

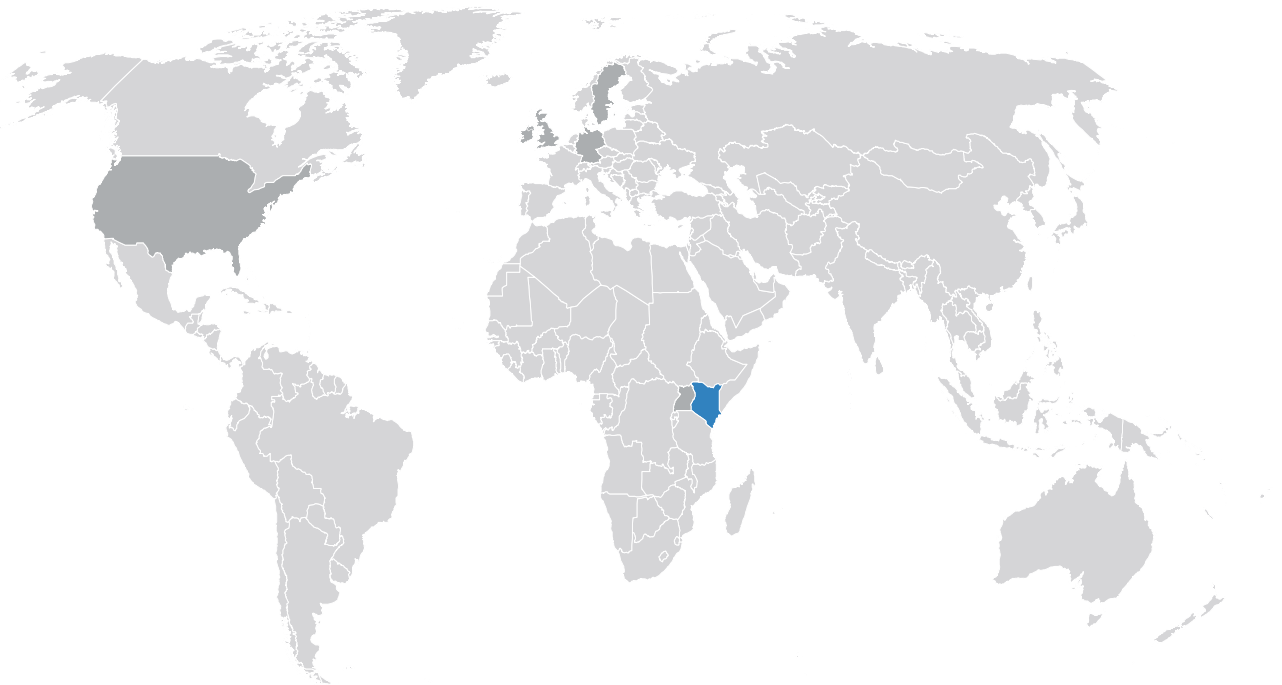


# Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants

## Kenya country profile

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August 2020



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This briefing presents an overview of the key features of migration and asylum policy in Kenya, recent trends in migration, refugee and asylum patterns, public perceptions and political narratives on refugees and other migrants. This is part of a wider project supported by the IKEA Foundation aimed at engaging public and private investors interested in migration and displacement.

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## Executive summary

Refugees and other migrants represent 2% (around one million people) of Kenya's overall population. Many have migrated to the country to study, fill labour market gaps in the growing economy, or to seek refuge after displacement. Today, Kenya hosts over 491,000 refugees. More than half of these are from Somalia – alongside significant numbers of South Sudanese refugees and smaller populations from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Burundi and Sudan. Kenya has also increasingly been recognised as both a transit and destination point for mixed movements of irregular migrants.

Kenya's approach to refugee-hosting has evolved significantly over time. While earlier arrivals could work, move and settle across the country, from the early 1990s – as hundreds of thousands of refugees arrived in the country from Somalia and elsewhere – Kenya's dominant approach has been one of encampment. This has become increasingly entrenched over the last decade, alongside other restrictive measures specifically targeting Somalis. Kenya has been a signatory to various regional and global policy frameworks advancing refugees' self-reliance and inclusion. However, despite opportunities for progress at county levels, fundamental policy barriers remain in place. While Kenya's 2006 Refugee Act puts in place a relatively strong refugee rights framework, in practice many obstacles remain, including to realising refugees' right to work.

