby affecting social cohesion.

Overall, the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 establishes strong legal foundations for the protection, dignity and inclusion of refugees. Yet, the extent to which these constitutional guarantees translate into everyday fairness and cooperation between refugees and host communities depends heavily on harmonisation with national legislation, administrative capacity and local governance practices in Turkana County.

Refugees Act, 2021

The Refugees Act 2021 and the Refugees (General) Regulations 2024⁶ represent the most substantial overhaul of refugee governance in Kenya in two decades. It replaces the 2006 Refugees Act and attempts to harmonise Kenyan policy with the 1951 Convention, the 1969 OAU Convention and evolving regional commitments under IGAD. The Act broadens rights, restructures governance and signals a partial shift from encampment toward inclusion and self-reliance. The 2021 Act aligns with Kenya's gradual shift toward a more integration-oriented approach. Although camps remain, the law supports initiatives such as settlement transformation and the expansion of integrated development plans. By legally opening pathways for work, training and shared service systems, the Act provides a national framework conducive to social and economic interaction between refugees and hosts.

The Act further establishes the Department of Refugee Services (DRS), situated within the State Department for Immigration and Citizen Services under the Ministry of Interior and National Administration. The DRS serves as the statutory body responsible for the management and provision of assistance to refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya. Its core functions include receiving and registering refugees and asylum seekers, and issuing the requisite legal documentation necessary for their protection and lawful stay in the country.

Other National and State-Led Integration Policies

Kenya's shift toward a more inclusive, development-oriented refugee management model is articulated through several national integration frameworks, particularly the Shirika Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (2025)⁷, the Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan⁸ (KISED) and the Garissa Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan⁹ (GISED).

The Shirika Plan (2025) positions refugee inclusion as part of Kenya's broader social and economic transformation agenda. It promotes a 'settlement transformation model', which envisions refugee-hosting areas such as Kakuma transitioning from isolated humanitarian spaces into integrated urbanising areas with shared systems for service delivery, infrastructure, markets, environmental management and local governance.

⁶https://www.parliament.go.ke/sites/default/files/2024-02/The%20refugees%28General%29%20regulations%2C%202024_0.pdf

⁷<https://refugee.go.ke/sites/default/files/2025-04/SHIRIKA%20PLAN%20FOR%20REFUGEES%20AND%20HOST%20COMMUNITIES.pdf>

⁸<https://www.unhcr.org/ke/media/kisedp-kalobeyei-integrated-socio-econ-dev-programme-pdf>

⁹<https://www.unhcr.org/ke/media/gisedp-1-main-report-final-26092023-pdf>

The Plan embeds inclusion into 10 core pillars, including: shared social services (health, education, water, sanitation); integrated markets and livelihoods; local infrastructure development; area-based planning; environmental management; safety and security; documentation systems; and coordinated governance across national, county, and municipal actors. Consistent with Kenya's commitment under the Global Compact on Refugees,¹⁰ The Plan directs that refugees and host communities should benefit jointly from development investments. It prioritises expanding county-run service systems (particularly education and health), strengthening municipal administrations (such as Kakuma Municipality), integrating refugee data into national information systems, and enhancing refugee self-reliance through access to work opportunities, skills training, and financial services.

Together, these instruments represent a deliberate move away from encampment and toward a whole-of-government, area-based inclusion approach that integrates refugees into national systems while strengthening host-community development. The Shirika Plan, in particular, operationalises Kenya's policy shift envisioned under the Refugees Act (2021) by setting out a structured pathway for refugee inclusion within national and county development plans.

2.4.4 Identified gaps and challenges

Several progressive legal and policy frameworks exist at global, regional, and local levels within Kenya to guide refugee management and integration. Despite these advancements, numerous structural and operational challenges persist, threatening the intended cohesion benefits in Kakuma Municipality.

Coordination Gaps

Policy implementation requires coordination across national agencies (Ministry of Interior and National Administration, Department of Refugee Services (DRS)-State Department for Immigration and Citizen Services), county governments, humanitarian actors, and local municipalities.

Funding and political constraints

Inclusion policies depend on substantial resources. Yet, development financing commitments under Shirika Plan, KISED P and GISED P remain uneven; donor funding is on a sharp decline; national budget allocations for DRS remain low; county level fiscal capacity is equally constrained and political debates on security and migration; are among the factors which have hampered the smooth implementation of these

¹⁰<https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-compact-refugees-booklet>

good policies seeking to enhancing integration inadvertently worsening tensions the host and Refugees. The Host communities feel left out or underserved relative to refugees.

Community-level tensions

Legal frameworks alone cannot eliminate cohesion challenges at the grassroots level, including competition for water, grazing land and jobs; perceptions of unequal aid distribution, and cultural misunderstandings or stereotypes. Unofficial restrictions (security checkpoints, informal fees, slow issuance of documents) can further create friction. The Rift Valley Institute (2024) reports that economic inequality between refugee businesses and host communities sometimes ignites local grievances, especially when regulatory enforcement differs among populations.

At the local level, the County Government of Turkana plays a central role in shaping how refugees and host communities live together (Rodgers, 2021). The county's development aspirations are laid out in its County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP), which explicitly recognises that areas such as Kakuma Municipality and Kalobeyei Settlement host significant refugee populations (reportedly making up ~15 % of the county population) and calls for inclusive planning for both refugees and host-community (Rodgers, 2021). With the formal establishment of Kakuma Municipality transforming the former refugee camp zone into a municipal administrative area, local governance structures have begun to assume responsibility for urban planning, land-use mapping, public utilities and service delivery (Njagi, 2025).

Despite these efforts, capacity gaps remain a critical challenge at the local level. For instance, local institutions have consistently received limited human and financial resources, and yet integrating refugee-serving infrastructure into county systems requires sustained funds, technical planning and coordination among multiple actors, such as county departments, municipal offices, humanitarian agencies and private/international partners. In a nutshell, at the county/municipal level, Turkana's CIDP and the establishment of Kakuma Municipality provide institutional and spatial frameworks for integrating refugees and hosts under a shared local governance structure. However, the success of local cohesion depends heavily on bridging capacity and resource gaps, ensuring local institutions can deliver shared services and uphold inclusive planning.

Structural vs. Operational barriers

At the structural level, ambiguous or incomplete legal and policy provisions, especially around land tenure, movement, resource access and long-term inclusion, create uncertainty. For example, while the national Refugees Act 2021 provides a formal basis for inclusion and rights, the absence of a clear legal pathway for land ownership

or long-term residence undermines full integration, limiting refugees to a semi-permanent status. Researchers from Refugees International note that the lack of clarity over land tenure has already deterred investments such as prefabricated housing for refugees. On the operational side, insufficient resources, weak administrative capacity and uneven or delayed implementation of integration policies undermine benefits in practice. For instance, the shift under the Shirika Plan toward municipal integration and shared services is welcomed, but actual rollout remains slow and patchy, especially in infrastructure, livelihoods and documentation.

2.5 Summary

Kenya has experienced significant influxes of refugees, particularly from regional conflicts, since the early 1990s. The predominant policy shifted from an initial open-door approach to a more restrictive encampment policy, especially after 1991, culminating in the Refugees Act 2021. Despite this progressive legislative framework, challenges to peaceful coexistence in areas such as Kakuma Municipality remain. Critical analysis reveals that despite the 2021 Act's intention to empower refugees and domesticate durable solutions, significant gaps persist in its implementation, evidenced by weak grassroots legal education, insufficient funding, and continued practical confinement of refugees that limits their rights to mobility and work. These structural impediments highlight the ongoing tension between policy and realities on the ground, which ultimately affect social cohesion and the long-term well-being of both refugee and host populations.

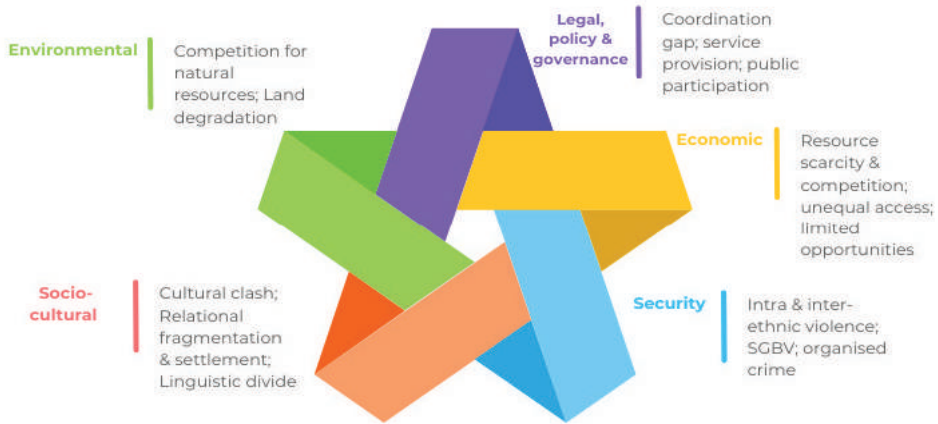
Chapter Three

IMPEDIMENTS TO PEACE IN KAKUMA MUNICIPALITY



3.1 Introduction

This section examines the various impediments to peace and cohesion in Kakuma Municipality, having undertaken a comprehensive review of their interconnectedness and the overall impact on the diverse population, i.e., the refugees and the host communities. These factors include environmental, socio-cultural, security, economic, legal, policy and governance.



3.2 Environmental Factors

Kakuma Municipality lies within a fragile, semi-arid ecosystem where natural resources are inherently limited and highly sensitive to human pressures. Over the past three decades, the steady influx of large refugee populations, coupled with rapid urbanisation, climate variability, and shifts in traditional livelihood practices, has intensified competition for essential environmental assets, particularly water, arable land, grazing areas, and vegetation. In this context, environmental pressures are not peripheral challenges; they form the very foundation of many host–refugee tensions. Scarcity of these vital resources shapes everyday interactions, influences livelihood strategies, and often triggers disputes that can escalate into broader conflict.

3.2.1 Competition for Limited Natural Resources

The arid climate of Turkana County, compounded by climate change, places severe and persistent pressure on the region’s natural resources. Water sources are scarce, vegetation cover is limited, and grazing lands are increasingly degraded. Prolonged dry spells, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and widespread soil erosion reduce household water and food availability, undermining livestock productivity as a critical livelihood source for both host communities and refugees. These environmental stresses heighten competition over an already limited resource base, intensifying the potential for disputes.

Water

Water scarcity is particularly an acute pressure point, as the available seasonal rivers and limited boreholes cannot meet the needs of both refugees and host populations. Refugee settlements often benefit from camp-managed water infrastructure, providing more reliable access to clean water, while host communities frequently rely on distant, unreliable, or polluted sources. This disparity fosters resentment, particularly during the dry season when water is critical for both households and livestock.

Refugees have water, while we (the hosts) rely on getting water from the luggas, which is dirty. Many times it’s not even there, and our women have to walk long distances. Just walk around and observe, you will realise that people are wearing dirty clothes and look so unkempt. How can you afford water for hygiene when you don’t even have a little to drink? That is where conflict comes from (KII Host)

On the host side, there is no water because of climate change, and Turkana is generally a dry area. Most of the time, conflicts happen around water points because sometimes they have no choice but to come and fetch water here (camp). And when they do so, they always find us (refugees) there. And somehow they feel they have more rights to the water than us; so that is where the conflicts always begin (FGD, Refugee)

Land Usage and Access

Perceptions gleaned from FGDs and participant interviews highlighted land use as a significant source of conflict between the host community and refugees. Both the host community and refugees rely on the land for grazing livestock, cultivating crops, and constructing shelters. Members of the host community expressed bitterness for having been forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands to make room for refugee settlement. A case in point is the tension that occurred during the establishment of the Kalobeyei settlement, where host community members strongly resisted the move. They argued that their land and resources were being appropriated without proper consultation, leading to frustration and tensions between the two groups.

We have hosted them (refugees) for over 30 years. First of all, the land was only meant to be temporary, but they keep expanding and expanding. They recently came up with the Kalobeyei settlement, which really caused a lot of tension, because our people felt it was unfair to push them out without proper consultation. Where will we graze our animals? Our land is being taken away, and we don't see an end to this (KII Host)

The expansion of refugee settlements has intensified pressure on already limited land, increasing competition between communities. Refugee cultivation plots and small-scale farming often overlap with traditional grazing areas used by pastoralist hosts, leading to recurring disputes. Participants opine that the hosts' livestock destroy crops, causing economic losses for refugee households, while hosts perceive refugee farming as encroachment on vital communal grazing land and traditional livestock routes. From the refugee perspective, such infiltrations violate scarce agricultural plots, generating frustration and a sense of injustice as one participant noted:

While no major issues are reported in day-to-day relations, a key point of contention is land allocation, which remains the 'elephant' in the room. Sometimes I want to think it borders on a clash of cultures because some of the refugees are farmers, and they value their crops. For the hosts, livestock is everything to them. And they won't mind encroaching on the farms just to ensure they are well fed. And the refugees won't take that sitting down, will they? That is what triggers conflict here (KII, Non-state Actor)

These conflicts are rooted in a long history of contested land and livelihood boundaries. Past grievances, including disputes over grazing routes, farmland access, and livestock damage, continue to shape interactions between refugees and hosts. Settlement expansion has altered access to critical environmental resources, particularly grazing land and water points relied upon by host communities. Grazing land, in particular,

has become highly contentious, as pastoralist hosts depend on seasonal pastures to sustain their livestock, which are often disrupted by refugee cultivation and settlement infrastructure, with 76.67% of the respondents affirming damage to land as a significant concern.

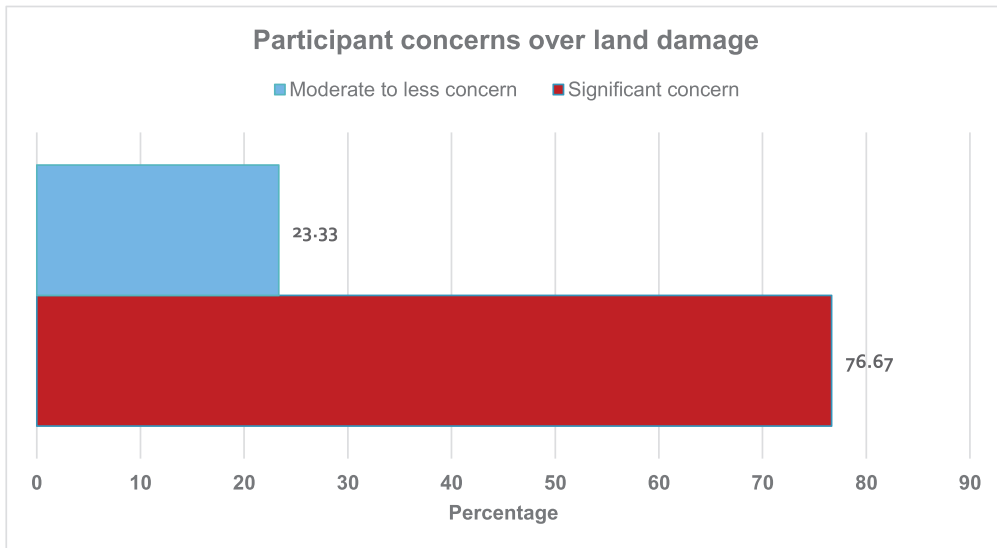


Figure 6: Representation of survey respondents' concerns over land damage in Kakuma Municipality

The host community also expressed dissatisfaction with the restricted movements in certain areas surrounding the refugee camp. They believe that, as rightful occupants of the land, they should be allowed to move freely and access all areas without limitation. Many voiced concerns regarding these restrictions, highlighting a sense of unfairness when they observed refugees freely moving outside the camp and even operating businesses in the vicinity, further exacerbating feelings of resentment, igniting tensions, and contributing to frequent conflicts between the refugees and the local population.

