



Kenya: Citizens' Perceptions on Refugees



Voices of Citizens | Sauti za Wananchi

19 June 2018

Kenya

From Harm to Home | [Rescue.org](https://www.rescue.org)

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Cover picture: *Refugees eagerly answering questions in a literacy class in a refugee camp in Kenya. Credit: The IRC*

INTRODUCTION

The much-anticipated Global Refugee Compact (GRC), expected in late 2018, together with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), promise to revitalize refugee response through a multi-stakeholder “whole of society” approach. At a time when the international community is grappling with fundamental questions such as the equitable sharing of responsibility for refugees, the views and opinions of citizens in East Africa are invaluable in charting new directions.

East Africa has a long history of hosting refugee populations. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have experienced large influxes of people displaced by the numerous conflicts in the region over the past decades. These three countries currently host more than 2.2 million refugees,¹ with Uganda hosting 1.4 million, followed by Kenya (just under 500,000) and Tanzania (over 350,000).

The dominant refugee response model in East Africa has been to house refugees in large camps, often built in marginal locations that restrict access and movement. This limits interaction between refugees and citizens of the host country. More recently, an integrated settlements approach, in which refugees and host communities coexist and share common services—as exemplified by the Settlements Transformative Agenda and Refugee and Host Population Empowerment in Uganda and the Kalobeyei settlement in Kenya—have brought citizens and refugees closer together, albeit only at the local level.

The majority of citizens in Kenya still have little or no interaction with refugees, yet Kenyans play a critical role, both directly and indirectly, in determining the conditions of refugee asylum. The extent to which citizens influence asylum policies in Kenya is not well documented, and little is known about the impact of citizens’ perceptions on current policy positions, despite this being a requirement of the country’s constitution. Currently, there is an ideal opportunity to incorporate citizens’ views with the proposed Refugee Bill—a previous version of the legislation failed for want of public participation.

This report attempts to illuminate key issues concerning citizens’ perceptions on refugee reception and response, as well as their attitudes toward the establishment of durable solutions. UNHCR defines three durable solutions for refugees: 1) voluntary repatriation to the country of origin in safety and dignity, 2) local integration in the country of asylum and, 3) resettlement to a third country. The objective is to highlight any connection (or disconnection) that may exist between public perceptions of refugees and public policy established by national and local governments.

The report calls for more deliberate and strategic engagement of the public in the policy decision-making process in Kenya. It identifies opportunities for strategic engagement of citizens and concludes that more needs to be done to improve the quality of information available to the public, as well as opportunities for citizens and refugees to engage directly in policy formulation.

1 UNHCR Fact Sheets for Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda February 2018.

METHODOLOGY

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) in partnership with Twaweza² undertook the survey using a tool called *Sauti za Wananchi*³ (SzW) a mobile phone panel survey developed and managed by Twaweza in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. SzW provides high quality and easily obtained survey data from a representative sample of the population in each of the three target countries. The IRC joined with Twaweza and national and international NGOs along with representatives from Kenya's Refugee Affairs Secretariat to develop the survey of 18 questions administered in all three countries during the first half of May 2018.

Data was collected from 1,672 respondents in Kenya, 1,606 in Tanzania, and 1,925 in Uganda. Based on the response rate, the data sets were then cleaned and weighted by Twaweza before the IRC staff began their analysis.

Twaweza *Sauti za Wananchi* survey description and sampling approach

In brief, *Sauti za Wananchi* is a mobile phone panel survey that establishes a baseline using randomly selected households and individual data from national censuses in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. In phase one, respondents are interviewed face-to-face in selected enumeration areas (EA). In phase two, respondents are contacted on their mobile phones over a 36-month period and asked questions covering a wide range of topics.

The target population for the survey are citizens 18 years and above. Geographic and gender balances are determined according to national census data. Twaweza used a multistage stratified sampling approach to achieve a representative sample of the total target population: stage one involves random selection of census enumeration areas based on specific EA strata; stage two involves random selection of households sampled from the EA list; stage three involves selection of individual respondents from household members 18 and older.

In each country, a population of 2,000 individuals in 200 enumeration areas was obtained, a sample sufficient for a confidence interval of +/- 5 percentage points. In addition to the 2,000 individuals, 400 additional replacement individuals were established in a representative manner to replace those individuals who drop out over the course of the survey. However, the protocols used to establish trust with Twaweza and to encourage participation, ensuring that high response rates are maintained over the life of each survey.

² <https://www.twaweza.org/go/about-us>

³ Kiswahili phrase that translates to the "Voices of Citizens"

KENYA

How do citizens identify refugees and where do they get their information?