More broadly, Kenyan policies have not yet fully capitalised on the development benefits of labour migration. Since 2016, the government's approach has prioritised Kenyan citizens' labour market access over foreigners, resulting in heavy barriers

for foreign nationals seeking to obtain work permits. This has included migrants from the East African Community (EAC) – despite commitments under the EAC Common Market Protocol towards greater regional freedom of movement. However, rather than restricting labour migration, recent policy changes have resulted in the growth of informal work and irregular status.

There are various, sometimes conflicting, narratives around refugees and migrants in Kenya, demonstrating the dividing lines between different actors:

- **Central government** narratives have shown marked contrast between international and domestic positioning. While Kenya's government has been more positive on the international stage, espousing support to refugees' inclusion and regional freedom of movement, domestic narratives have often been negative, portraying refugees and other migrants – particularly Somalis – as a threat to national security, while pointing to concerns of criminality and corruption linked to 'illegal migration'.
- **Local government actors** have acknowledged the potential development gains associated with refugees' presence, while also emphasising ongoing pressures. Such narratives are particularly evident in Garissa and Turkana counties, where Dadaab and Kakuma camps are hosted.
- **Civil society actors** have focused on refugees' and other migrants' rights and protection. Engagement with refugees is the most developed and is becoming increasingly successful in influencing government approaches.

- Kenya's private sector have, in recent years, stepped up interventions targeting refugees, reflecting changing approaches around longer-term engagement with refugee issues. Kenya is an example of good practice within the region, with significant private sector investments targeting refugee populations. Private sector actors have spoken publicly about this work as part of wider commitments to supporting inclusion among marginalised groups, also highlighting potential development benefits linked to hosting both refugees and other migrants.

Polling on public perceptions of refugees and other migrants in Kenya is limited, although less scarce than in other African nations. While more detailed polling data is needed, available evidence suggests a number of trends:

- **Kenyans hold complex views on immigration: most would prefer lower levels of immigration, while being relatively accepting towards migrants once in the country.** Over three quarters of Kenyans hold neutral opinions or would feel positively about welcoming 'immigrants or foreign workers' as neighbours.
- **Most Kenyans show some level of support – and even pride – for the role the country has played hosting refugees.** Despite government and media narratives, many Kenyans feel positively about refugees and security concerns do not appear especially prevalent.
- **Kenyans support refugees' right to work but are more sceptical about social inclusion.** While polling has shown that almost three quarters of Kenyans support refugees' right to work, it has also suggested the majority support encampment and restrictions on wider inclusion.

- **Attitudes may be more positive towards inclusion in areas of Kenya where refugees are concentrated.** While tensions have been documented, studies have shown positive interactions and friendship between host-community members and refugees in refugee-hosting areas, particularly surrounding Dadaab and Kakuma.

There are various opportunities for different actors seeking to engage with narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants in Kenya:

1. **Invest in polling data to better understand Kenyan attitudes towards refugees and other migrants,** through their more consistent inclusion in existing global, regional and national datasets, alongside support for more detailed national studies. This should include efforts to understand whether perceptions have been influenced by the recent Covid-19 pandemic.
2. **Advocacy efforts seeking policy reform and policymakers themselves should proactively ground their efforts in what Kenya's public thinks.** While more extensive data is needed, available evidence suggests promising entry points, including broadly welcoming attitudes towards foreign workers and support for refugees' right to work.
3. **Build space for wider reforms in the longer-term by amplifying existing positive narratives from county governments, the private sector and civil society,** including around the development benefits of hosting refugees and other migrants. There are opportunities to pursue such narratives as part of wider conversations regarding the response to Covid-19 and economic and social recovery from the pandemic.