The reason we have always had a problem with them is that they handle us as if we don't belong here. Look, this is our land, and we were born here. Sometimes accessing the camp is a problem, and there's even a time that you shouldn't be found within the camp. But walk around town, and you will see them everywhere. They are doing business...they have big shops. They ride bodabodas, and will do so until as late as possible (FGD, Host)

Limited consultation in settlement planning further intensifies perceptions of inequity. Many community members feel excluded from decisions regarding land allocation, reinforcing a sense of marginalisation and exacerbating mistrust. Worth noting is that the Constitution mandates public participation. Article 61 grants the public a voice

in decisions related to land, while Article 69 requires the state to promote public involvement in the management, protection, and conservation of the environment. In the words of one of the participants,

No one consults you regarding land issues here. It's like we're not part of this community. They just sit somewhere and decide that this is what we're going to do henceforth. Yet our lives and livelihoods literally depend on it. The government seriously needs to up their game (FGD, Host)

3.2.2 Environmental degradation

Environmental degradation further compounds these challenges. Deforestation, overgrazing by livestock, and soil erosion diminish these critical resources, leaving both refugees and hosts vulnerable. When asked about their concerns regarding land damage, both the host community and the refugees expressed similar levels of apprehension, with 77% demonstrating significant concern about the state of their environment. In contrast, 23% indicated “moderate” to “less” concern, demonstrating the common challenges faced by both groups on environmental degradation.

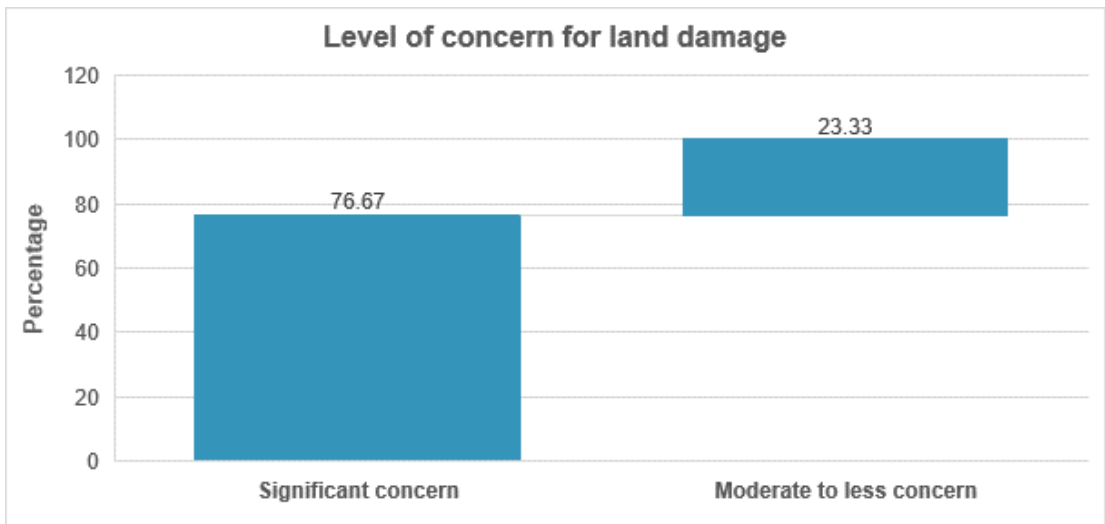


Figure 7: Representation of survey respondents' level of concern over land damage in Kakuma Municipality

Participant voices point to the fact that everyday survival strategies, such as collecting firewood, grazing livestock in restricted areas, and using limited water sources, unintentionally act as a conflict trigger between the two groups, as voiced by one of the participants:

One of the key conflict triggers we have seen here emanates from daily survival strategies that eventually affect the environment. While both groups participate in one way or another, there are often accusations and counter-accusations. The refugees face a lot of resistance when they collect firewood. They have been accused by the hosts of damaging the environment by cutting trees for firewood and construction. The refugees, on the other hand, blame the degradation on the hosts, saying they overgraze on the already depleted land, over-exploit the limited water sources, and such like things (KII, Non-State Actor)

Historically, refugees relied on surrounding forests to collect fuel, but restrictions imposed by host communities, combined with the overall depletion of forest resources, have heightened competition over these critical environmental assets. Reduced allocations of fuel under the differentiated assistance (DA) system have further compounded the problem, forcing many refugee families to venture into host-controlled areas, where they face the risk of confrontation, as one participant explained:

Firewood and charcoal have been a major cause of conflicts. If this resource is not well managed, it will soon escalate... the reduced allocation through the DA forces many families to go direct to the forest in search of firewood and charcoal and this puts them at risk of conflict with local community, and for the women and girls it exposes them to further risks, crime and vices such as rape (KII, Non-State Actor)

The burden of collecting these scarce resources often falls disproportionately on women and girls, leading to increased physical strain and exposing them to greater risks. They face harassment, including sexual assault, particularly when they are forced to travel long distances into contested or insecure areas. One participant highlighted the severity of this risk:

Women are mostly responsible for firewood collection... You find that they get attacked and violated... They are also raped as they carry charcoal for sale, because sometimes they also want to make a living, so they fetch it for selling. Sometimes they are caught there and harassed, even beaten up. But somehow they have to go back because how else do you survive (KII, Host)

This is exemplified by a recent incident of two young girls aged 12 and 14, who were sexually assaulted while collecting firewood, highlighting the dangerous nexus between environmental degradation and insecurity.

A few days ago, we had a rape case involving suspected host males of two children aged 12 and 14 years, who had gone to look for firewood. A very sad case indeed. As we speak, the children are still in the hospital (KII, State Actor)

3.3 Summary

The environmental pressures extend beyond mere environmental degradation and land use, highlighting a combination of resource scarcity, access, and gendered vulnerabilities that fuel social tensions and broader insecurity within Kakuma Municipality. The competition for these vital resources, exacerbated by restricted access and dwindling supply, not only creates resentment and conflict between and within communities but also contributes to a sense of insecurity, demonstrating that environmental issues are deeply embedded in the region's socio-economic and political fabric.

3.4 Socio-Cultural Factors

Kakuma is home to diverse nationalities from across the world, but mainly from Eastern Africa. As refugees arrive from various countries, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds, they bring with them diverse traditions, languages and customs of their home countries, which ordinarily should enrich the camp with beautiful diversity. However, the study augments these differences as one of the major conflict drivers amongst refugees and between the refugees and host communities.

3.4.1 Cultural Clash

The study highlights cultural clashes as the main source of conflict in Kakuma Municipality. With nationalities from over 22 countries, including Somalia, South Sudan, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Burundi, Sudan, Uganda, Eritrea, and Rwanda inter alia living within the camp, refugees create a complex cultural landscape that often leads to conflict. Although the diversity brings a variety of lifestyles and traditions, study findings lend credibility to the fact that these diversities contribute to mistrust among the approximately 305,421 refugees living within the Municipality. According to study participants, their unique cultural practices and perspectives make certain groups perceive them as ‘outsiders’, leading to tension.

These people (South Sudanese) are always the aggressors. I invite you to check. Anytime you see a crowd of people gathered somewhere fighting or something has been stolen, I assure you, they will be there. They are the ones always fighting, always being accused of theft. Because they just want to sit. You will not find them working. They have come here with problems, and they want to drag us into their issues. You will even find them fighting among themselves (FGD, Refugee)

Another participant observed that members of the South Sudanese community often exhibit violent tendencies when interacting with others, leading to internal conflicts and heightened tensions with various groups, including the host community. In an effort to understand the roots of this violent behaviour, the participant identified certain cultural values prevalent among some South Sudanese communities that associate heroism with dominance. As he explained, ‘Once you win at anything, you are regarded as a hero. Maybe that is why they are very combative, highlighting how deep-rooted societal notions of success and heroism can contribute to aggressive behaviour within different cultures, perpetuating cycles of conflict within and outside the community.

The finding on cultural clash is corroborated by a survey that established that 72.45% of refugees feel unsafe living alongside other refugees. Furthermore, 64.89% reported experiencing ongoing problems with fellow refugees from different tribes or clans.

Additionally, 63.35% expressed that they are often treated poorly by other refugees, while 74.63% confirmed that cultural differences frequently result in conflicts. Essentially, the study established that conflicts among refugees are more prevalent than those between refugees and host communities.

Refugee-refugee issues in Kakuma Municipality

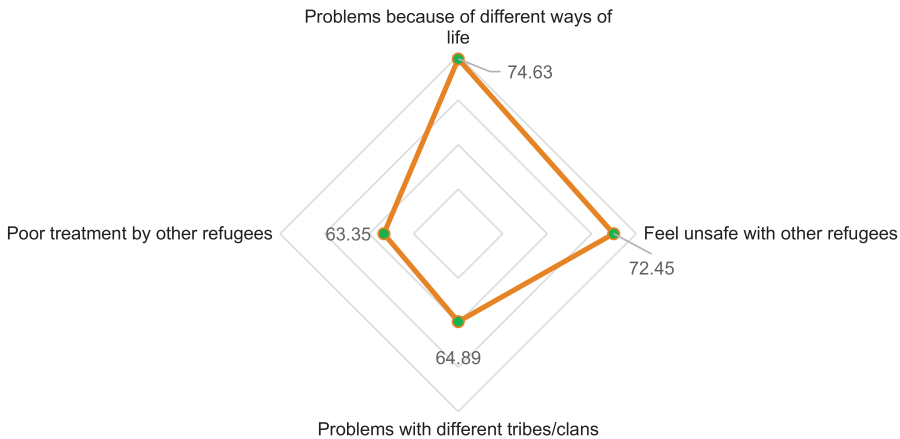


Figure 9: Representation of survey respondents' feelings regarding refugee-refugee issues in Kakuma Municipality

When the results regarding the biggest worries among refugees were subjected to principal component analysis (PCA), three significant components emerged that met the eigenvalue greater-than-one retention criterion, collectively explaining 67.46% of the total variance. These components include: Interpersonal and aid-related conflicts; safety and intra-group tensions; and institutional and cultural barriers. This analysis corroborates the findings that the diverse ways of life among refugees represent a key factor contributing to conflict within the camp, illustrating how differing cultural backgrounds, expectations, and experiences create friction and challenge coexistence amongst refugees in Kakuma Municipality.

Table 1: Rotated Components Loadings

	Variable	Comp1	Comp2	Comp3	Unexplained
1	Problems between different tribes or clans	.	0.6791	.	0.3156
2	Feeling unsafe	.	0.7285	.	0.2698
3	Being treated badly by other refugees	-0.6291	.	.	0.2784
4	Problems due to different ways of life among refugees	0.4647	.	0.5505	0.3699
5	Govt rules that cause problems, fear, uncertainty	.	.	0.7847	0.2485
6	Aid categorisation	0.5904	.	.	0.4702

Source: NCIC Statistical PCA Outcome (blanks are |loading| < 0.3)

3.4.2 Relational Fragmentation and Resettlement

The study established that relational fragmentation, particularly in the context of marriages, relationships and resettlement, plays an important role in shaping the experiences of both refugees and host communities in Kakuma Municipality, as described below:

Intermarriages and Relationships

The study identifies intermarriages between the host community and refugees, as well as among different refugee groups, as a significant source of tension. Cultural differences, resettlement interests, and external pressures heavily influence these dynamics. Specifically, South Sudanese families are noted for their strong opposition to their daughters marrying men from the host community or other refugee groups. On the other hand, the Turkana host community expressed dissatisfaction with the way refugees are marrying their daughters. In traditional Turkana culture, the sanctity of marriage was highly valued, as unions were carefully planned and celebrated through a process that involved both families. However, this tradition is increasingly being challenged by the untraditional elopement of Turkana girls with refugees. Refugees often argue that they cannot meet the customary demands or do not fully relate to Turkana cultural practices, leading to heightened tensions and conflict between the Turkana community and the refugee population.

South Sudanese don't like us marrying their women and girls. They are violent, and even when they marry our girls, they abuse them. Yet, we have witnessed some refugees here elope with our girls without consent. Some claim that it is the girls who followed them willingly. Yet for us, marriage was highly celebrated and carefully planned. Even if one eloped, they would still come back to initiate marriage proceedings and to take responsibility for their actions. But these just take your girls and sit comfortably (KII, Host)

Beyond intermarriages, relationships between girls and boys were highlighted as triggers for conflict, particularly between the Turkana host community and refugees from South Sudan. This is exemplified by a case involving a boy from the host community who impregnated a girl from the South Sudanese refugee community. In response to this situation, young men from South Sudan expressed their dissent and physically confronted the boy, beating him severely enough that he required hospitalisation. This case highlights the fragility of inter-communal relationships in the context of diverse backgrounds and expectations.

Resettlement

In terms of resettlement, challenges have emerged, particularly when one partner takes the children and leaves the other partner, mostly the host, behind in Kenya. Instances have been reported where a partner's resettlement in another country has created tensions, with hosts often feeling like victims of abandonment. They question the rationale behind such actions, especially when they are married and believe they should be repatriated together. One participant narrated a case where his partner (a refugee) reportedly took away their children and left the country, leaving him behind.

While the study highlights numerous issues surrounding intermarriages that can lead to tension and, at times, violent confrontations, it also records a perspective from some host participants who expressed a more positive outlook on their relationships with refugees. These individuals noted that, having lived alongside refugees for an extended period, they had developed a level of familiarity and understanding that contributes to relatively harmonious interactions. Although they acknowledged the existence of conflicts due to cultural differences and misunderstandings, they attributed these challenges to the complexities inherent in any relationship. Worth noting is that they appreciated that refugees have brought new dynamics into their community, providing opportunities for creating new familial bonds, as they now have wives and husbands within their midst, as voiced below:

The truth is, we have issues, yes. Especially if you enter the camp, especially at night, as a local, you risk your life; you could be attacked, robbed, or even killed. But the truth is, we live with these people (refugees). Some of them are our wives and husbands. We have built families together. Where else would we have gotten spouses if they didn't come? So we have issues like any other marriage would, but we are glad that these unions exist (FGD, Host)

Witchcraft

A clash between traditional practices and the norms of the refugee setting within Kakuma Municipality emerges as a form of conflict, particularly concerning allegations

of witchcraft among communities from the Great Lakes region, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan. Participants reported fears and suspicions surrounding members of the South Sudanese community, with claims that witchcraft was being employed to ‘put someone in a bottle’, a metaphor indicating supernatural harm or control. Apart from causing tension between deeply held cultural beliefs and the evolving social dynamics of the refugee camp, participants expressed concerns regarding the potential social repercussions. These include exclusion, stigmatisation, and even violence against those accused.

It's tough because these are not just stories; when someone is accused, it can lead to real violence. People start to distance themselves, and those accused can feel completely isolated. Who wants to associate themselves with someone who practices witchcraft? Sometimes you don't even want to go do any work in their homes...even eat their food. You almost feel you will not succeed in life, and so you keep your distance. There are a lot of whispers, especially targeting these Great Lakes guys (KII, Host)

3.4.3 Linguistic Divide

Language barrier is a significant challenge within Kakuma Municipality, contributing to poor relationships and limiting effective conflict resolution, not only between host and refugee communities, but also among refugees themselves. There is evidence that misunderstandings have arisen due to misinterpretation of intent, leading to tensions and exacerbating existing social divisions. With the camp hosting individuals from over 22 nationalities, most of them from diverse linguistic backgrounds, participants noted that the diversity sometimes thwarts interactions as individuals cannot fully express themselves. This contributes to disputes, feelings of alienation and generally hinders social inclusion.

There are so many of us here from different parts of the world, yet sometimes we only look at each other. Even when together, say at the water points, and there's an issue, you cannot even understand each other because of our different languages. And it's worse for those who have come here recently. Sometimes they don't know a single word and cannot even ask for water (FGD, Refugee)

Worth noting is that some participants conveyed enthusiasm as some refugee children are now able to speak the local Turkana language, signifying a positive step toward enhancing mutual understanding and connection between the two groups. Some refugee children can also speak the local dialects of the other refugee groups, reflecting the gradual blending of cultures and creating opportunities for strengthened

relationships, cooperation, and a shared sense of community toward harmonious coexistence.