Kenya has a long history of hosting refugees, notably the large influxes from Somalia and Sudan experienced in the 1980s and 1990s. The country maintains an open-door policy for refugees. Both factors have contributed to high levels of public awareness and understanding about refugees and issues that affect them. The majority of Kenyans (83%) can accurately describe the term *refugee*, based on one criteria, conflict. However, there is a significant proportion of the population whose understanding of the term *refugee* includes migrants (17%), those displaced by natural disasters (41%), and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (26%).

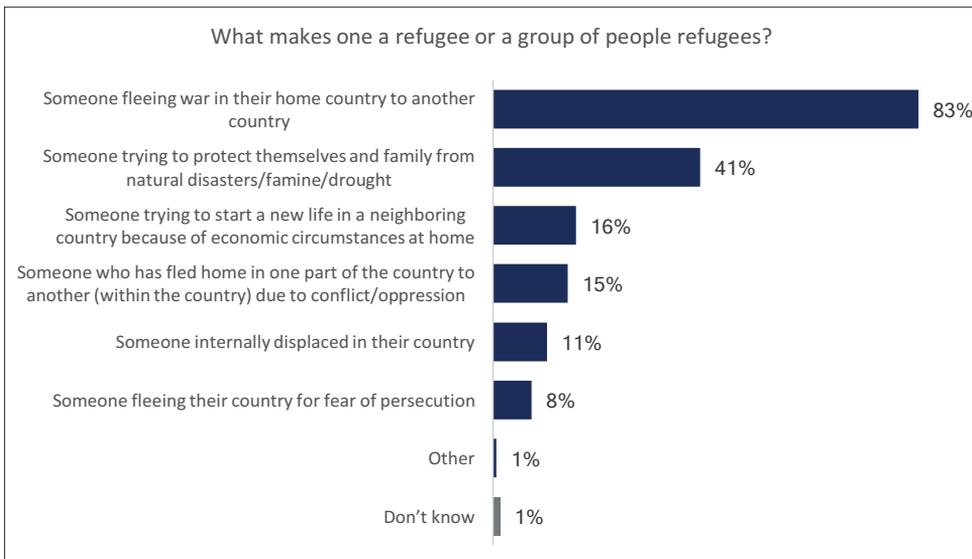


Figure 1: Kenyans' views on what makes one a refugee

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

Historically, Kenya has maintained a policy of encampment, hosting refugees in designated areas. This may account for the relatively low levels of interaction between citizens and refugees, with just over quarter (26%) of the population having experienced direct interaction with a refugee, as shown in Figure 2. Kenyans receive information about refugees primarily from electronic and print media, particularly radio (80%), television (42%) and newspapers (16%), as indicated in Figure 3. The majority of Kenyans (72%) trust what they hear on radio about refugees compared to other sources.

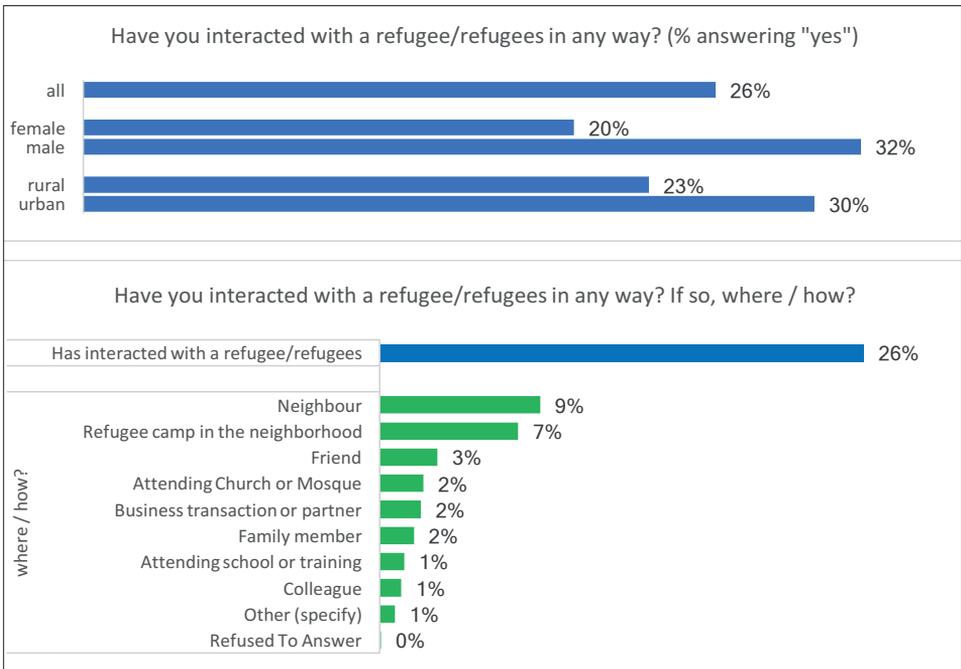


Figure 2: Kenyans who have interacted with a refugee/refugees. And if so where and how.

Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

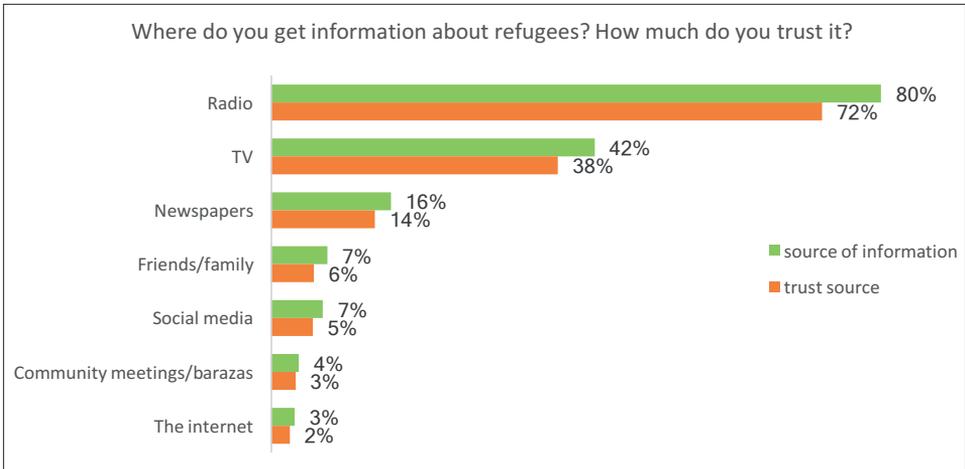


Figure 3: Where do you get information about refugees? How much do you trust it?

Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

In the past four years, media reports on refugees have been focused on national security concerns posed by the terrorist groups based in Somalia. Consequently, Kenyans are most aware of reports concerning the closing of camps (48%) and security threats (40%), as shown in Figure 4. In 2014, following a spate of terrorist attacks attributed to terrorist groups derived from Somalia that killed hundreds, the Kenyan government in 2016 announced that it would close Dadaab refugee camp, then home to more than 300,000 refugees, by May 2017. The announcement and subsequent political debate, including discussion of a case before the High Court of Kenya, dominated national media and no doubt influenced public perception of refugees.

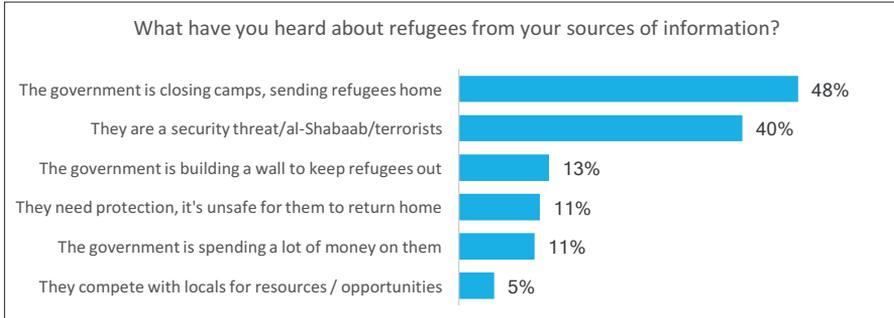


Figure 4: What have you heard about refugees from your sources of information?

Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

What do citizens think about protection and humanitarian service to refugees?

For decades, Kenya has played an important role in providing asylum to hundreds of thousands of refugees, most of whom have been or will be displaced for years. Figure 5 shows that 90% of Kenyans think that the country has been a good example to the rest of the world on how to assist refugees; 74% of Kenyans believe the Kenyan government has performed very well/well in recent years (Figure 6), with only a small proportion (5%) expressing disapproval of the country's refugee hosting arrangements (Figure 5).

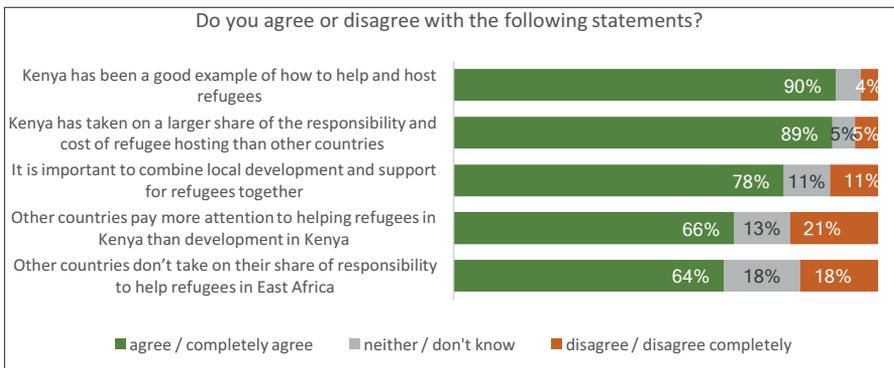


Figure 5: Kenyans Views on their governments response to refugee issues.

Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

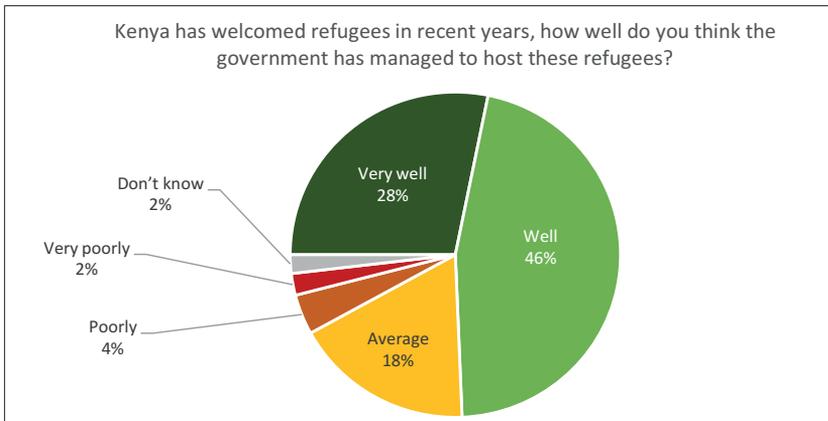


Figure 6: Kenyan has welcomed refugees in recent years, how well do you think the government has managed to host these refugees?

Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

Most Kenyans consider ongoing humanitarian need as the primary reason why the country should continue to support refugees (Figure 7). Just over a quarter (27%) of respondents view refugees as a security threat, even fewer (13%) view refugees as a burden on their country's resources.

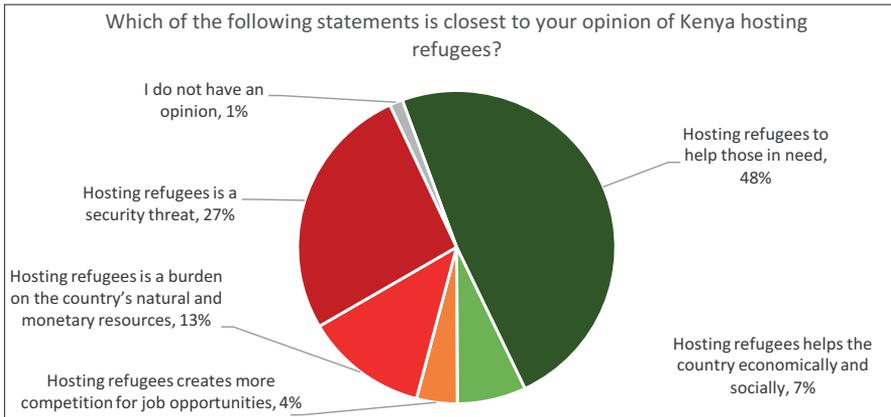


Figure 7: Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion of Kenya hosting refugees?

Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

A high proportion of citizens support the delivery of public services to refugees, particularly services that are closely linked to humanitarian need, such as water (94%) and security (93%). However, there is significantly less support for longer-term needs, such as land (39%) and citizenship (31%), which indicates Kenyans are less receptive to some factors that could lead to durable solutions for refugees (Figure 8).

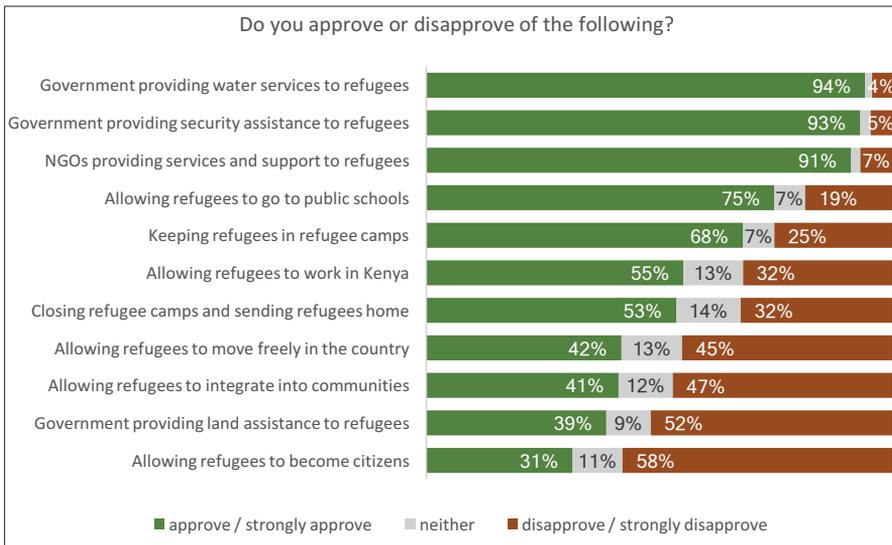


Figure 8. Kenyans' approval or disapproval of various services to refugees in Kenya