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# 1 Introduction

This briefing presents an overview of the key features of policies in Kenya concerning refugees and other migrants, recent trends, public perceptions, and international and national narratives. It is part of a wider project supported by the IKEA Foundation, which aims to engage public and private investors interested in migration and displacement. The briefing is based on a review of available literature and polling, as well as 15 key informant interviews with staff from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the United Nations (UN), donors, and business and civil society actors in Kenya. This

research was carried out before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and so is unable to provide a full analysis of its impacts, although some reference is made in articulating recommendations for future action.

This report was published alongside a profile exploring the Ugandan context and comparisons are drawn between the two where possible. This brief uses the terminology ‘refugee and other migrants’ in reference to the broad group of all foreign nationals in Kenya, with the term ‘refugees’ used when referring only to this more circumscribed group.

## 2 Kenya's history of hosting refugees and other migrants

Kenya has long been a destination, origin and transit country for migration, and a key refugee-hosting country (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Historically, flows of refugees and other migrants have included:

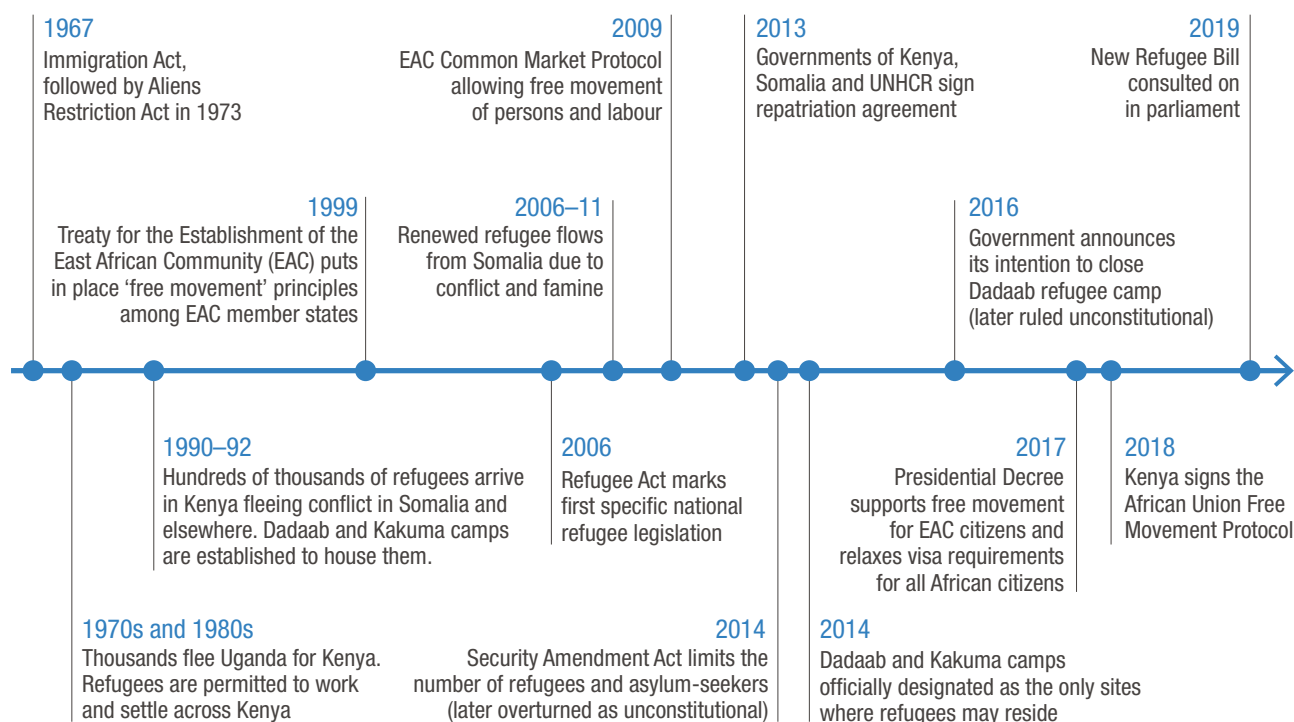
- traditional nomadic and pastoralist migration
- forced displacement due to conflict, political instability and natural hazard-related disasters;
- migration, both circular and longer-term, into Kenya as a regional economic hub
- irregular migration, both into and through Kenya (Odipo, 2018).