3.5 Summary

Socio-cultural dynamics in Kakuma Municipality exist in various facets, including cultural clash, intermarriages, relational fragmentation, and communicative barriers that complicate inter-communal harmony. The convergence of over 22 nationalities within the camp generates cultural friction, as divergent norms, values, and practices create misunderstandings that escalate into conflict. Inter-communal relationships remain strained by historical grievances imported from countries of origin, with ethnic and clan-based loyalties often superseding solidarity, thereby reinforcing segregation and reducing the ties essential for cohesive community formation.

3.6 Security Factors

Security factors are important in shaping the overall environment in Kakuma as they influence the dynamics between refugee and host communities. The presence of crime, violence, and safety concerns often creates an atmosphere of fear and tension, complicating efforts to enhance social cohesion and mutual understanding among communal groups. Understanding these risk measures is essential for addressing the underlying tensions in Kakuma and developing strategies to enhance the stability and peace of the region.

3.6.1 Violence between and among Refugee Groups

The most common form of insecurity within the camp is infighting between the Nuer and Dinka communities, who bring their longstanding conflicts from South Sudan into the Kakuma environment. There is evidence that whenever tensions or conflicts arise in their home country, these same issues manifest in the camp, leading to violence and discord. The conflicts between these groups are deeply rooted in historical, political, and ethnic factors, which continue to shape their interactions. A participant narrated how the fighting between Sudanese Dinkas and Sudanese Nuers has, in the past, resulted in an unknown number of deaths and injuries.

One of the key issues of violence we have had here is between the Nuer and Dinka. The two communities from South Sudan bring their home conflict to the camp, always causing unrest among other communities living in the camp. Anytime their leaders are having issues up there, you will just see that the atmosphere is not right. And in no time, you will hear there has been violence within the camp. And several people have died, and many others have been injured because of these things. Why can't they leave the conflicts in their country, yet they have come here to seek refuge? (KII, Refugee)

Additionally, there have been instances of conflict between sub-clans, specifically the Dinka Barhal Gazal and the Dinka Bor, which have also led to deaths and numerous injuries. Other forms of violence are ethnic in nature, often instigated by underlying mistrust and unresolved historical divisions. Sometimes these conflicts are instigated by a minor altercation between two people, as narrated below:

Sometimes conflicts start from very minor issues and escalate into major communal conflicts. Tribal issues happening in South Sudan affect the way South Sudanese people interact within the camp, for example, the Nuer and Anywak living in Kakuma 2 and Kalobeyei once engaged in tribal conflict, which resulted in a larger population of Anywak travelling to urban centres of Nairobi and Nakuru to seek refuge. Mark you, this was instigated by a very minor incident (FGD, Refugee)

There has also been violence between different national refugee groups within the camp, often triggered by minor incidents that escalate rapidly. These conflicts can arise from small disagreements but attract a lot of tension, fueled by scarce resources, such as water, food, and access to necessities. In a setting where communities are already struggling for survival, competition over limited resources can ignite existing rivalries, leading to outbreaks of violence that further destabilise the camp environment, as exemplified below:

Sometimes it's the little resources that are there. Sometimes it's just hatred from one community to another. But other times, it's just a flare-up because I remember sometime back we had a very serious fight here between the South Sudanese and Somali boys. Started at the water point where I think one of them kicked the other's jerrican. It later became a big thing that the authorities were to come in. Others were stubbed, some were injured, and many ended up hospitalised (KII, Refugee)

3.6.2 Violence between Refugees and the Host Community

Study findings show minimal open violence between the host community and refugees, with isolated incidents of violence related to robberies, particularly stemming from competition for resources. A household survey indicated 77.95% of the host communities perceive an increase in crime incidences in the recent past, making them feel unsafe in the presence of refugees. They accused the refugees of largely targeting them, with all manner of crude weapons making them feel unsafe, especially at night, as exemplified below:

Nowadays, you can't walk around in some places past 8 pm, sometimes even as early as 7 pm. As long as darkness sets in, some areas are a no-go zone. Just recently, my wife was attacked while coming from the market, and the money she had and her phone were taken away from her. I have asked her to leave the market by 5 pm. And this has become worse since the introduction of this Differentiated Assistance (DA) thing. So I think they're (refugees) targeting us to put food on the table (FGD, Host)

Similarly, 73.2% of the refugees expressed that they, too, perceive an increase in crime, contributing to their feelings of insecurity around the host community. Although further scrutiny of the data reveals that the state of relations between the host and locals is generally good, as shown below, each community harbours suspicions about the other, creating an environment where fear and misconceptions inhibit cooperation and reinforce divisions, ultimately complicating social cohesion within the Municipality.



Worth noting is that the Turkana host community have no ethnic or cultural links with the residents of the camp, further complicating the integration process. When asked what prevents refugees and locals from living together peacefully, 77.01% affirmed that they simply do not trust each other.

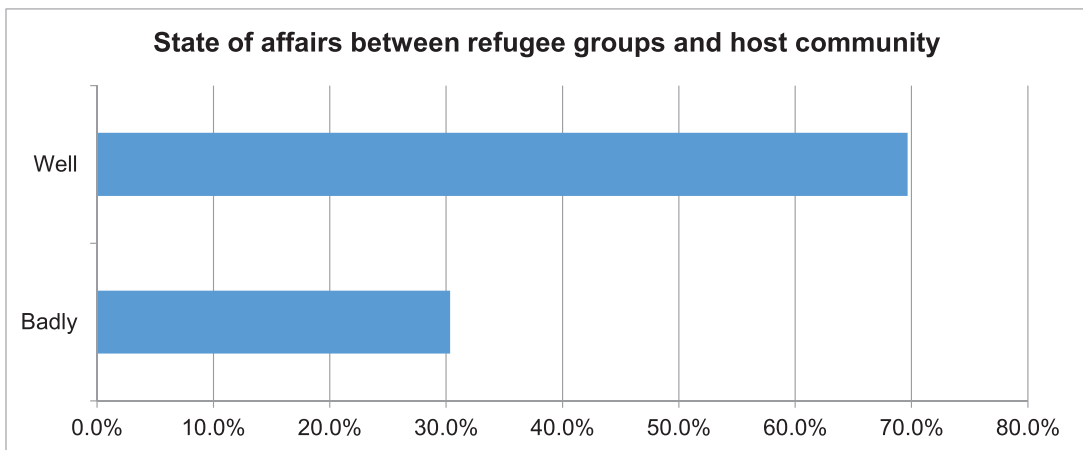
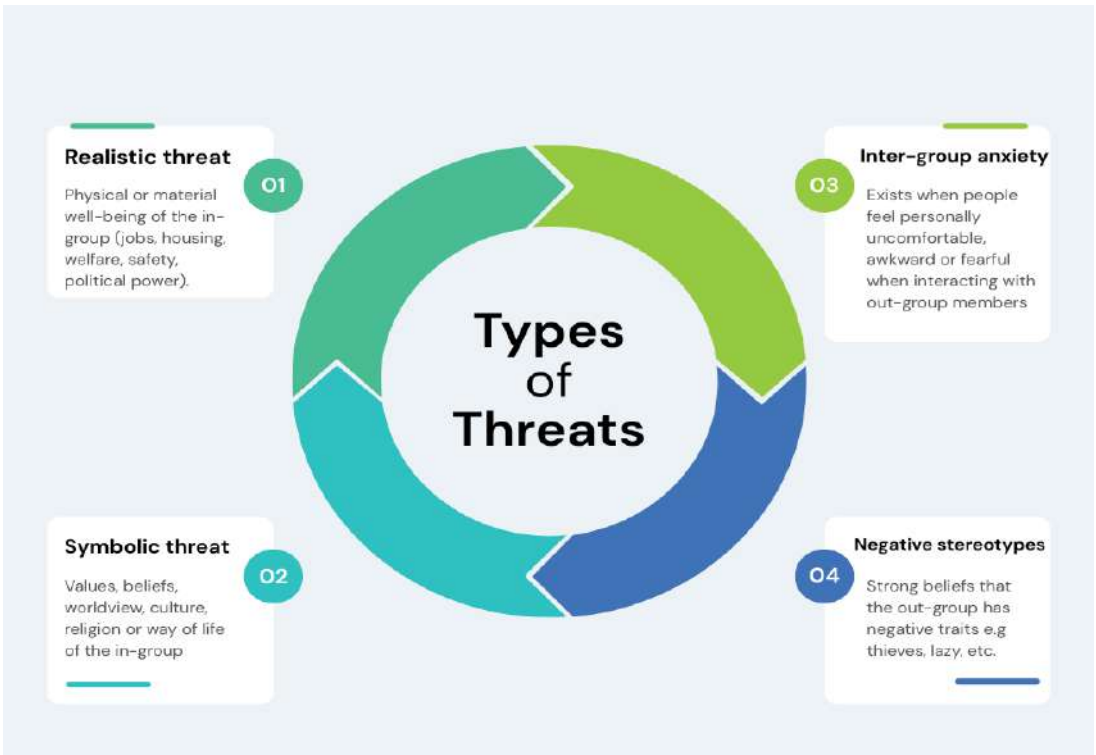


Figure 10: Survey respondents' representation of the level of state of affairs between refugee groups and the host community in Kakuma Municipality

Participants were further asked to rate the types of threats they face in order of priority. Findings were classified using Gordon Allport's intergroup contact theory (Vezzali & Stathi, 2016), which presents four likely types of threats between the host and refugee community. These include:



The figure below illustrates the levels of the four identified threats as revealed by the communities:

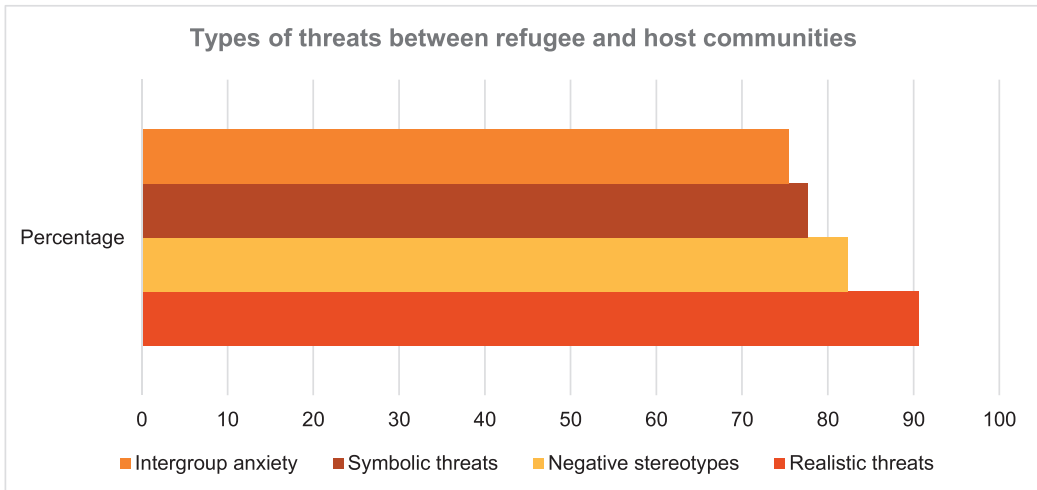


Figure 11: Survey respondents' representation of the types of threats between refugee and host communities

All four types of threats ranked high, above 75%, with realistic threats and negative stereotypes being predominant at 80%, as illustrated in 11 above. Evidence points to the fact that the high percentage of realistic threats accounting for most of the conflicts (90.57%), arising from the introduction of the Differentiated Assistance¹¹. Following closely are the threats stemming from negative stereotypes, cited 82.3% of participants, highlighting how preconceived notions can further entrench divides. According to participants from the host community, some refugees are “bad people who can never change. They are combative and lazy. Instead of working hard to earn a living like others do, they choose to engage in crime, yet they just want to sit and do nothing”. Additionally, 77.7% of participants identified symbolic threats, which encompass non-verbal cues and behaviours that can create perceptions of danger or mistrust, such as the Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTQI+) culture. Lastly, intergroup anxiety was cited by 75.4% of respondents, indicating that feelings of apprehension between the two groups hinder efforts toward collaboration and understanding.



¹¹ Differentiated assistance is an approach that prioritises tailored humanitarian and development assistance based on individual needs and capacities rather than registration status. It aims to reduce dependency on aid, while upholding the principles of do no harm and inclusive community engagement for sustainable impact (WFP, 2025)

3.6.3 Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Findings from this study highlight gender-based violence (GBV) as a significant source of conflict and insecurity within Kakuma Municipality, affecting both refugee communities internally and the relationship between refugees and host populations. GBV, which is rampant in refugee camps, plays out in various forms, including rape, physical violence, including domestic violence, trading sex for food, and forced early marriages.

While the Children's Act of 2022¹² in Kenya prohibits early child marriage and forbids any form of child abuse, certain communities within the Kakuma Municipality, particularly the Somali community, were reported to uphold cultural practices that encourage arranged and early marriages, often to the detriment of girls' education and personal development. These practices not only limit girls' opportunities for academic and social growth but also contribute to the perpetuation of GBV within the community. Additionally, there are troubling allegations that some members of these communities protect perpetrators of rape, perpetuating a cycle of violence and impunity. This protection further creates tension amongst refugees, and between refugees and the host community, where host communities often feel threatened by such behaviour and perceive them as threatening their social order. Further scrutiny into the data revealed that victims feel marginalised, unsupported, and deterred from seeking justice or speaking out against their abusers.

When a girl is raped in Somali culture, they protect the abuser, but in my culture in Sudan, we take such things seriously. We follow the law and take serious action on the case. But these people just let it slide and even try to negotiate things around it. How will this girl ever find justice if people want to sweep things under the carpet and assume everything is okay? (KII, Refugee)

The available evidence suggests that economic hardship further exacerbates vulnerabilities for girls in refugee settings, often forcing them into unsafe situations. In some instances, parents struggling to provide for their families compel their daughters to seek food and resources, leading them to engage in exploitative trades, including exchanging sex for food. Additionally, in the hope of securing economic stability and easing financial burdens, families force their daughters into early marriages, often before they are emotionally or physically ready. In the long run, the girls' health, education, and overall well-being are affected by the harmful cultural norms that exploit their vulnerabilities.

¹² <https://new.kenyalaw.org/akn/ke/act/2022/29/eng%402022-12-31>

The study also identifies domestic violence within households as a hidden, yet significant driver of conflict that often spills over into broader community tensions. Participants noted that through domestic abuse, especially between mixed families, there is a resultant atmosphere of fear and instability, affecting not only the immediate victims but also the surrounding community.

There are also cases of domestic violence here. And it is worse if they involve individuals from different clans, tribes or even nationalities. If it happens that they are different, and people get to know, then it attracts others as well, and everyone wants to defend their own. We recently had a case involving a Burundian guy and a Somali girl. The whole community was here, and it almost spilt into something else (FGD, Refugee).

Further evidence supports the presence of LGBTQI asylum seekers and refugees as a source of tension between refugees and the host community in Kakuma Municipality. Despite the Kenyan constitution's recognition of dignity for all individuals, it does not permit same-sex relationships. According to the Turkana people, the presence of LGBTQI refugees threatens to erode their established ethos and values, leading to accusations of 'bad behavior' being imported into their community. This tension is exemplified by an incident where some community members chased away a refugee for being seen in public dressed in a manner perceived as queer. The confrontation not only raised immediate tensions between the two groups but also reflected the underlying struggles around acceptance and identity, as well as the cultural clash arising from a diverse community.

We will not accept them (refugees) to bring their bad behaviour here. When you go to Rome, you must do what the Romans do. We have raised our children well...for many years. Then, suddenly, people are now coming here and doing what they want. Just recently, a man was walking around here dressed in something like a skirt. He even had lipstick on. He was chased away, and all the women were screaming. There was a lot of tension here because they wanted to attack us, but we will not accept it (KII, Host)

On further scrutiny of the data, there is credible evidence that SGBV witnessed in Kakuma Municipality is exacerbated through abuse of state officials, including security forces, who exploit the vulnerable in exchange for essential resources such as food, protection, or documentation. This has created an atmosphere of distrust and fear within the camp, as those in positions of authority take advantage of the needy. Additionally, child sexual exploitation, including trafficking, is confirmed to be facilitated by this same culture of abuse, allowing perpetrators to operate with impunity,

undermining the safety and dignity of individuals. This is exemplified by a participant who allegedly narrated her observations of children being transported in vehicles, specifically proboxes, highlighting the vulnerabilities present within the community.