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

More than half of Kenyans (56%) have some degree of support for provision of public services to refugees through local (county) government, while 34% are opposed this option (Figure 9). A strong majority (78%) agree to some extent that it is important to combine local development with support for refugees (Figure 10). A majority of Kenyans (85%) also support the provision of services by Non Governmental Organizations to both refugees and host communities (Figure 11).

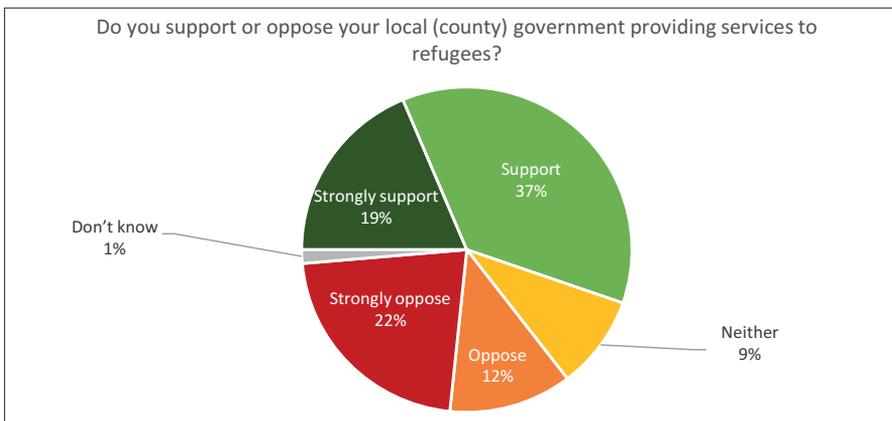


Figure 9: Do you support or oppose your local (county) government providing services to refugees?

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

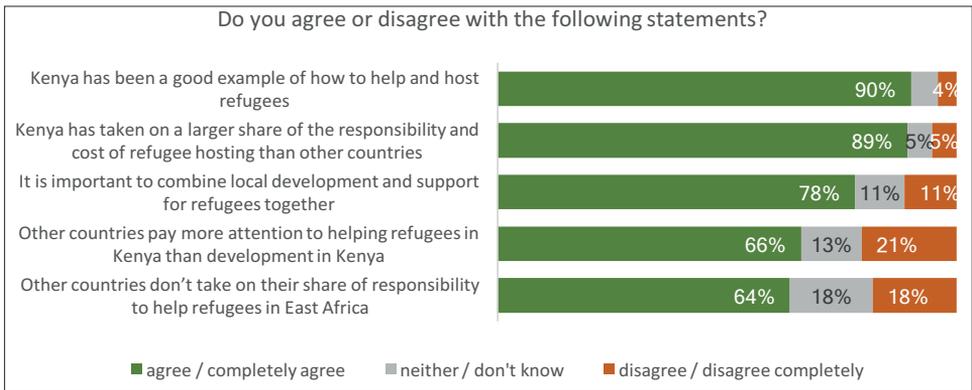


Figure 10: Kenyans’ views on international responsibility sharing

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

Kenya’s strict policy of encampment of refugees limits their freedom of movement and right to work, thus hampering their efforts to become self-reliant and rendering them dependent on humanitarian aid. These restrictions are exacerbated by the remote and arid locations of the main hosting areas.

UNHCR and the governments of Kenya and Somalia have implemented a repatriation program that has returned 76,589 Somali refugees to their home country⁴. The policy in Kenya has been driven by national security concerns, particularly after the government declared that Dadaab refugee camp had “lost its humanitarian character”. Yet only 27% of Kenyans currently think that refugees pose a security threat (Figure 7). Nevertheless, more than half (54%) of Kenyans support the closing of refugee camps and sending refugees home (Figure 12). These findings point to uncertainty among the general population about the appropriateness of the policy and its implications for national security given the prevailing context.

What do citizens think about refugee integration?

A major obstacle to refugee integration in Kenya remains the encampment policy. For integration to occur, refugees require freedom of movement as well as the right to work and earn a living. Figure 13 shows that 41% of Kenyans would like to see integration of refugees in the country. However, respondents were almost split evenly on refugees’ right to freedom of movement, with 42% approving and 45% disapproving (Figure 8).