### 2.1 Refugee hosting

Kenya is well known as a major host country for refugees; it has hosted refugees since the 1960s, with the majority of earlier arrivals fleeing repressive regimes in Uganda (Kagwanja, 2000; Abuya, 2007). However, in the 1970s and 1980s numbers remained low; in these decades the number of refugees recorded by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) peaked at 6,500 and 12,810 respectively (UNHCR, 2020a).

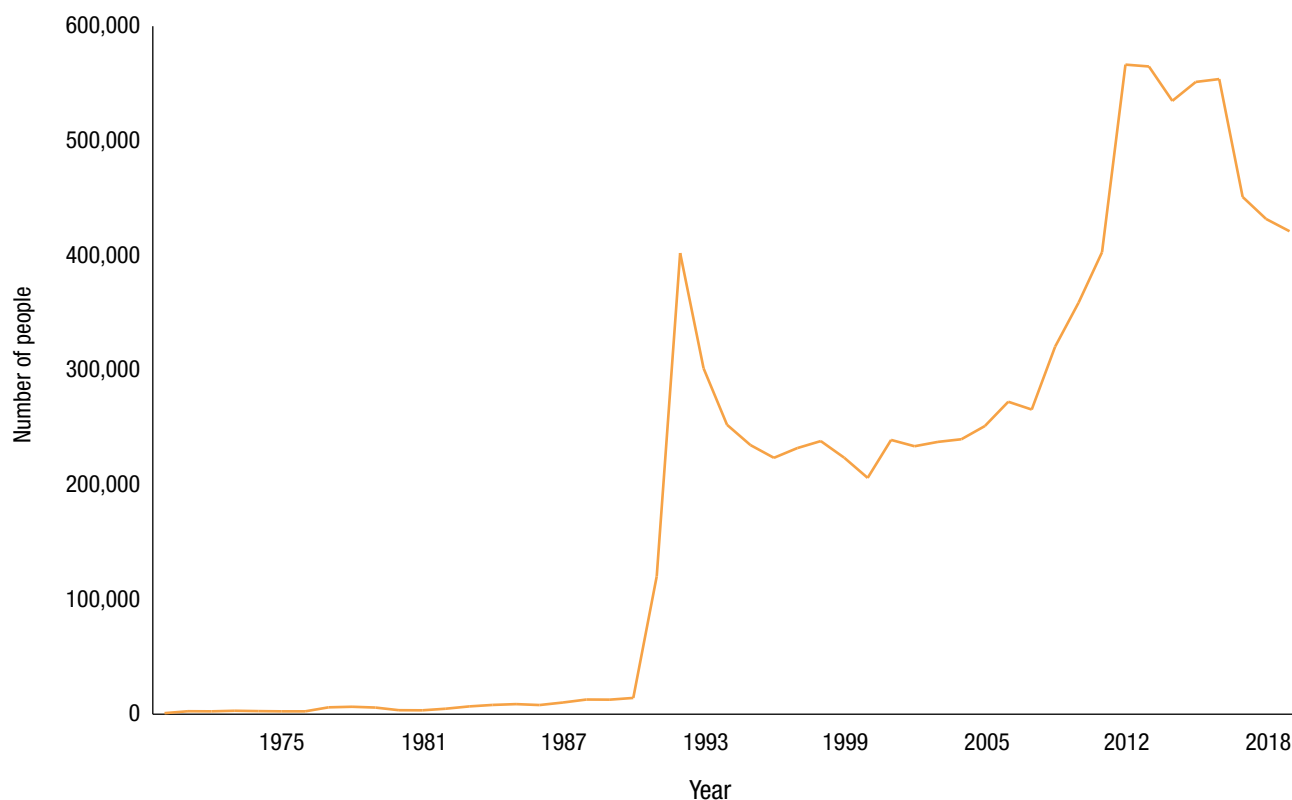
The 1990s proved a turning point as the number of refugees in Kenya rose steeply due to regional political instability in Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda and DRC.