3.6.4 Organised and Gang-related Crime

The Municipality, particularly the camp, faces challenges related to criminality, particularly with the rise of youth gangs. According to study participants, the increase in gang activity is fueled by various socio-economic factors, including high unemployment, poverty, and a lack of opportunities for youth, all contributing to economic despair and idleness that make young individuals more susceptible to gang recruitment. Findings demonstrate that the youth gangs are engaged in a wide range of criminal activities, including theft, assault, and extortion, with reports of murder and armed break-ins also surfacing. Gangs offer their members a sense of belonging and economic incentives, drawing in youths, particularly those from South Sudan, who were often mentioned in connection with robbery, cannabis, illicit brews, and related crimes.

Additionally, drug trafficking and widespread substance abuse emerged as significant concerns, with the camp serving as a transit point for illicit goods. With limited access to opportunities and resources, many individuals, especially young adults, resort to drugs as a coping mechanism for the harsh realities of camp life. The proliferation of these substances not only fuels addiction but also nurtures an underground economy, leading to competition, exploitation, and violence. Furthermore, study participants alluded to the fact that substance abuse results in erratic behaviour, aggravating interpersonal conflicts and further contributing to a cycle of instability within the camp community. Interviewees perceived law enforcement agencies as unable to contain the situation, often alleging corruption involving drug dealers.

I can tell you, most of the time when these young people are found engaging in crime, they are not usually sober. We have seen them smoke bhang in broad daylight, and we know they just come through the border here. How do you control someone who is already addicted to drugs? They just end up recruiting more and more boys. Sometimes, you will find them fighting amongst themselves over who has stolen from whom. Really, it's so disgusting because we have all come here for refuge. Now we're ending up forgetting why we came in the first place and engaging in other things (KII, Refugee)

3.7 Summary

Conflicts and Security dynamics in Kakuma Municipality are complex, with many dynamics that constrain mobility, economic activity, and inter-communal trust. The camp and its environs host multiple organised gangs, exploiting governance vacuums and youth unemployment to recruit members and institutionalise predatory economies. These groups establish dominance in specific hotspot zones, where incidents of armed robbery, sexual violence, and inter-group assault are concentrated, creating no-go areas that affect the integration of host and refugee populations, including having unique implications on various groups.



3.8 Economic Factors

Several economic factors together affect the relations between the refugees and hosts, as well as among the refugees in Kakuma Municipality. The scarcity of resources, combined with high levels of unemployment and limited access to livelihood opportunities, creates competition that leads to tension and conflict. Both refugees and host community members find themselves competing for food, water, employment and other opportunities, further intensifying their grievances as discussed below:

3.8.1 Resource Scarcity and Competition

Participant voices drew a nexus between resource scarcity in Kakuma Municipality and conflict, particularly for both refugees and host communities who rely on the available limited resources for survival. Data points to the fact that limited access to resources has reduced income-generating opportunities, making it increasingly difficult for households to meet basic needs. The lack of resources has further created friction over the available scarce resources, including water, food, and charcoal, sometimes escalating into conflicts, as one participant noted:

The relationship has recently drifted because of the current food shortage. Refugees now cannot trade charcoal for cooking with food, as they used to with the host. It was some form of barter trade, because we need the charcoal, yet we cannot access it easily. But now they have nothing. This has affected the relationship between the two communities (refugees and hosts) (FGD, refugees)

The above finding aligns with quantitative data, which demonstrates that out of the issues contributing to conflict among refugees and the host community, the most critical factor is the competition over resources, with 83.68% of the respondents identifying this as a primary concern. This was followed by tensions arising from differing ways of life, which accounted for 68.51% of responses. Disputes related to leadership were noted by 17.01% of participants, while conflicts over land were reported by 14.94%, and other issues constituted 0.23%, a confirmation that resource competition is the primary driver of conflict in Kakuma Municipality as show in Figure 12 below.

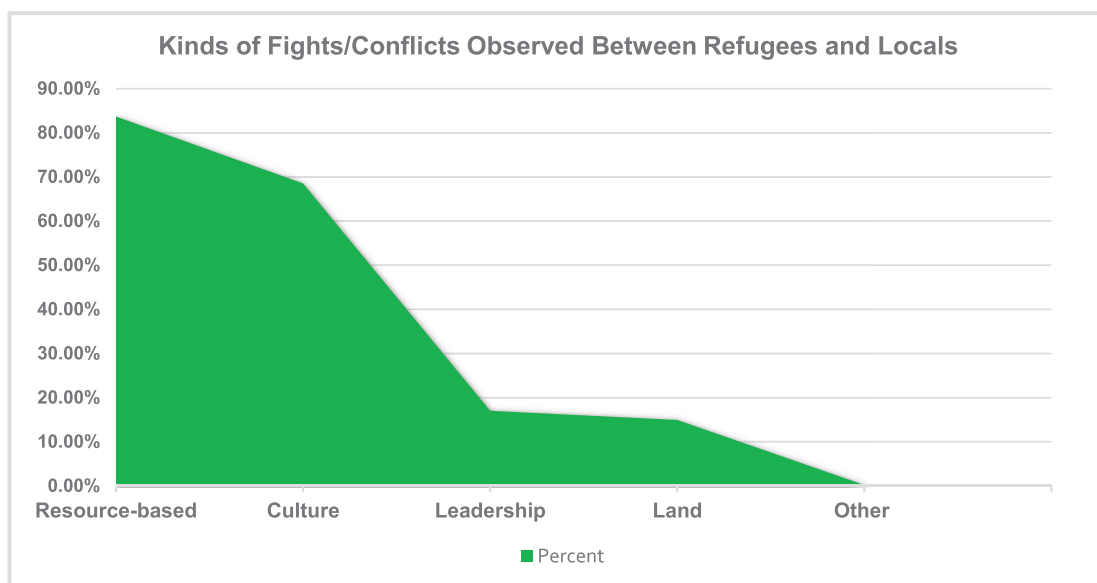


Figure 12: Competition over scarce resources is the key driver of conflicts in the region.

3.8.2 Unequal Access and Perceived Favouritism

Further scrutiny into the data reveals a perception of unequal treatment and favouritism in resource allocation and opportunities, particularly concerning the distribution of aid. Members of the host community alleged that refugees receive preferential treatment when it comes to humanitarian assistance, leading to feelings of resentment and frustration. They expressed concerns about their inability to access essential resources such as water and food, just as the refugees do, even though they are living on their ancestral land. In fact, the host community indicated that they often rely on refugees to employ them for manual work so they can eke out a living.

This sense of inequity and disparity creates a divide between the host and refugee populations, fueling tension and, in the long run, undermining social cohesion. Moreover, the hosts feel that their needs are being sidelined while refugees benefit more, contributing to suspicion, mistrust and conflict as voiced by one of the participants:

I know the resources are limited. But even the little resources that are there are not being distributed equally. They (refugees) have water in there...yet when we go to fetch, it's a problem. They at least get food, even if it's not enough. They at least manage to get it. The question is: are we better than them? No! We are even worse. Why the inequality in resource sharing? That is why we even get mad at them! (Kil, Host)

3.8.3 Limited Livelihood and Employment Opportunities

Participants conveyed frustrations regarding limited opportunities to enable them to make a livelihood within the Municipality. According to the majority of participants from the refugee community, they confront various barriers in accessing formal employment opportunities within the camp and surrounding areas, mostly due to scarcity. They indicated that the limited opportunities available from development partners working in the area are highly contested. Moreover, they voiced challenges about educational credential recognition. Formal requirements require verification of certificates, which sometimes fail to align with Kenyan accreditation standards. They therefore end up competing for the limited livelihood opportunities that the hosts also seek, leading to feelings of resentment.

In the same vein, the host community also perceives the refugee presence as directly threatening their employment prospects. According to them, the refugees take up the majority of the jobs, including menial ones. This is corroborated by 72.88% of the respondents from the survey who indicated that the hosts access fewer jobs because of the refugees. They particularly alleged disadvantages in the distribution of humanitarian sector employment and scholarship opportunities. The hosts further feel that because of this, the refugees attain superior educational outcomes, including overseas study opportunities. As a result, they not only dominate the local economy, but also are advantaged in terms of international exit options, leaving the host educationally and economically disadvantaged, as voiced below:

We have been forgotten by our own government, but also, we feel that these people (refugees) end up taking everything. If you check the town, they are the ones who own the businesses. We are only at their mercy. And not even that. Check the scholarship opportunities. For us, only a handful get to access those scholarships. While the refugees get them and even end up relocating abroad. So who ends up suffering at the end of the day? (FGD, Host)

However, it is important to mention that when asked, the actors, particularly members of the humanitarian sector, indicated that they have fulfilled their role in ensuring equal access to opportunities such as education and scholarships for both refugees and host communities. They emphasised that while they strive for equitable distribution, the implementation often occurs through local leadership structures. As a result, instances may arise where the leadership fails to distribute the opportunities fairly, leading the hosts to unfairly blame humanitarian organisations for perceived inequalities.

3.9 Summary

Both the refugee and host communities express their concern over their inability to access opportunities, hindering their ability to meet basic needs and live with dignity. The economic factors highlighted in Kakuma Municipality reveal important inequalities in resource distribution, which contribute to the erosion of social cohesion within the region. The perceived disparities between the refugees and hosts undermine the potential for collaboration, further worsening feelings of mistrust and overall well-being of the said communities.



3.10 Legal, Policy Frameworks and Governance Factors

While Kakuma has been recognised for its humanitarian efforts, there is evidence that various legal, policy and governance factors continue to hinder the establishment of lasting peace. These factors, including the efficacy and fairness of national laws, the operational realities of local policies, and the functionality of administrative bodies, dictate the conditions under which refugee and host communities interact. As evidenced below, deficiencies in these areas directly contribute to social tensions and undermine efforts towards harmonious coexistence.

3.10.1 Coordination gap

The findings from the household confirmed the lack of a coordinating framework for peacebuilding initiatives in Kakuma Municipality - there is no central institution that offers that role. While participants recognised the existence of peacebuilding initiatives by various organisations, there is a clear absence of a coordinating body to unify all towards a common cause: peaceful coexistence within Kakuma. A participant from one of the NGOs had this to say:

The biggest impediment to ensuring peaceful co-existence, if you ask me, is the lack of coordination. We have a tendency to rally together when there is a problem or a need, such as an election or something. We even used to have a technical working group here, composed of several organisations including DRC, World Vision, Israel Aid, RCK, UNHRC, Peace Winds Japan, the Lutheran and many others. And we would mostly be coordinated by the DRS. But I don't know if it exists or not. We have only met once in a long time. And if you check well, all these organisations have their own unique mandate. Can we not have an institution whose mandate is peace to take up this role? I believe we will be more effective (KII, NGO)

As alluded to by study participants during discussions from KIIs and FGDs, they purport that coordination among existing peace structures remains weak, as these entities operate in a disjointed and uncoordinated manner. Moreover, most institutions are seriously underfunded and dependent on donor support, further hindering their effectiveness in conflict prevention and resolution. Participants also observed that peacebuilding initiatives tend to be disorganised and lack a comprehensive framework. Various actors, including government representatives, local civil society, humanitarian organisations, and multilateral entities, have pursued independent peacebuilding efforts without effective collaboration. As a result, the coordination and complementarity of different interventions remain insufficient, creating challenges in leveraging the diverse experiences and resources from across various sectors for greater impact.

3.10.2 Fairness in Critical Service Provision and Opportunities

A significant source of tension arises from inequity and discrimination in resource and aid distribution within Kakuma Municipality. There is a perceived bias in resource distribution, going by the evidence gathered from participant discussions and interviews. According to the participants, more attention is directed toward refugee areas than host communities. This, coupled with the observation that refugees often secure more employment, scholarship and other opportunities, generates resentment among the local Turkana population. Participants from the host community further argued that refugees enjoy a higher standard of living compared to them, noting that most of them are employed by refugees as domestic or casual labourers. Additionally, the perception that refugees receive adequate food rations, while locals in the host country lack basic needs, further fuels feelings of inadequacy as voiced by a participant:

Refugees are doing better than us. Obviously. Look at them...they have food, schools, hospitals...yet we host them on our land. What an irony! That a stranger comes into your house, but then you are the one depending on them for basic needs, including food. They are lucky they have UNHCR, who is their father and mother. But the rest of us? We are orphans in our own land, desperately looking like children of a lesser god (FGD, Host)

The above sentiments corroborate survey data where 83.68% of respondents indicated that conflicts between refugees and locals mainly revolve around competition for resources such as water, food, jobs, and scholarships. Specifically, 72.88% of host community members believe they have less access to job opportunities because of the presence of refugees, while 76.92% argued that the provision of aid or assistance is not distributed fairly and is primarily focused on refugees. Moreover, the hosts often rely heavily on essential services from the refugee camp, such as schools and hospitals, which further strains resources within the community. In fact, 63.48% of respondents affirmed that there is excessive pressure on vital services, including educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and water supply, as demonstrated in the figure below:

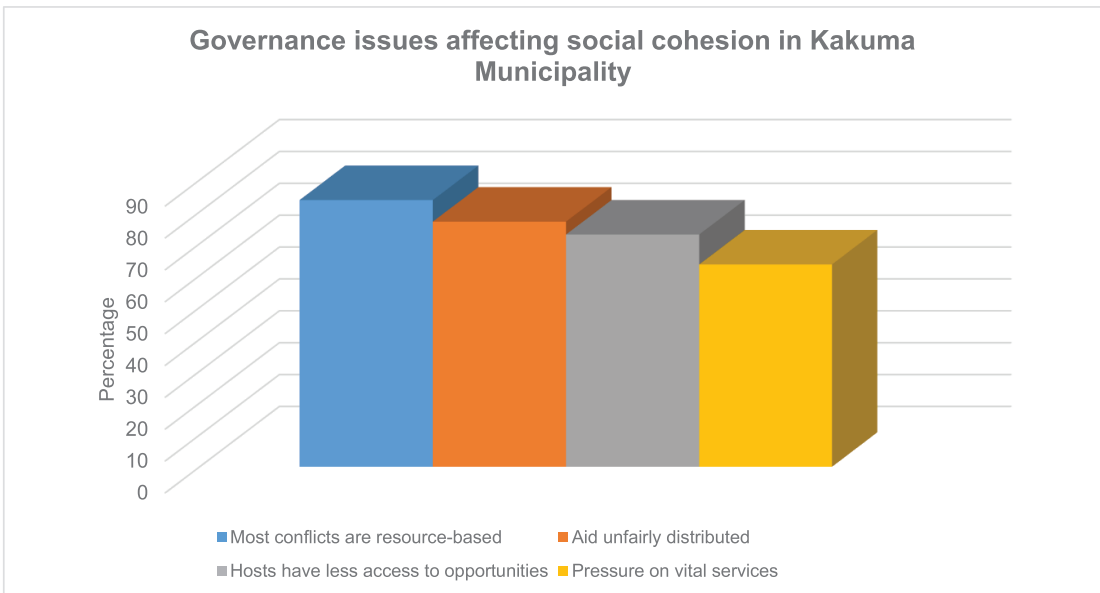


Figure 14: Representation of survey respondents' feelings on governance issues affecting social cohesion in Kakuma Municipality

Voices across FGDs and interviews revealed that members of the host community are increasingly questioning the capacity and willingness of the Kenyan government to protect its citizens, particularly in the context of sharing opportunities and access to services. Most participants articulated their concerns about a perceived lack of effective governance, which they believe prioritises the needs of refugees while neglecting the local population. There is a vivid growing frustration among the host community, as they feel their rights and interests are overlooked by authorities in favour of addressing the circumstances of refugee populations, further exacerbating existing tensions between the two groups.