4 <http://www.unhcr.org/ke/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/02/Voluntary-Repatriation-Analysis-2-February-2018.pdf>

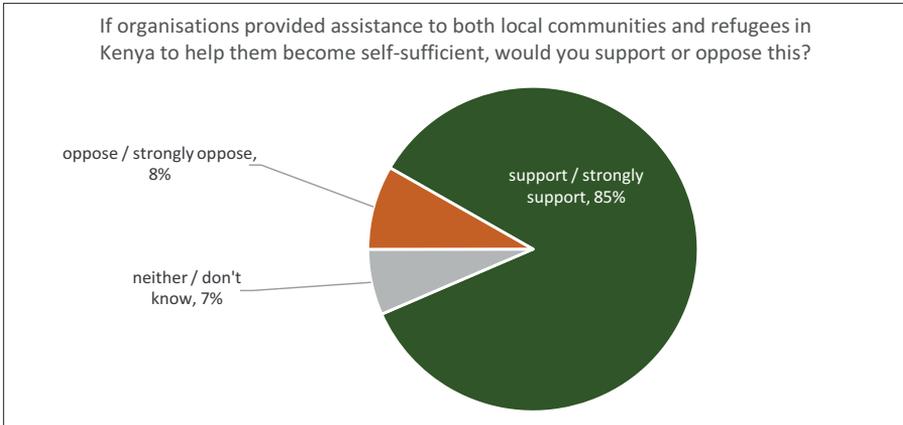


Figure 11: Kenyans' support for integrated support for self-sufficiency for local and refugee communities

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

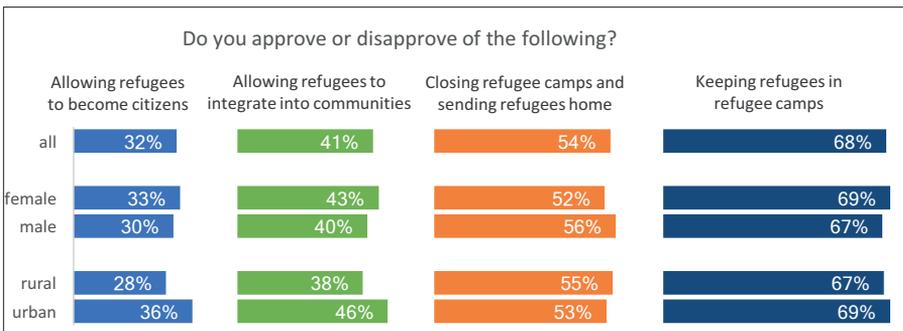


Figure 12: Kenyans's approval on citizenship, integration, closing camps, and the encampment policy

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

A significant majority (88%) think that the government should support refugees in their efforts to achieve livelihoods, and support their right to work (72%) (Figure 13). Most Kenyans do not perceive refugees as posing a threat to jobs, with only 4% expressing deep concerns over competition (Figure 7). Very few (7%) feel that refugees contribute to the national economy (Figure 7), which is not surprising given that refugees have limited right to work or livelihood opportunities.

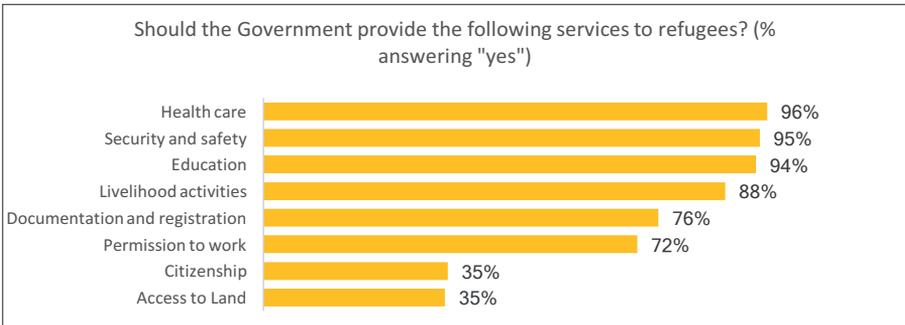


Figure 13: Should the Government provide the following services to refugees? (% answering “yes”)

Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

Many refugees in Kenya have been living in the country for years, some for over two decades, including those who were born in Kenya. By law, refugees may apply for citizenship if they meet requirements, including at least seven years of legal residence. In practice, however, citizenship is largely unattainable due to political and bureaucratic impediments. While a minority of respondents (32%) believe refugees should be allowed to gain citizenship an almost equal percentage (62%) say that they would support citizenship for refugees who have maintained legal residence for 20 years (Figure 14). Nearly a quarter (24%) maintain that citizenship should never be granted to refugees.