**Figure 1 Timeline: refugees and other migrants in Kenya**



<sup>1</sup> While this profile focuses on international mobility, internal movements are also a prominent feature in Kenya, including intraregional movement (in particular from other areas of the country towards the Rift Valley), rural-urban migration (including to urban centres such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Eldoret and Nakuru) and internal displacement (Odipo, 2018). In December 2019, Kenya hosted an estimated 162,000 IDPs (IDMC, 2019). Emigration from Kenya is also significant. According to UN estimates, in 2019 271.6 million Kenyans were living abroad (UN DESA, 2019a). Kenyan emigration is largely regular and predominantly for education and work (Marchand et al., 2017).

**Figure 2 Refugee numbers in Kenya, 1970–2018**



Source: Migration Data Portal (2020)

In 1990, Kenya hosted around 15,000 refugees; by 1992 this had risen to over 400,000, of which 300,000 were from Somalia (Abuya, 2007). Kenya's refugee population has since fluctuated (see Figure 2) but has remained in the hundreds of thousands, most notably falling considerably in the mid- to late-1990s due to large-scale repatriation, before increasing to higher levels than ever before between 2006 and 2011 as conflict and famine in Somalia renewed (Kagwanja, 2000).

Kenya's approach to refugee-hosting has evolved significantly. Earlier national policies permitted refugees to work, move and settle across the country. Yet as arrivals increased sharply in the 1990s, the government's approach shifted (Campbell, 2006; Abuya, 2007).<sup>2</sup> With large-scale arrivals came a new paradigm of encampment, confining refugees to camps in remote areas of the country – where UNHCR

took on responsibility for refugee management. In 1992 the Dadaab camps of Ifo, Hagadera and Dagahaley were established, mainly for Somali refugees, while South Sudanese, Congolese and other refugees were relocated to Kakuma camp near the Sudanese border (Kagwanja, 2000).

The country's institutional and legislative arrangements concerning refugees became fully formalised with the 2006 Refugee Act. While Kenya had, in 1966, acceded to the UN Refugee Convention – also acceding to its related Protocol in 1981 and ratifying the OAU Refugee Convention in 1993 – the 2006 Act represented the first piece of national refugee legislation, translating the country's commitments under these frameworks into law and setting out refugees' and asylum-seekers' rights (Abuya, 2007; Campbell et al., 2011). The 2006 Act also established greater national ownership over refugee management, creating the Department

<sup>2</sup> Alongside the sheer scale of refugee arrivals, this shift in policy also reflected their changing profile. While many of the earlier Ugandan refugees who had settled in Kenya were wealthy professionals, many of the predominantly Somali arrivals in the 1990s lacked their 'socio-economic credentials', and arrived against a background of long-held discrimination towards Kenyan Somalis (Kagwanja, 2000; Abuya, 2007; Lind et al., 2015, cited in O'Callaghan and Sturge, 2019).

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for Refugee Affairs (DRA), which took over responsibility from UNHCR for refugee affairs.<sup>3</sup>

While Kenyan policies towards refugees had become restrictive in the 1990s, they became progressively more so from the late 2000s, particularly towards Somali refugees. This shift can partly be attributed to increasing refugee numbers, discrimination towards ethnic Somalis and Kenyan military engagement in Somalia (O’Callaghan et al., 2019). Yet, significantly, security concerns were also increasingly cited – particularly following a series of high-profile al-Shabaab attacks within the country, beginning with the 2013 attack on Westgate shopping mall, followed by attacks on Garissa University in 2015 and the Dusit D2 hotel in 2019.

During this period the government further entrenched its encampment approach. From 2012 refugees’ registration was barred in urban areas and in 2014 the government passed the Security Laws (Amendment) Act, which restricted refugees’ ability to reside outside of camps and attempted to limit numbers of refugees and asylum-seekers in the country (Mutambo, 2019).<sup>4</sup> While the proposed refugee ceiling was later ruled to be unconstitutional, the provisions entrenching encampment were upheld – further bolstered by a March 2014 order, which designated Kenya’s camps as the only places where refugees could legally reside (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016).