In fact, following the reduction of humanitarian assistance to refugees due to the introduction of new policies such as the Differentiated Assistance, hosts have found themselves increasingly affected by the resultant scarcity, exacerbating their struggles. Surprisingly, while refugees and host communities do not agree on many issues, they have come together to oppose the DA model, recognising that its implementation not only disenfranchises them but also collectively undermines their access to necessary resources and support. Survey findings reinforce this cooperation, revealing that 97.39% of the survey respondents from both the host and refugee communities argued that the aid categorisation has brought major problems contributing to the lack of social cohesion.

3.10.3 Inadequate Public Participation

Further scrutiny of the data revealed concerns in key policy formulation and implementation in public participation in Kakuma Municipality. Residents from both the host and refugee communities believe that the processes surrounding this constitutional requirement are largely ineffective. When asked about their feelings regarding government policies that affect them, 80.61% of the survey respondents articulated that certain policies have instilled fear and uncertainty among the communities. According to them, the public participation efforts are ‘symbolic, non-inclusive, lacking genuine bottom-up engagement, and when done, communities are used for statistics and visibility’. Key hindrances to effective public participation were identified, including inadequate communication of information, poor formal channels for involvement, language barriers due to low literacy levels, and limited community engagement. As a result, members of the host community frequently feel excluded from decisions that impact their lives, particularly regarding land use and the expansion of refugee settlements, leading to a sense of marginalisation that exacerbates tensions between the two groups.

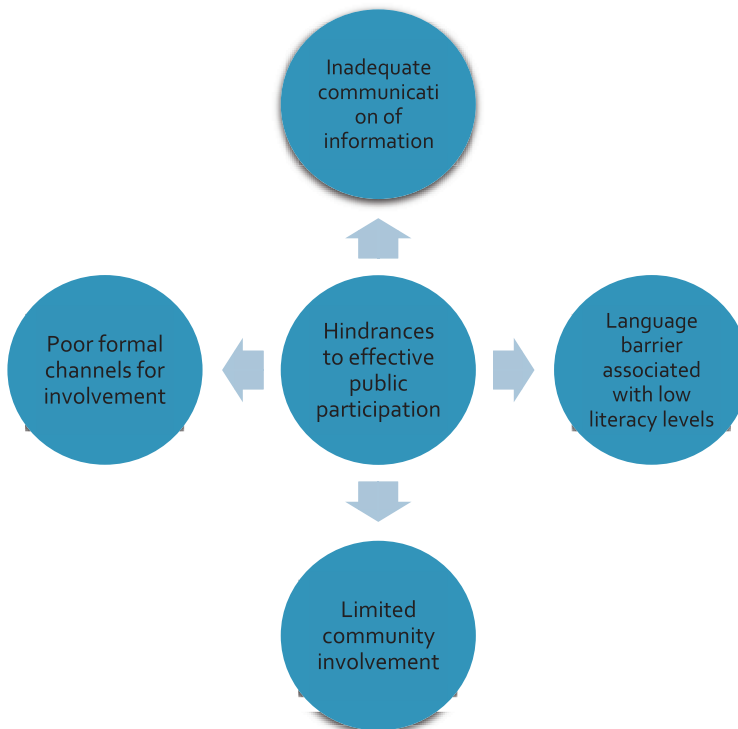


Figure 15: NCIC's representation of hindrances to effective public participation in Kakuma Municipality

One key concern is the introduction of the Shirika Plan¹³. While this forward-looking initiative aims to transform refugee camps into integrated municipalities and facilitate a transition from humanitarian aid dependence to self-reliance, it has ignited considerable anxiety and unrest among the residents. For many participants, The Plan represents both hope and uncertainty. While it promises improved integration and reduced dependence on humanitarian aid, the implementation details remain unclear, creating anxiety about the future. One community member observed, “The donor community is pushing Kenya towards development and ensuring our dependence on humanitarian aid reduces. We suspect there’s a hidden agenda”. Both host and refugee communities have joined hands in opposing The Plan, expressing frustration over the perceived lack of consultation in its development and roll-out. Many feel sidelined, believing that their voices and perspectives were not adequately considered, leading to widespread misinformation, heightened tensions and a sense of distrust towards the implementing authorities. In the words of one of the participants,

We do not know what this animal called Shirika Plan is. Suddenly, everyone is talking about it. It has just appeared, pap, like a bomb! We don’t understand it at all! Some say we shall be overtaken by these people (refugees). Some say they will take away our land and control us. Go back and tell the government to educate us first on what exactly this animal is, instead of forcing it down our throats (FGD, Host)

The perceived lack of participation during the introduction of the Differentiated Assistance programme is another significant bone of contention, with many arguing that consultations were not conducted properly, making them feel excluded from the decision-making process. The perceived lack of transparency has led to widespread dissatisfaction, particularly regarding food distribution, which is viewed as unfairly categorised, negatively affecting those who rely on these resources for survival. Participants from the refugee community opined that the absence of meaningful consultation has resulted in the implementation of a policy that has affected their lives, as voiced below:

Recently, three women and children went back to South Sudan, and more are saying they will go back if the situation remains the same. Why implement something without even consulting, yet it is so critical to people’s lives and livelihoods? People are planning to go back. They are saying they’d rather die by a bullet than die of hunger (FGD, Refugee)

¹³ <https://refugee.go.ke/kenya-shirika-plan-overview-and-action-plan>

It is important to note that interviews with institutions responsible for the implementation of the Differentiated Assistance Programme asserted that consultations were conducted properly and that appropriate data were utilised to place individuals into different categories. They emphasised that the categorisation was based on comprehensive assessments of needs and circumstances, aiming to ensure that resources were allocated effectively. According to these officials, the goal was to tailor assistance to the varied needs of both the refugee and host communities, which they believed would ultimately enhance the efficacy of the programme. This perspective, however, contrasts sharply with the experiences of many community members who feel that their voices were not adequately heard during the consultation process and that the process was not fairly done. The findings further reveal that while some religious and community leaders report being consulted on certain matters, grassroots voices, especially those of women and youth, are often absent from high-level discussions, contributing to feelings of resentment and frustration within the community.

At the centre of managing refugee affairs, the Department of Refugee Services (DRS) plays a critical role in governance. However, participants noted that its effectiveness is often limited by resource constraints and reliance on donor funding, sometimes restricting its operational autonomy and responsiveness to local needs. Similarly, law enforcement agencies, though benefiting from NGO-supported capacity building, struggle with persistent resource gaps that impact their effectiveness. Community narratives indicate increased concern about policing practices, with refugees reporting experiences of harassment, arbitrary arrests and corruption cases during security operations. Participants noted that, despite the authority of government agencies to stabilise the environment and discharge their respective mandates, their impact is frequently constrained by mistrust, inconsistent engagement, and perceived inequities in service delivery, hampering public participation and overall governance.

3.10.4 Legal framework

Kenya enacted the Refugees Act of 2021, representing progressive strides in its approach to refugee protection and integration¹⁴. The Act, which became operational in February 2022, moves beyond previous limitations by acknowledging that refugees are entitled to rights akin to other individuals in Kenya, providing an environment where they can not only survive but also thrive. Essentially, it domesticates the three durable solutions to refugee crises: local integration, resettlement, and voluntary repatriation, ensuring Kenya's full compliance with international conventions such as the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the principle of

¹⁴Refugee Act. (2021). Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 210 (Acts No. 10)

non-refoulement. Worth noting is that the legislation facilitates refugees' contribution to Kenya's economic and social development by granting access to necessary documentation and the right to engage in gainful employment or professional practice where qualifications are recognised. At the same time, the Act specifically outlines provisions for the recognition, protection, and management of refugees, ensuring a safer asylum space for vulnerable groups, including women, children, persons with disabilities, and unaccompanied minors.

Participants from the refugee community voiced their concerns regarding property ownership and resource allocation as outlined in the Refugees Act, noting that the legislation often lacks clarity. This ambiguity frequently leads to disputes over land use and ownership, exacerbating tensions between refugees and host communities. Participants highlighted that they cannot fully own land or keep livestock, which not only limits their economic opportunities but also contributes to feelings of insecurity and marginalisation. In essence, the law is not clear on certain aspects of property rights, such as housing and land ownership, creating an environment of uncertainty, where competition for limited resources escalates conflicts and hinders the prospects for peaceful coexistence between the two groups.

On the aspects of local integration, participants expressed significant concerns regarding the clarity of policies governing their incorporation into society. While the Refugees Act allows for the integration of refugees into the local community, it simultaneously imposes restrictions that require them to remain within 'designated areas', essentially confining them to the camp. According to FGD and KII participants, this definition is vague, as it does not adequately reflect the desire to afford refugees greater mobility and integration into the broader society. The majority voiced a strong preference for relocation to more fertile regions of the country that offer better opportunities for livelihoods and stability, believing that true integration should include the freedom to live and work outside the 'designated area', as voiced below:

We appreciate the new Act. Yes, we're told we now have some rights that were not there in the past. I have heard that it allows for integration. But I keep wondering, what really is the meaning of this integration? As is, we still can't move out of here. Was the Act meant to make a bigger camp or what? Why can't they take us to Mombasa, Kisumu, or Kitale and give us land there? Where can we farm and feed our families? Why limit us to this dry area, yet they talk about integration? (KII, Refugee).

3.11 Summary

Several factors affect social cohesion in Kakuma Municipality. These include socio-cultural, environmental, security, legal, policy, and governance dimensions. Socio-cultural factors, resulting from the presence of many people from diverse cultures, contribute to mistrust and conflict among the refugee communities, but also between refugees and host populations. Environmental challenges such as resource scarcity and environmental degradation exacerbate competition over limited resources, leading to tensions and conflict. Security concerns are heightened by the presence of youth gangs and criminal activities, and exacerbated by the presence of the camp, which has resulted in a geographical concentration of violence. Additionally, legal and policy factors hinder effective conflict resolution, as inadequate representation and participation in decision-making processes leave both refugees and hosts feeling marginalised and underserved.

Chapter Four

CONFLICT LANDSCAPE OF KAKUMA MUNICIPALITY



4.0 Introduction

The conflict landscape in Kakuma Municipality is shaped by various key actors whose roles are both significant and sometimes contradictory. While some play negative roles that exacerbate conflict, others take on positive roles that help to alleviate tensions, often doing so either knowingly or unknowingly. There is evidence that their actions influence perceptions of safety, trust in institutions, and the overall stability of the community, while also affecting several groups differently.



4.1 Key actors

An analysis of the data reveals that the key actors include youth groups, community leadership structures, humanitarian agencies, religious institutions, government authorities, and political actors as described below:

Table 2: Representation of key actors in Kakuma Municipality and their roles

Actor	Description	Role
1. Youth	<p>A central demographic due to their high numbers across both the refugees and the host communities</p> <p>Most are affected by high unemployment, limited livelihood opportunities, and inadequate sensitisation around policy shifts, hence feeling marginalised and disoriented.</p> <p>Forms the bulk of the members of organised criminal gangs</p> <p>Possess crude and other dangerous weapons, including guns.</p> <p>Some form part of the <i>bodaboda</i> riders</p>	<p>Associated with insecurity, including theft, mugging & assault, killings, and other forms of violent confrontation</p> <p>Known for stealing phones and other useful belongings, especially at night, but also engage in livestock theft, including camels, goats, and cows, stolen from hosts and resold within refugee markets</p> <p>Some, especially from South Sudanese communities, control access to key routes, stage ambushes, and coordinate theft networks.</p> <p>They both sell and abuse drugs and other substances.</p> <p>Actively participate in peacebuilding and inter-community support mechanisms. Some have organised cross-community groups that intervene during periods of heightened tension.</p> <p>Engage in political mobilisation, particularly during protests against policies such as the DA programme.</p> <p>Active agents in protest and resistance, particularly in response to food shortages and shifts in humanitarian policies</p>
2. Women	<p>Bearers of the primary burden of caregiving, especially under conditions of increasing scarcity, navigate food shortages, insecurity, and limited livelihood opportunities.</p>	<p>Play a pivotal role in local governance, dispute resolution, and liaison with humanitarian agencies.</p>
3. Community leaders	<p>Structures composed of all-inclusive members of society. They include zonal leaders and others elected to represent the communities.</p> <p>72.51% agreed that these structures are inclusive, incorporating women, youth, and persons with disabilities (PWDs).</p>	<p>They convene peace forums, mobilise communities, and disseminate information on policies and assistance programmes through barazas and other forums.</p> <p>72.27% of the respondents expressed confidence in community leaders, with 84.14% agreeing that they are important actors in mitigating conflict</p> <p>However, they are also accused of manipulating community grievances for personal or political gain, hence viewed with suspicion.</p> <p>They influence youth to participate in demonstrations or confrontations.</p> <p>Leadership transitions are a key conflict trigger, feeding broader intra-community rivalries and exacerbating existing grievances.</p>
4. Humanitarian and Non-Governmental Organisations	<p>Nonprofit entities that provide assistance and support to individuals and communities. The common ones mentioned include United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), World Vision International, Finn Church Aid (FCA), IsraAID, Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK), GIZ, IOM, Peace Winds Japan, Kenya Red Cross, International Rescue Committee, Danish Church Aid, Don Bosco Kenya, Jesuit Refugee Services, Humanity and Inclusion, Plan International, TUPADO, and LOKADO.</p>	<p>Central to service provision, peacebuilding, and livelihood sustenance</p> <p>Have built a wide ecosystem of peace committees, dialogue forums, and youth engagement platforms that contribute to early warning, mediation, and local conflict prevention, with 76.44% of the respondents agreeing that they play a huge role in reducing conflict</p> <p>They, however, encounter challenges such as inadequate consultation, duplication of efforts, perceived bias, and insufficient inclusion of key actors, especially religious leaders.</p>

5. Government	Includes various branches and agencies of the local and national government, key among them the Department of Refugee Services (DRS), the National Police Service, the judiciary, and county-level authorities	Address the needs of both the host and refugee communities by playing a critical role in governance, security, and the delivery of public services in Kakuma Municipality. Their involvement shapes community perceptions of safety, fairness, and state responsiveness, influencing both trust and tensions within refugee and host communities. Play a complex, often contradictory role in shaping community dynamics.
6. Political leaders	Include individuals who hold positions of authority and influence within the governance framework, and are responsible for making decisions, formulating policies, and representing the interests of the Municipality populace, such as the Governor, Members of Parliament (MPs) and Members of County Assembly (MCAs)	Mobilise support for peace initiatives, advocate for resources, and help mitigate crises Sometimes use their influence to inflame tensions, manipulate grievances, or advance personal political agendas, thereby creating divisions, with communities forming factions based on political opinions and fault lines.
7. Religious leaders	Individuals/institutions that guide and provide spiritual leadership, including churches, mosques, and faith-based networks, such as the Kakuma Pastors' Fellowship Regarded as the first point of contact when disputes arise Widely recognised as pillars of moral authority across both refugee and host communities. Their influence spans spiritual, cultural, and social spheres, positioning them as trusted intermediaries capable of diffusing tensions and guiding communities toward a non-violent solution.	Engage in political exploitation of refugee-host dynamics, particularly around resource distribution, land disputes, and narratives about refugees participating in national elections. They actively promote peace, respect, and coexistence, reaching audiences that other actors struggle to access, through church fellowships, community meetings, and radio programmes, and faith leaders. Provide counselling, community sensitisation programmes, and platforms for dialogue that few other actors can match. Despite their strong grassroots presence and ability to mobilise large audiences, religious leaders often feel excluded from formal humanitarian coordination and programme design, limiting the reach of peacebuilding messaging and representing a missed opportunity for deeper community engagement. 94.71% of the respondents agreed that religious leaders play an indispensable role in fostering peace, trust, and cohesion within Kakuma Municipality
8. Refugee-led Organisations and Community-based Organisations (CBOs)	These are non-profit entities established and operated by refugees themselves Have a deep understanding of local realities. Their reach across Kakuma, Kalobeyei, and host communities positions them as essential connectors in the peace and governance landscape. Often described as 'equitable actors serving all communities'	Foster social cohesion and community engagement in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. Function as early responders, identifying tensions, mediating disputes, and raising concerns promptly Advocate for meaningful refugee participation in policy processes and fill gaps in formal structures. Despite their vital role, they often face exclusion from formal decision-making and coordination. Limited funding and structural barriers also constrain their capacity to scale