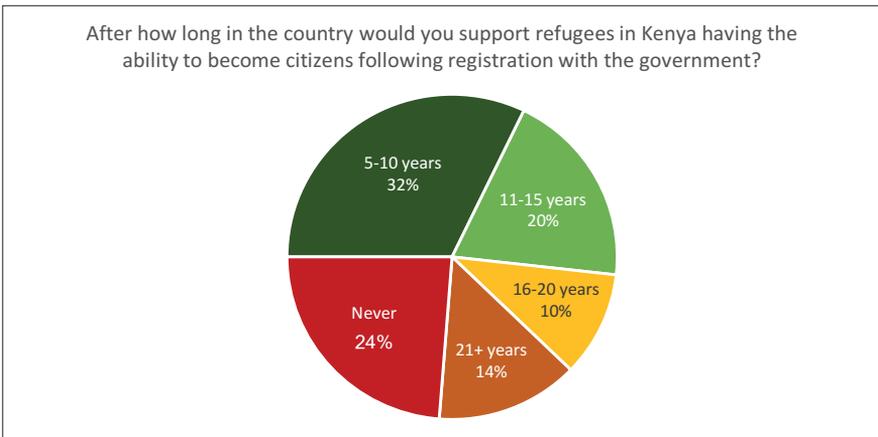


Figure 14: After how long in the country would you support refugee in Kenya having the ability to become citizens following registration with the government?

Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

Kenyans are more sympathetic to refugees born in Kenya, or who were brought to Kenya as young children. An overwhelming majority (94%) express support for education for refugee children born in Kenya (Figure 15). Most Kenyans support the right to work (81%) and freedom of movement (76%) for refugees born in Kenya, as shown in Figure 15. The majority of respondents (62%) also support granting citizenship to this group (Figure 15).

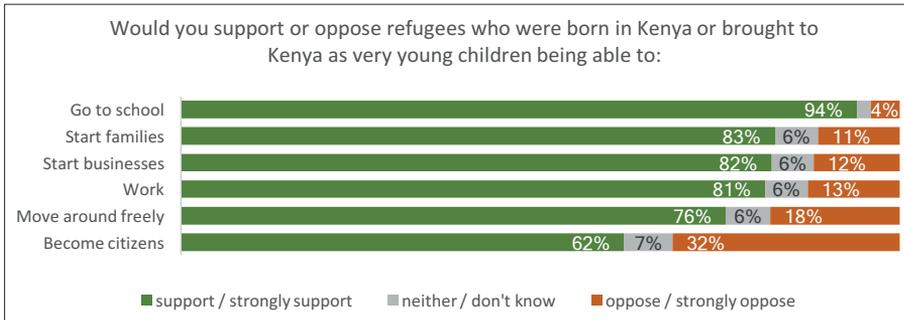


Figure 15: Would you support or oppose refugee who were born in Kenya or brought to Kenya as very young children being able to do the following...?

Source: Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

What do citizens think about sharing responsibility for refugee hosting among the international community?

A strong majority of Kenyans (89%) think that Kenya has taken on a larger share of the responsibility and cost of hosting refugees as compared to other countries (Figure 10); 64% think that other countries have not accepted their share of responsibility to help refugees in East Africa (Figure 10). Lastly, 66% of the population thinks that other countries pay more attention to helping refugees than helping Kenyans (Figure 10).

Kenya is developing its Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which could encourage international sharing of the responsibility for hosting and supporting refugees. The country has recently received USD 103 million from the World Bank to improve access to basic social services, expand economic opportunities, and enhance environmental management for communities hosting refugees in Garissa, Turkana and Wajir counties in the north and northeast.⁵ Kenyans are divided on whether the government should borrow further funds to support refugees and their host communities. Figure 16 shows that just over half of respondents (51%) support borrowing money to support refugee hosting areas, but a significant number (37%) do not. Even fewer (46%) also support borrowing money just for refugees (Figure 16).

⁵ www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2017/04/26/kenya-receives-100-million-world-bank-financing-to-mitigate-effects-of-forced-displacement

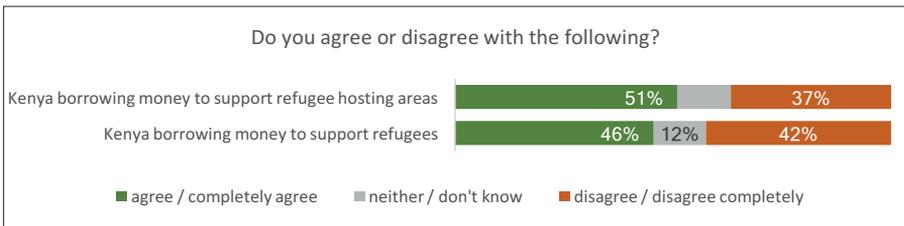


Figure 16: Support for borrowing

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

Kenya continues to play a prominent role, at both bilateral and multilateral levels, in efforts to resolve the regional crises, particularly those in South Sudan and Somalia where, as a member of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the African Union, the country has contributed to both political and security arrangements. A majority (77%) of Kenyans think that the government has made some effort to resolve conflicts in the region (Figure 17).