Other restrictions in this period more directly targeted Somalis, including border closures, forced deportations and periodic crackdowns, including the 2014 counter-terror operation Operation Usalama Watch, during which numerous human rights violations were documented (Amnesty International, 2014; Lind et al., 2015; RCK, 2015). Since 2016 the government has on several occasions announced its intention to close Dadaab refugee camp and repatriate its residents to Somalia – although this has been successfully challenged by the High Court and to date the closure has not taken place (Hargrave et al., 2016;

AFP, 2019). Nevertheless, the Kenyan government has continued to forcefully pursue Somali refugees’ repatriation, building on a 2013 repatriation agreement signed between the Government of Somalia, UNHCR and the Kenyan government; also revoking their prima facie status in 2016.

## 2.2 Other migrants in Kenya

Alongside refugees, Kenya’s immigration history is characterised by a wider range of – predominantly intra-regional – migration movements. Kenya has long hosted individuals arriving as part of traditional nomadic and pastoralist cross-border migration patterns. However, over time the country’s foreign-born population has expanded and evolved, as individuals arrived in Kenya to study in the country’s educational facilities or to seek employment in its growing economy.

While the literature provides comparatively little detail about labour migration into Kenya, evidence suggests that it has grown over time (IOM, 2015; Marchand et al., 2017). As its economy diversified, migrant workers travelled to Kenya, particularly its capital Nairobi, filling labour market gaps, including in the services and technology industries (IOM, 2015; 2020). As a regional hub for businesses, the United Nations (UN) and other international organisations, Kenya has, over time, also attracted those seeking a base from which to conduct activities spanning not just Kenya but also the wider region (IOM, 2015).

Labour mobility has been particularly prominent from other East African countries, alongside the growth of smaller migrant populations from elsewhere, most notably Asia (IOM, 2015; Flahaux and de Haas, 2016; Marchand et al., 2017). In particular, Kenya has seen migration from Uganda and Tanzania, to some extent encouraged by commitments towards freedom of movement among East African Community (EAC) member states (outlined in Box 1).

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3 In 2016 the DRA was superseded by the Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS), which has been comparatively far less politically powerful and less well resourced (O’Callaghan et al., 2019).

4 Provisions relating to encampment in the 2014 Act followed a relocation directive issued in December 2012, although this was overruled as unconstitutional in 2013.



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**Box 1 Kenya and regional commitments to free movement**

Kenya has long been party to regional commitments towards greater economic integration and freedom of movement. Across the African continent, ambitions towards freedom of movement seen in the 1991 Abuja Treaty were reignited by the 2002 establishment of the African Union and, more recently, in the 2018 African Union Free Movement Protocol (GFMD, 2018). Within Kenya, the most tangible progress has been seen regarding commitments made as part of smaller blocs, predominantly between EAC Partner States (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda) – although Kenya has also signed (but not ratified) the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Free Movement Protocol (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018) and has been closely engaged with the development of the new Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Free Movement of Persons Protocol (IGAD, 2020).

The 1999 Treaty for the Establishment of the EAC contained measures where member states agreed to adopt policies supportive of the free movement of persons, further solidified by the later 2009 Protocol for the Establishment of the EAC Common Market (EAC, n.d.). Building on these, a 2017 Kenyan Presidential Decree proclaimed that citizens of EAC Partner States (bar South Sudan) could move, settle and work in Kenya without hindrance – with work permit fees to be waived (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018; Government of Kenya, 2018). The same decree also relaxed visa requirements for citizens of other African countries, allowing them to be procured on arrival (GFMD, 2018). However, as discussed below, while regional commitments have been progressive, barriers remain in Kenya to fully realising regional free movement ambitions in practice.