The above observations align closely with survey evidence regarding the level of confidence the communities have in the capacity of various actors to effectively carry out their functions in conflict resolution. According to the survey results, religious leaders topped the list with a confidence level of 94.71%, reflecting the trust communities place in their spiritual guidance and mediation skills. Next are community leaders (including zonal leaders) who garnered an 84.14% confidence rating, highlighting their perceived effectiveness in addressing local issues and fostering unity. Humanitarian organisations and government institutions came in at 76.44% and 76.21%, respectively, indicating a moderate level of trust in their ability to respond to conflicts and provide vital services. Additionally, community-based organisations (CBOs) and refugee-led organisations (RLOs) received a confidence level of 73.68%, reflecting their importance in addressing specific needs within the population. Lastly, political leaders were viewed with the least confidence at 61%, suggesting a level of scepticism regarding their effectiveness in conflict resolution as demonstrated in the figure below:

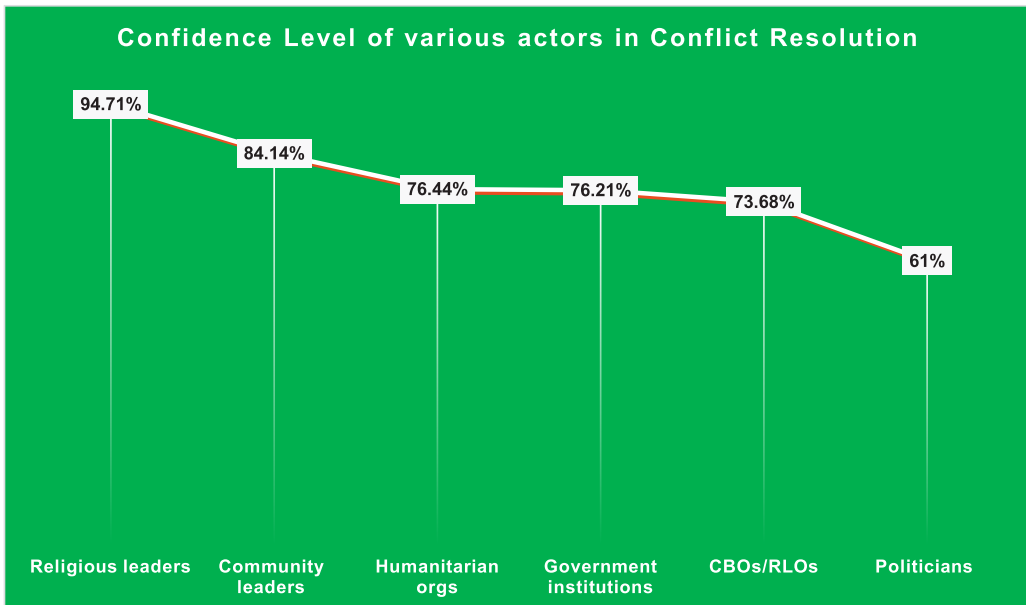


Figure 16: Representation of the level of confidence of various actors in conflict resolution within Kakuma Municipality

The above image reinforces participant voices from FGDs and KII that communities place high confidence in religious leaders, who are widely recognised as pillars of moral authority. Their influence extends across spiritual, cultural, and social spheres, positioning them as trusted intermediaries capable of diffusing tensions and guiding communities toward non-violent solutions. Participants expressed their unique abilities to foster dialogue, understand local contexts, and promote reconciliation among diverse groups. Worth noting is that, despite their strong grassroots presence and capability

to resolve conflicts, religious leaders often feel excluded from formal humanitarian coordination and programme design, diminishing their impact on peacebuilding initiatives, as voiced by one of the participants:

They implement things without proper rollout or consultation. Especially for us religious leaders, they fail to involve us, yet we have large crowds and can help them cascade. You just hear there was a meeting in this and this place, but nobody involved you. But remember, when things go south, that's when they remember we exist and call in when it's almost too late. Religious leaders should also be involved in peace processes as early as possible to avert conflicts (KII, Refugee)

In contrast, members of the political community received the lowest confidence ratings in their ability to resolve conflicts, as many participants opined that they manipulate community grievances for personal and political gain, undermining trust in their leadership.

4.2 Impact of Conflict on Various Groups

While conflict permeates every aspect of life, the nature and extent of its effects differ substantially among specific populations, leading to unique vulnerabilities and responses. The study reveals that although the entire society is affected differently by conflict, there exist varied experiences and challenges faced by different demographic groups within the community, as demonstrated below:



Figure 17: Impact of conflicts on vulnerable groups.

The study reveals that elders in both refugee and host communities bear a dual burden in the context of conflict. While playing a crucial role in dialogues and conflict resolution processes within their communities, they are also affected by insecurity. Elders are seen as mediators, respected for their roles in resolving conflicts through traditional council systems. According to FGD participants, there have been instances where elders among refugees have been killed due to clan-based violence; “there was a time here when several elders from the Anywak community were killed. Apart from them being aged and vulnerable, they emanate from a minority community and therefore were targeted”.

Socially, elders endure emotional stress as families cope with hunger, insecurity, and the pressures resulting from the DA and Shirika Plan transitions. In some cases, older individuals, especially widows and those reliant on youth, suffer during aid cuts or are neglected during food shortages, as described by a refugee key informant:

It is worse for the old because they are neglected as communities and families fight over food. You will just find them seated there, looking miserable. Of course, men will go out to fend for themselves, even if it means stealing, and the women will prioritise the children. But who remembers the old? Nobody. Unfortunately. Even in times of danger, they cannot run or fend for themselves (KII, Refugee)

Survey findings support the above evidence as respondents, when asked about who suffers more during conflict, 70.92% agreed that elders are the most at risk from violence. However, as highlighted in several focus group discussions, they sometimes intensify conflict through cultural rigidity, such as imposing intermarriage restrictions or exerting a strong influence over youth. Despite these constraints, the study illustrates that elders remain central to dispute resolution committees, tribal councils, zonal leadership, and mediation efforts. They also act as first responders in managing community-level disputes before matters escalate to the police or humanitarian actors, highlighting their critical role in maintaining social cohesion and addressing conflicts within the refugee community.

Youth

The research findings indicate that youth in both refugee and host communities are consistently positioned at the centre of the conflict, acting both as primary actors and as victims of violence, criminality, and systemic exclusion. Quantitative data reinforce this perception, with 69.19% of respondents agreeing that the youth suffer more during times of conflict, making them one of the most vulnerable groups identified throughout the study. FGD discussions and key informant interviews further reveal that complex pressures shape young people’s exposure to harm.

A dominant theme that emerged across these conversations is the persistent idleness, unemployment, and lack of opportunities, which left many young individuals in Kakuma Municipality susceptible to manipulation by political actors, community leaders, or criminal elements. Observations point to the fact that these youth have been recruited into gangs or sometimes incentivised to participate in conflict, especially during periods of heightened tension, as one participant articulated,

Anytime there is conflict anywhere around here, you will find the youth at the forefront. Always. And sometimes I don't blame them, because they're idle, they abuse drugs and other substances, and are often unemployed. So, with the energy they have because they are young, you can imagine they have to involve themselves in something. Unfortunately, that "something" happens to be crime (KII, host)

Simultaneously, they frequently suffer harm, both from violence within their community and from security operations. Refugee youth reported that police crackdowns often target innocent individuals, reflecting a deep mistrust and fear of authorities. One participant described his experience:

During protests, the police end up harassing and arresting innocent youths. Sometimes you may just be walking around where there were issues. Maybe you just want to see, or you were just going about your business, when the police suddenly pounce on you. Remember, the real culprits have already run away. So now you and any other young person on site become the culprit. The other day, when people were arguing about food, I was just passing by. Going about my business, when suddenly they bounced on me, and I was whisked away. I kept trying to tell them that I didn't even know what was happening there. Do you think they listened? If you run, they will say you don't respect me, and they will arrest you. If you run, it's still a problem...why are you running if you are not guilty? Either way, they pick you up (FGD, Refugee)

Education disruptions are another significant impact, as youth are unable to continue their schooling during periods of conflict. Many are drawn into protests or destructive activities when they feel marginalised or excluded from opportunities. Discussions from KIIs noted that some refugee youth are well acquainted with their rights, yet are unable to progress academically, have led to incidents of school unrest or arson. Limited access to higher education for refugee youth due to low exam grades and a lack of opportunities further deepens their frustration and contributes to cycles of idleness and disaffection.

Moreover, identity-linked tensions prominently emerge, particularly affecting South Sudanese youth, mainly those from the Dinka community, who are frequently perceived as aggressors. These perceptions contribute to stereotyping, profiling, and intergroup hostility, further entrenching divisions within the camp. Across all data sources, the overarching conclusion is that youth remain among the most exposed groups during conflict, simultaneously driving and suffering from the insecurity that shapes daily life in Kakuma Municipality. Their high visibility, lack of opportunities, and susceptibility to manipulation make them central to both the escalation and the consequences of conflict.

Women and girls

Study findings indicate that women and girls are highly vulnerable and suffer significantly during periods of conflict, unrest and insecurity, with their experiences spanning physical, economic, social, and psychological effects. A recurring theme across the focus group discussions and key informant interviews was that women face acute physical and protection risks, particularly while accessing basic resources such as water and firewood. These activities are traditionally assigned to them and often require traversing remote or insecure areas. Participants frequently described these environments as hotspots for violence, where incidents such as assault, robbery, and rape are prevalent. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) emerged as the greatest threat, which includes rape, defilement, and sexual exploitation. Disturbing patterns noted in FGDs included exploitation by transport operators and opportunistic attacks during aid collection, further underscoring the precariousness of their situations.

We, women, suffer quite a lot. You just know the problem we have here with water and firewood. Yet you still have to go and look for it because it is your responsibility. Remember, even these people (the hosts) do not want us to cut their trees, so there will always be conflict. Sometimes you succeed, then on your way back, you're attacked by some boys, who even do bad things to you. It happened to some of our women a while back, and it was really sad (FGD, Refugee)

When we receive our donations here, we're mostly carried by these bodabodas. But do you know what? Some of them are not genuine. They're just robbers pretending to be doing business. They end up driving you far away, taking away your things, and if you resist, they beat you up. One time, my cousin was attacked here and beaten up thoroughly. They almost killed her (FGD, Refugee)

The economic impacts of conflict on women are equally significant, as many operate small-scale businesses selling charcoal, engage in casual labour, or manage small stalls. However, these activities are frequently disrupted by security concerns, demonstrations, or gang activity, creating additional barriers to their livelihoods. Participants reported experiencing harassment and theft at the hands of idle youth, which further diminishes their economic stability. During tense periods, women often find themselves forced to close their businesses, avoid markets, or operate only under escort for safety.

Women are still the ones who do business out there, as they have to fend for their families. Some take care of up to 12 children. So it's not just about being attacked as they search for food, no. Remember, they are also affected economically, especially during periods of conflict or insecurity, like demos. They will have to close down their shops. Sometimes they would be robbed. Other times, they are harassed and forced to pay money they know nothing about. In short, they bear the brunt (KII, NGO)

Further scrutiny into the data reveals that women, as the primary caregivers, bear the emotional and material burdens when family members are threatened or harmed. Women who lose husbands to violence or abandonment become single mothers, facing expanded responsibilities, often under severe strain. Such pressures, where anxiety, depression and emotional distress are prevalent, contribute to mental health issues amongst women, and the community at large.

We have seen mostly women committing suicide. Many times I have been called to intervene, or when, sadly, the worst had already happened. And remember, they are the heads of the households, so instead of witnessing the suffering, they have opted not to see. What people have gone through in their own countries leaves them emotionally unbalanced. Any small trigger through a situation, even a lack, is all they need to do the worst (KII, Refugee)

The unsafe environments and the desire to secure livelihoods expose young women and girls to increased risks of early pregnancy, sexual exploitation, and dropping out of school. Moreover, participants noted that women with disabilities face even greater exclusion, such as barriers at water points and increased exposure to dangers during food distribution.

We have seen many girls drop out of school because they are faced with the pressure to make ends meet. How do you go to school when there's no food to eat at home? When there's no water even to drink? You are forced

to look for that water. And do you know what happens in the long run? Early pregnancies. They are forced to get married before their time. Some are sexually exploited for some small favours here and there. So literally the life of that girl is just spoiled (KII, NGO)

Sometimes we're troubled when the police arrest our sons. Sometimes they haven't even done anything serious. Or maybe they were just found loitering in the wrong place, and were assumed to be members of some bad groups. So you have no choice but to bail them out. Really. You can't just leave them in custody because you will not even sleep at night. And sometimes the father is not even around. Mine remained in South Sudan. For other women, you will find the man just deserted them. Disappeared. Abandoned her. So it's not easy, really. You end up using the little you have to bail them out (KII, Refugee)

The above findings were confirmed by 68.97% of survey respondents who argued that women and girls bear the brunt during conflicts and periods of insecurity.

Business owners

Business owners from both the host and refugee communities are affected economically and physically during conflict in Kakuma Municipality. 66.89% of survey respondents agreed that business owners suffer more during times of conflict, with FGD and KII discussions highlighting widespread recognition of issues such as looting, theft, and forced business closures. These losses frequently occur during periods of demonstrations, inter-communal clashes, or gang attacks, often targeting businesses owned by specific nationalities or ethnic groups as acts of retaliation.

Sometimes they target your business based on the ethnic community where you come from. Not so long ago, a Kikuyu with a business in Hong Kong was targeted and robbed because he was from a community that was being fought against. I have never seen that man again around here. I don't know if he went to Nairobi or what exactly happened to him. His shop remains closed to date (KII, Refugee)

The study findings suggest that business owners operate in highly insecure environments, with numerous FGDs and KIIs indicating that traders face harassment and extortion from idle youth, often under the influence of drugs during times of instability. Particularly high-risk areas, such as the Arrupe Centre and Hong Kong, are notorious for robberies, especially after dark, compelling shops to close early, limit trading hours, and hinder business expansion in certain zones.

Furthermore, the findings show that conflict exacerbates mistrust and tension among traders from different nationalities. Competition for market spaces, perceptions of economic dominance, and accusations of exclusion were particularly pronounced in disputes involving Somali traders and communities from the Great Lakes region. Host KIIs described business spaces as both venues for cooperation and sources of tension, noting that while business interactions enhance engagement, they are also influenced by cultural beliefs and stereotypes, such as fears related to black magic (majawe).

Business is good. It's through business that we get to chat, share ideas, help each other, and learn about other cultures. Actually, when you interact with one, you realise they are not bad people. But even so, there's a lot of talk, and sometimes what I think is bad competition. You know the Somali know business. And they own very big businesses here. So sometimes you will find others feeling otherwise. But sometimes they also say the guys from Great Lakes operate under majawe, so they avoid them. So at the end of the day, no one trusts the other (KII, host)

Additionally, demonstrations, protests, and clashes often spill over into market areas, exposing business owners to violence and destruction. Refugee KIIs described instances of looting occurring in broad daylight during periods of unrest, resulting in significant losses that, in some cases, forced traders to relocate or abandon their businesses altogether. The impact of conflict is so severe that one respondent observed, 'Business owners lose their livelihoods. Because sometimes there are those who just take advantage to loot and destroy property' (KII, Government). The data also reveals gendered dimensions affecting women traders, who face compounded risks, particularly when their businesses heavily depend on refugee customers. Women reported that conflict not only disrupts their trade but also increases their fear of physical harm, harassment, and insecurity while sourcing supplies or operating in markets.