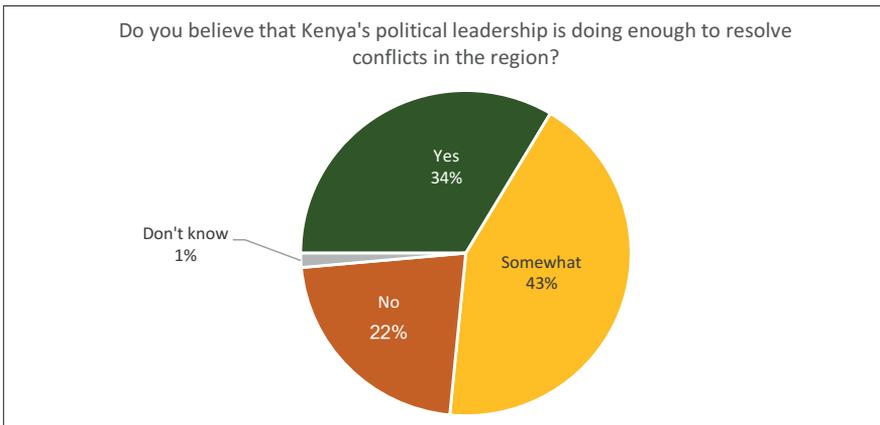


Figure 17: Do you believe that Kenya's political leadership is doing enough to resolve conflicts in the region?

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 21, May 2018 n= 1,672)

OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

Information to citizens about refugees needs to be more strategic.

A vast majority of Kenyans are well aware of refugees and the issues affecting them. Most citizens get their information from mass media. As a consequence, Kenyans' knowledge of the refugee situation is driven more by crisis and controversy and less by strategic engagement. There is need to improve the quality of information that reaches citizens, which ideally would include updates about efforts such as the proposed Kenya Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees,⁶ and the proposed Refugee Bill. Government, humanitarian and development actors must work more closely with journalists and media practitioners to enhance the public's awareness and sensitivity to strategic objectives and priorities.

Citizens support public service provision to refugees despite national challenges and political rhetoric.

While national security and inadequate resources are cited by the Government of Kenya as reasons behind decisions such as the closing of refugee camps and repatriation, public sentiment does not currently match up with these conclusions. Security is not currently a major concern, and Kenyans are divided on whether or not the refugee camps should be closed. There is popular support for the delivery of basic services to refugees; at the same time, Kenyans recognize that such support stretches resources. Policy makers must find ways to better capture public sentiments. Public initiatives such as the CRRF, the Refugee Bill and the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees offer opportunities for greater public engagement.

Citizens are open to integration, but more work is required to determine the appropriate extent.

While the majority of Kenyans appear to oppose whole sale integration, there is popular support for key elements such as freedom of movement, the right to work, and access to public services. Kenyans exhibit less support for longer-term needs such as access to land for refugees. The public appears open to aspects integration, and as such further engagement on these issues is required. What is clear is that the public does not support citizenship except when refugees are born in Kenya or raised there from a young age. There is need to engage with citizens to better understand and define parameters for refugee integration.

Citizens want the international community to do more to support refugees.

Kenyans generally feel that the country has taken on more than its fair share of the responsibility for hosting refugees, and they also feel that international donors pay more attention to refugees than national development. Kenyans understand that their nation needs more resources to better support refugees, but they are divided on how the resources should be obtained, particularly with respect to the government borrowing money for this purpose. It is important that the public have access to more information on international investment relative to the cost of hosting refugees.

⁶ Inter-Governmental Authority on Development IGAD, *Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees* <https://igad.int/communique/1519-communique-special-summit-of-the-igad-assembly-of-heads-of-state-and-government-on-durable-solutions-for-somali-refugees>



The five children and their mother fled violent civil war in Mogadishu, and now live in one tiny room along with another woman from Somalia and her two children as urban refugees in Nairobi. Credit: John Gyovai for CineTrek

The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. Founded in 1993 at the call of Albert Einstein, the IRC is at work in over 30 countries and 26 U.S. cities helping people to survive, reclaim control of their future and strengthen their communities.

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