Overall, there is evidence that violence, insecurity, economic shocks, and movement restrictions have severely eroded confidence in the business environment in Kakuma Municipality. Traders frequently cited their inability to invest, expand, or restock due to ongoing uncertainty and threats of violence, leading many to operate on a survival basis rather than pursue growth.

Children

Children within both the refugee and host communities are among the most vulnerable and exposed groups affected by conflict in Kakuma Municipality. Just like women,

68% of survey respondents indicated that children suffer more during periods of insecurity. They either endure direct and indirect harm arising from insecurity, disruptions to essential services, and the strain placed on household and community support systems. Many children are frequently exposed to violence in their immediate environment, particularly during clashes, gang-related attacks, or violent incidents at water points and distribution centres. A leader from the refugee community aptly captured this situation by noting,

Women and children are, in most cases, most affected when conflicts occur. Children will not go to school, they will go hungry, they will not be in a position to seek refuge during conflicts, they do not get the proper care and access to basic needs, and therefore they suffer a great deal (KII, Refugee)

The findings reveal that educational disruption is one of the most significant impacts of conflict on children. Respondents from FGD reported that many Turkana children attend schools located inside the refugee camps due to their free accessibility. However, these learning environments are highly susceptible to closure during times of unrest. The study confirms that school closures disrupt learning cycles, lead to absenteeism, and result in prolonged academic stagnation, affecting both host and refugee learners alike.

As you can see, we don't have schools around here. At least on our side (host). And the few that are there are very far away. So our children go to schools there (within the camp). It's good because at least they can get an education. But you can imagine how many issues they endure. Sometimes it's a strike here, other times people are fighting; I don't know where, and school cannot continue. So our children have to stay home. And if they stay home for long, some of them just give up and drop out completely (FGD, Host)

Government KIIs reinforced this pattern, stating that 'conflicts often disrupt schooling, leading to dropouts and forced relocation of children'. The findings also indicate that when children must shift to host community schools due to reduced funding or system restructuring, they often have to walk long distances of 6 - 10 kilometres, exposing them to safety risks, fatigue, and diminished concentration on their studies, affecting their well-being, as they face increased vulnerability in their formative years.

Persons with disability

Further scrutiny of the data reveals that Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) experience distinct vulnerability during conflict situations within Kakuma Municipality. Qualitative insights from key informant interviews reveal that conflict disproportionately impacts

this group due to significant barriers in mobility and access to essential services. One KII emphasised the particular risks faced by PWDs, stating,

PWDs are even more disadvantaged. Accessing services like water during conflict is in itself a problem, not to mention the risks they endure during food distribution or violent incidents, as many are unable to flee quickly (KII, NGO)

It is worth noting that PWDs suffer more during periods of sudden outbreaks of violence, particularly in scenarios that necessitate immediate physical response, such as escaping dangerous situations, queuing for food, or accessing vital water points. Their limitations increase their exposure to harm during periods of tension or when criminal activities escalate, as reported by survey respondents, 67.02% of whom agree that PWDs suffer more during periods of conflict and insecurity.

Overall, although 74.02% of survey respondents agreed that the entire society suffers during times of conflict, they also highlighted the unique ways in which specific groups endure hardship in these challenging situations, as demonstrated in the figure below:

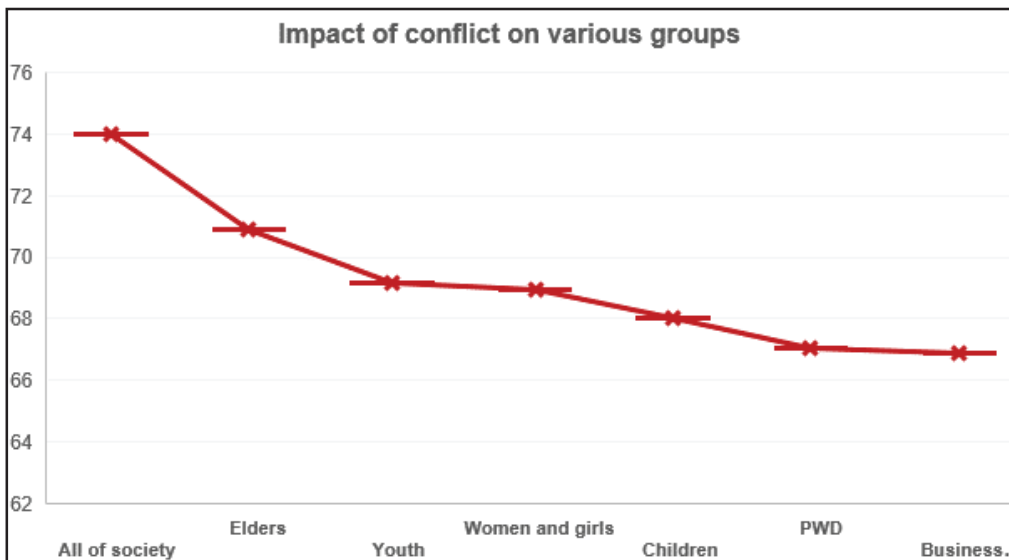


Figure 18: Survey participants' representation of the impact of conflict on various groups in Kakuma Municipality

4.3 Conflict Hotspot Areas in Kakuma Municipality

The study has demonstrated several conflict hotspot areas endangering the lives of both refugees and host communities within the Municipality. The hotspots are associated with the presence of various gang groups that engage in criminal activities, from petty robbery to more lethal acts of violence, including rape and murder, as revealed below:

Table 3: Key Conflict Hotspot areas within Kakuma Municipality

No.	Hotspots	Gang groups in operation	Remarks
1.	Block 1	Ten tigers	They are robbers and killers
2.	Block 4	Bad boys	They are known for destroying property and engaging in robbery
3.	Block 6 and 11	Superpower	
4.	Blocks 7, 8, and 9 Kalobeyei	0 block gangs	They are killers and robbers
5.	Block 9	Black danger group	They are killers and robbers
6.	Kakuma 1, Zone 1, Block 7, 8, and 9	NWC	Kisumu town, Nyando, Muhoroni
7.	Okapi field, near basketball field (clinic four)	Bloodshed group	They are known for the use of dangerous weapons such as guns and machetes
8.	Block 10, 11 and 12	Mexico mixed group	
9.	TMC	Baba Gala Group	
10.	Kakuma 1, Hong Kong		Prone to tensions due to the presence of gangs from the South Sudanese Dinka and Nuer communities
11.	Kakuma 1, Zone 2	Mapangale group	Multi-nationality
12.	Kakuma 1, Zone 3 and 4 Kakuma 2	TLG group	
13.	Kakuma 1, Aruppe Street		Composed of multi-nationality gangs, including the host community. Known for using machetes to mete out violence
14.	Kakuma 2, Zone 2		Frequent conflicts over market access, particularly with the Somali community, are often accused of excluding other communities/nationalities.
15.	Kakuma 2, Gambela (behind Refugee Primary School)		Presence of petty thieves known to target personal belongings such as phones and money. Often wielding machetes to intimidate victims and mete out violence.
16.	Kakuma 3	West coast group Shuluk boys group D-Gang group Kusum boys group	Multi-nationality
17.	Kakuma 3, Zone 3		Known for frequent violence, sometimes resource-based, involving the Somali community
18.	Kakuma 4, Zone 1		Experiences social tension, particularly around intermarriages, which the Nuer from South Sudan strongly oppose. Said to be 'a no-go zone even for security officers. Presence of armed youth
19.	Kalobeyei – Village 1	Gaza 69 rebels	Multi-nationality Operate day and night, assaulting individuals, stealing, and causing havoc. Engage in fighting other gang groups, stealing, assaulting and killing. Mainly inhabited by the Anwak clan, it is affected by tensions rooted in historical grievances and spills over conflicts from the mother country.
20.	Kalobeyei – Village 2	0 Block group	
21.	Kalobeyei – Village 3	Colombia group Big Daddy group Big dog group	
22.	Border hotspots include: The Kalemuchuch border between Kakuma and the host community Kakuma 1 and Kakuma 3 border with Lopur Ward River Don Bosco area, between Kakuma 1 and Kakuma 2 between Kakuma 2 and Lochor Edome		Known for frequent conflicts both during the day and night, with several youth groups operating
23.	Other hotspot areas		The Municipality has other hotspot areas, including: Angelina Jollie, the Lagga River, Duka Moja town area, Natiri 1 near the Lagga River, Clinic 4, Kadugli Primary School, Ejore Village, Darfur Market, Komudei, Laini Moja, Loitakor Village, Nabek River, Yemen, and the Baghdad area.

When the findings were assessed according to their level of severity within the Municipality, the survey revealed that out of the seven areas surveyed, Kalobeyei Village 2 is the most prevalent hotspot, as shown in the table below:

Table 4: Level of severity of conflict as per the Municipality area in Kakuma Municipality

#	Municipality Area	Freq (n=195)	Per cent (%)
1.	Kalobeyei Village 2	115	58.97%
2.	Kalobeyei Village 3	89	45.64%
3.	Kalobeyei Village 1	81	41.54%
4.	Kakuma Camp 1	74	37.95%
5.	Kakuma Camp 4	65	33.33%
6.	Kakuma Camp 3	55	28.21%
7.	Kakuma Camp 2	37	18.97%



Figure 19: Map showing Kakuma Municipality as per the Municipality area

Key	
Municipality area	Level of severity
1. Kalobeyei Village 2	Most severe
2. Kalobeyei Village 3	High risk
3. Kalobeyei Village 1	Significant concern
4. Kakuma Camp 1	Moderate alert
5. Kakuma Camp 4	Caution zone
6. Kakuma Camp 3	Low risk
7. Kakuma Camp 2	Stable

4.4 Connectors and Resilience Factors

A range of connectors and resilience factors in Kakuma Municipality sustain social cohesion and prevent everyday friction from escalating into sustained conflict, even amidst persistent tensions. Although they do not erase underlying challenges, these mechanisms create important buffers through established relationships, shared routines, and accessible resources that absorb shock and promote stability, contributing to a resilient environment where collective efforts address shared challenges, as demonstrated in the figure below:



Fig 20: Connectors and resilience factors that sustain cohesion

4.4.1 Shared developmental challenges

In Kakuma Municipality, both the host community and refugees experience common struggles, creating a unique context where their difficulties, ironically, enhance resilience and cooperation. The host community endures some of Kenya's most severe socio-economic challenges, characterised by extreme poverty. Statistics indicate that Turkana County has the highest overall poverty rate at 82.7% and a food poverty rate of 64.3%¹⁵, along with exceptionally low literacy rates, limited access to formal employment opportunities and other basic amenities.

Similarly, the refugee population has fled their home countries due to equally dire circumstances, including mass atrocities, armed conflict, political violence, and widespread insecurity, seeking a haven from conditions that threatened their very

¹⁵<https://www.knbs.or.ke/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/The-Kenya-Poverty-Report-2022.pdf>

survival (IGMAP & AIPG, 2025). This shared experience of hardship, whether stemming from the persistent underdevelopment and environmental challenges such as frequent droughts and resource scarcity in Turkana, or the push factors of conflict and instability that drove refugees from their homes, creates a unifying force between these two communities. Despite the factors that impede peaceful coexistence between refugees and their hosts, their shared struggle against poverty, insecurity, and environmental fragility becomes a catalyst for collective action, enabling them to bridge divisions and work together towards resolving shared challenges, thereby strengthening social cohesion in the face of adversity.

Sometimes I ask myself, what are we even fighting over? Especially when they (hosts) come here to fetch water. So, we refugees came here desperately looking for refuge. At least in a safe place we can lay our heads and see our children live normal lives like other children do. But even they (hosts) look at the kind of lives they live. Really? This place is the poorest I have ever seen. Just go to town and look around at the people walking there. They haven't even showered. Like, people are living such desperate lives. Then I wonder, why not just support each other and co-exist? (KII, Refugee)

4.4.2 Social and Relational Resilience

In Kakuma Municipality, where over 22 nationalities coexist alongside ethnic and nationality rivalries and competition for limited resources, the ability to build and maintain social bonds is crucial for coping with the challenges of camp life. The available evidence suggests that some form of resilience often emerges outside of formal governance structures, evident in activities such as sports, particularly football tournaments and other athletic events that bring youth together across ethnicities and with the host communities. This was exemplified by teams such as Kakuma United football league, with 82.3% of participants confirming that sports, especially football, are an effective tool for promoting social cohesion between communities living in Kakuma Municipality. Data also suggests that cultural events such as 'Kakuma Got Talent' provide natural spaces for integration, as highlighted by 86% of participants.

In terms of relational resilience, there is evidence that connectors such as intermarriages, religion and shared spiritual spaces, and other communal engagements encourage a sense of belonging among the communities' shared experiences of hardship and displacement, turning strangers into a supportive community. This is corroborated by quantitative data, where 93% of participants confirmed that engaging in religious activities brings people together, promoting social cohesion. These connectors serve as bridges that encourage interaction and understanding, leading to stronger relationships and shared expectations over time.

4.4.3 Economic Resilience

Economic resilience in Kakuma is built not on formal employment or stable markets but on the ability of communities to adapt to economic shocks and collaborate. The refugee and surrounding Turkana communities form an interdependent economic ecosystem, where the needs of the refugees align with the resources of the host community in transactions that often occur outside formal regulations. For instance, our findings reveal the existence of opportunities for economic exchange between refugees and the host community, with a participant conveying that ‘they bring us charcoal (hosts), and we exchange with food. Sometimes they would help us with some work, and we would find something to offer them in exchange. We all depend on one another somehow’. These collaborative efforts help build trust and create social ties, which are crucial during difficult times, with 69.9% of survey participants affirming that they relate well with either the locals or refugees.

Further scrutiny into the data reveals that the resilience of the informal economy lies in its ability to absorb shocks through collective support and diversification. When the World Food Programme (WFP) reduced rations through the Differentiated Assistance programme, some households relied on extended networks for survival, as averred by one of the KII participants, “there are people who literally could not survive with the little that was provided. You find yourself chipping in and sharing the little you have”. This diversity enhances their ability to cope, as members experience economic difficulties differently. Worth noting is that when conflicts arise, these economic ties are threatened, sometimes creating incentives for peaceful resolution, as individuals recognise that their livelihoods depend on maintaining cooperation.

4.4.4 Institutional and Governance Resilience

There is accumulating evidence from the study that institutional and governance resilience in Kakuma Municipality is shaped by the spaces and opportunities that arise from existing formal structures. While these structures provide essential services and frameworks, resilience is frequently found in the innovative arrangements the community develops in response to specific challenges, including forming alternative governance mechanisms that effectively address their immediate needs. A case in point is when the communities face registration bottlenecks (refugees) and experience police harassment either when doing business or settling disputes. Participant voices from FGDs and KIIs indicate that in response, they create alternative authority structures that combine traditional leadership with the camp’s practical needs. For instance, refugees who have encountered registration delays and require SIM cards have turned to host community members for assistance. Some community members, fearing harassment, have resorted to traditional leaders to mediate disputes. In fact, community leaders, including village/block leaders and nationality leaders, are revered,

with 88.15% of the survey participants agreeing that, as frontline mediators, they are a powerful unifying factor. Worth noting is that an official from the Judiciary confirmed that 95% of the cases they receive are from refugees, implying that the hosts have devised ways to resolve conflicts independently.

Further scrutiny into the data discloses that inadequate public participation in policies such as the Shirika Plan and Differentiated Assistance is a strong resilience factor arising from governance issues. Despite the existing challenges between the host and refugee communities, they have united to oppose certain aspects of these policies, demonstrating a collective strength in advocating for their rights and needs. Moreover, connectors such as shared amenities, including water points, schools, and hospitals, bridge the two communities, facilitating access to essential services while simultaneously reducing tensions.

4.5 Summary

Several connectors and resilience factors together exist to advance social cohesion within the complex environment of Kakuma Municipality. Key connectors include community leaders, cultural practices, shared amenities such as water points and schools, and shared developmental challenges, all of which are essential in promoting collaboration and mutual support between refugees and the host community. Worth noting is that some of these factors also act as dividers. For instance, cultural differences also lead to misunderstandings amongst various nationalities, while community leaders sometimes reinforce divisions through biases and favouritism. Despite these challenges, it is important to leverage the connectors and resilience factors to build social cohesion within Kakuma Municipality.

Chapter Five

EMERGING ISSUES, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



5.0 Introduction

Kenya has ratified key international laws that seek to promote the rights and well-being of refugees. Despite embracing these legal frameworks and domesticating the laws, communities living in Kakuma Municipality still grapple with a range of challenges that hinder their progress. This chapter highlights the study's emerging issues, its recommendations and conclusions.

5.1 Emerging issues

This study has addressed several issues that affect social cohesion in Kakuma Municipality, shedding light on the complexities and challenges that host and refugee communities grapple with daily.

5.1.1 Intra-refugee issues outnumber refugee-host conflicts

The study reveals that there are more intra-refugee issues than refugee-host issues. Intra-communal conflicts /tension among refugees are more than inter-conflict between the refugee and the host community. These conflicts emerge from the happenings in their homeland, leading to the progressive fragmentation of what once appeared to be a united refugee community, and the most affected in this category are the South Sudanese.

Similarly, there are internal issues caused by cultural diversity struggles, stemming from faith practices, linguistic barriers, societal norms and values that govern how they live and relate. However, this does not imply that refugee-host issues are absent; they primarily revolve around resource competition, as the hosts often feel sidelined and believe that refugees enjoy better living conditions. Despite these tensions, the Turkana community does not harbour animosity toward the refugees. In fact, some appreciate their presence, noting that it has brought about a certain degree of improvement in their lives. One participant voiced the general sentiments from other Turkana sub-counties during the FGD sessions: “if you people (Kakuma host community) do not want to live with the refugees, bring them to us here (other Turkana sub-counties). We know we will benefit a lot from them”, thus revealing the complex relationship between these groups in light of the challenges they face.

5.1.2 Gaps in governance and service provision as key contributors to conflict in Kakuma Municipality

Turkana County receives Ksh. 13 billion annually as part of the national revenue share, making it one of the largest recipients of revenue in the country¹⁶. It also receives approximately 1.86 billion from the equalisation fund¹⁷ designed to support

¹⁶ National Treasury and Economic Planning. County Allocation of Revenue Bill, 2025

¹⁷ Kenya Gazette Supplement No. 80 (National Assembly Bills No. 21), 2025

basic service delivery in historically marginalised areas. Despite these allocations, the expected growth and improvement of life have not materialised for the people of Turkana. Ironically, even after 15 years of devolution, Turkana County has the highest poverty index in Kenya, accounting for 82.7% (KNBS, 2024). Residents expressed frustration with the worsening standard of living and their overreliance on the little aid that comes to the refugee community.

Access to quality essential services is still a mirage. It is no surprise that refugees entirely depend on humanitarian aid for their survival, as the host community members resort to barter trade, taking on menial jobs from refugees in exchange for food. The study findings demonstrate that this cyclic dependency exacerbates existing tensions, as both groups compete for limited resources, particularly in light of the new AID Model of Differentiated Assistance introduced by budget cuts. As aid becomes scarce and competition intensifies, the relationship between refugees and the host community may be strained, leading to full-blown conflicts, a resurgence of criminal gangs and increased levels of insecurity.

5.1.3 The Shirika Plan, a forward-looking document that lacks the Host and Refugee Buy-In

The Shirika Plan is a forward-looking document designed to promote the long-term integration and self-reliance of refugees in Kakuma. Owing to the current challenges wrought by budget cuts, this policy is key as it seeks to empower refugees to move from aid dependency to self-sufficiency. Its overall goal is to create sustainable conditions that would enhance their livelihoods and promote integration, ultimately transforming the reliance on humanitarian assistance into a more stable, self-reliant future for both refugees and the host community within the Municipality. This study has established that both refugees and the host community harbour misconceptions about this policy framework, leading to widespread opposition against it. This misunderstanding can be attributed to the lack of grassroots consultation before its rollout, as well as the absence of continuous civic education to explain why it is a beneficial policy for the community.

5.1.4 Minimal Focus in Peacebuilding Efforts and Weak Coordination Framework

Many organisations are undertaking different programmes in Kakuma Municipality. The findings show the absence of organisations that solely focus on peacebuilding. Additionally, there are no proper mechanisms for coordination. The lack of organisations that fully focus on peacebuilding is evidenced by the fragmentation of initiatives, the lack of prioritisation and the inability to tackle the root causes of conflict on time. The reality on the ground is that coordination mechanisms are ad hoc, an indication that peace structures remain ‘disjointed, uncoordinated, and underfunded’. Consequently, peacebuilding initiatives risk being subsumed under broader humanitarian, development, or security issues.

5.2 Conclusion

The people in Kakuma deserve to live peacefully and with dignity, irrespective of their status as refugees or members of the host community. Numerous international and local laws affirming the rights of refugees exist, emphasising the obligation to provide protection and support to those seeking safety. It is also important to consider the needs and concerns of the local communities that have graciously hosted refugees, recognising their struggles and the potential pressures they face in accommodating displaced populations.

As the global number of displaced persons continues to rise, the need to promote social cohesion in regions such as Kakuma Municipality becomes ever more critical, as it directly influences the ability of diverse groups to coexist, share resources, and collectively address challenges. The experiences in Kakuma Municipality demonstrate that while shared adversity has created a unifying force among the refugee and host communities in some aspects, the underlying complexities of refugee situations, coupled with a lack of dedicated peacebuilding institutions, lack of accountability from duty-bearers in service provision and fragmented efforts among local organisations, undermine these positive dynamics. It is important to invest strategically in initiatives that build bridges, strengthen community leadership, and implement a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach to ensure social cohesion remains a central pillar of all interventions.

5.3 Recommendations

The complexities and challenges highlighted in Kakuma Municipality demand more than just a continuation of existing efforts. It calls for a fundamental shift in strategy. The recommendations that follow are not mere suggestions for improvement; they represent an urgent call to action, offering a roadmap for transformative change essential to fostering genuine social cohesion, ensuring the dignity of all residents, and building a truly sustainable future for both host and refugee communities.

5.3.1 National Government

Strengthen the capacity of DRS to fully undertake its functions

To ensure refugee management is not reactive, crisis-driven, and that it's committed to upholding human rights, the national government should allocate adequate funding and comprehensively strengthen the Directorate of Refugee Services to ensure it becomes effective and its impact felt by actors, hosts and refugees. They should fully undertake their functions as per the act that established it. Without adequate resourcing and a robust DRS, Kenya cannot adequately address the complex needs of refugees, ensure their integration into national systems, or mitigate the socio-economic challenges that lead to tensions among refugees and host communities.

5.3.2 County government

Empowerment of the host community and supplementation of refugee services within Kakuma Municipality

The County Government of Turkana, as a key duty-bearer of service provision, holds a key responsibility to ensure all revenues and opportunities translate into tangible benefits for its marginalised populace, particularly the residents of Kakuma Municipality. Fifteen years post-devolution, the very promise of this constitutional shift was to bring public development, services, and equitable resource access to an unprecedented scale and reach. Yet voices from the locals suggest they would be better off as refugees in their own country, where aid appears more accessible, indicating that this promise remains unfulfilled for many. The county government should embrace its role as a proactive facilitator of development and equitable service delivery, transforming the rhetoric of devolution into a lived reality of dignity and opportunity for every citizen, irrespective of their status.

Specifically, the county government should:

- ❖ Scale up access to services, infrastructure and development initiatives that have the potential to spur growth and development for the host community
- ❖ Promote equity in access to services for all - refugees and host communities alike
- ❖ Enhance citizen participation to gather needs, concerns and translate them into policy interventions
- ❖ Engage actively in refugee protection, as outlined in policies such as the Refugees Act 2021
- ❖ Ensure effective coordination and resource allocation, which are critical for achieving meaningful impact in this area
- ❖ Leverage initiatives such as KISEDEP by proactively partnering with investors to ensure the consistent provision of basic services across Kakuma, shifting from mere contemplation to concrete action
- ❖ Take the constitutional requirement of affirmative action seriously to ensure employment opportunities reach the marginalised people of Kakuma Municipality.

5.3.3 Directorate of Refugee Services

Lack of access to objective, trusted information fuels rumours, which in turn shape community expectations and attitudes. This is the current scenario in Kakuma Municipality. The Directorate of Refugee Services (DRS) plays a critical midwifery role as the direct linkage between the refugee and the national government. They should undertake the following to mitigate identified gaps in relation to information, equity in access to services, public participation and coordination:

- ❖ Design and execute genuine civic education and sensitisation programmes that are credible, and endeavour to reach the grassroots levels. They should utilise trusted messengers to disseminate accurate information. This will go a long way in countering misinformation that undermines trust between refugee and host communities.
- ❖ Actively promote and facilitate programmes that create shared economic opportunities and access to services for both populations, such as vocational training and collaborative projects, recognising that such inclusive initiatives are vital for building inter-group trust and reducing conflict stemming from perceived inequalities in aid and services.
- ❖ Strategically embrace deep collaboration with like-minded institutions to circumvent existing challenges, such as coordination gaps, resource strain, service delivery and the need for enhanced public participation in policy implementation.

5.3.4. Kenya National Commission on Human Rights

Undertake investigations on perceived injustices linked to basic human rights

Kenyan law, anchored by the Constitution's Bill of Rights, enshrines economic and social rights like health, adequate food, water, housing, and education for all. Additionally, the Refugees Act 2021 establishes a robust framework that guarantees fundamental human rights and equitable access to basic needs for all individuals within its borders. They should therefore, in conjunction with the Commission on Administration of Justice (CAJ), launch a comprehensive investigation into allegations of injustices, discrimination, and corruption impacting service provision within Kakuma Municipality.

Reports highlight critical issues such as inequitable aid distribution, perceived preferential treatment in employment for refugees over hosts, and vulnerability to criminal activities, including gang violence, theft, and robberies. Given that these basic services are fundamental human rights, any instances of partiality, systemic discrimination, or corrupt practices not only undermine human dignity and exacerbate tensions but also represent a critical failure of duty-bearers. Therefore, the Commission should not only rigorously identify systemic failures and individual culpability but also proffer robust and implementable policy recommendations to ensure equitable access, hold those liable accountable, and establish transparent, rights-based mechanisms that uphold the inherent dignity and rights of every individual in Kakuma Municipality.

5.3.5 National Cohesion and Integration Commission

Fill the gap of an apex body coordinating peace initiatives in Kakuma Municipality

NCIC to step up its role as the peacebuilding apex institution mandated by the NCI Act to rally all actors within the Municipality and spearhead peacebuilding programmes

to avoid duplication and clarify the roles and responsibilities of different actors. NCIC should facilitate the development of a clear coordination framework that addresses the needs of the local target groups while deepening stakeholder collaboration in peacebuilding efforts across the refugee and host communities.

Specifically, NCIC should provide programmatic interventions aimed at dismantling cultural barriers and promoting robust inter-communal relationships among refugees and between refugee and host communities, by urgently rallying stakeholders to prioritise the design and execution of targeted social inclusion programmes within Kakuma Municipality. The aim is not to invent new infrastructure, but to leverage existing connectors as natural platforms for enhancing diversity, promoting inclusive participation, facilitating dialogue and building strong intra and intercommunal relations.

5.3.6 Civil society

Advocate for transformative change in good governance, equity and fairness in service provision and social justice

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are the genuine agents of social transformation in any space, including Kakuma Municipality. Although numerous CSOs operate within the Kakuma space, it remains essential to enhance collaboration, as these actors sometimes function in isolation, leading to duplication of initiatives.

Specifically, CSOs should:

- ❖ Engage in policy advocacy and collaborate with local communities by amplifying the marginalised voices. This includes pushing for equitable service delivery and participatory governance for both the refugee and host communities.
- ❖ Strengthen the local peace architecture through facilitating community-led dialogue initiatives, by strengthening and utilising existing community structures such as religious leaders, elders, and block leaders to enhance cohesion.
- ❖ Actively build trust and counter misinformation by creating platforms for interaction, engaging in community training, and conducting cultural exchange events, to reduce conflict, dispel stereotypes and myths that fuel inter-group tensions.

5.3.7 Political class

Members of the political class should resist the temptation to exploit the vulnerabilities of refugees for personal gain. Such opportunistic manipulation, often manifested through negative rhetoric and the dissemination of misinformation, directly fuels hate and mistrust, which leads to inter-community tensions and violent conflicts.

5.3.8 Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health (MoH), in partnership with other actors, should spearhead Mental Health programmes.

The cumulative effects of protracted displacement, recurrent inter-communal violence, and systemic policy failures have resulted in a mental health crisis in Kakuma that requires intentional collaboration between state and non-state actors, under the leadership of the Ministry of Health. Refugee experiences intersect destructively with unresolved historical trauma carried from countries of origin, which is then expressed publicly through outbursts of anger at water points, ethnic accusations in marketplace disputes, and later transmitted to younger generations, fueling cyclical conflict.

Specifically, the MoH should:

- ❖ Collaborate with other institutions to provide psychosocial support that stabilises acute distress by offering trained community counsellors, safe spaces for women and youth, and accessible referral pathways to clinical mental health services.
- ❖ Partner with NCIC to institute culturally grounded strategies that address historical trauma through community truth-telling forums, narrative therapy, and traditional healing integration processes that provide a safe space for managing unspeakable experiences.
- ❖ Partner with DRS to allocate dedicated funding for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) infrastructure, including trained personnel and protected counselling and recovery spaces.

5.3.9 National Police Service

In terms of security, Kakuma Municipality is rife with numerous hotspots, rising gang activity, and escalating issues of GBV. Data reveals that the landscape is deteriorating daily, with incidences of corruption being reported. The security responses remain largely reactive, failing to adequately address the unique dynamics of a protracted refugee camp environment, compromising the safety and stability of the residents.

Specifically, the National Police Service (NPS) should:

- ❖ Establish formal liaison committees comprising police, refugee representatives, and Turkana host community leaders to facilitate early warning and early response.

- ❖ Encourage transparent reporting mechanisms for police misconduct to the Independent Policing and Oversight Authority (IPOA), to rebuild trust eroded by corruption and other abuses.
- ❖ Collaborate with KNCHR to create a dedicated investigation capacity for gender-based violence and child protection cases.

5.3.10 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The study has highlighted key issues on the mandate of UNHCR, including the challenges surrounding differentiated assistance. The study recommends that these issues be addressed promptly to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of both refugees and the host community in Kakuma Municipality.

Specifically, UNHCR should:

- ❖ Establish a participatory review process for the Differentiated Assistance Programme, including regular consultations and feedback mechanisms to ensure the perspectives and needs of the affected communities are considered in the decision-making process.
- ❖ Prioritise joint projects that address shared resource challenges, particularly water, energy, and land management for both the refugee and the host community. They should be well consulted from the design to the execution stages.

The said interventions should leverage available grassroots structures such as faith leaders, women groups, elders and other community leaders, rather than externally imposed, to ensure that healing aligns with the local understanding of suffering and recovery.

Sustainable peace in Kakuma Municipality cannot be achieved through fragmented, single-mandate interventions. It demands a multi-agency convergence where government agencies, international organisations such as the UNHCR, refugee-led organisations, civil society, and grassroots community structures lock arms to dismantle the structural foundations of conflict. NCIC recognises that the surge in crime, intra- and inter-ethnic conflict, and social fragmentation is not merely a law-and-order problem but the consequences of deeper systemic failures, including unequal resource distribution, governance gaps, economic exclusion, and cultural alienation that no single actor can address alone. Only through this intentional partnership can structural issues be tackled at their roots, to realise an environment where diverse, displaced, and marginalised populations co-exist peacefully.

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