## 3 Current trends and policy approaches

### 3.1 Population trends

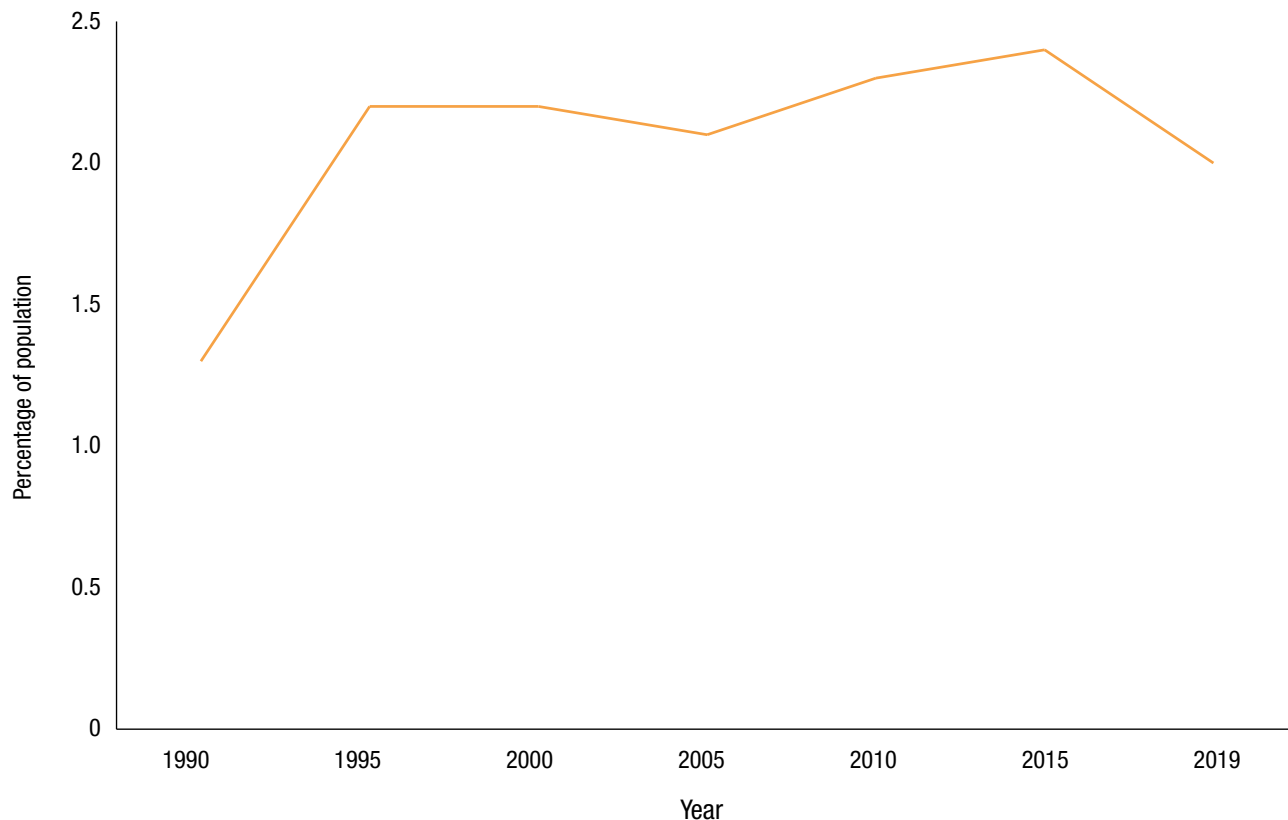
Today, Kenya’s population of refugees and other migrants is estimated at just over one million – or 2% of the population (UN DESA, 2019a). Interestingly, while absolute numbers have increased, this proportion has remained relatively constant for the past 25 years (see Figure 3). As Figure 4 shows, this is roughly in line with other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, though significantly below the wider global average. According to UN statistics, in 2019 approximately 90% of foreign nationals in Kenya originated from East African countries (UN DESA, 2019b) and almost three quarters (73%) of all foreign nationals came from Somalia and Uganda alone.<sup>5</sup>

However, official statistics may miss trends relating to irregular movements. Kenya has

increasingly been recognised as both a transit and destination point for irregular migrants, in part due to its well-connected smuggling networks (ICMPD, 2008). In particular, this includes those transiting along the ‘Southern Route’ toward South Africa, as well as smaller numbers undertaking journeys further afield – including to the Middle East and Europe (RMMS, 2016; Odipo, 2018). Available evidence suggests that most irregular entrants to Kenya originate from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia and are largely considered mixed movements, comprised of both refugees and other migrants (RMMS, 2016; IOM, 2020).

In 2019 refugees and asylum-seekers made up almost half (46.7%) of Kenya’s overall foreign national population (UN DESA, 2019a). UNHCR has estimated Kenya’s refugee population at over

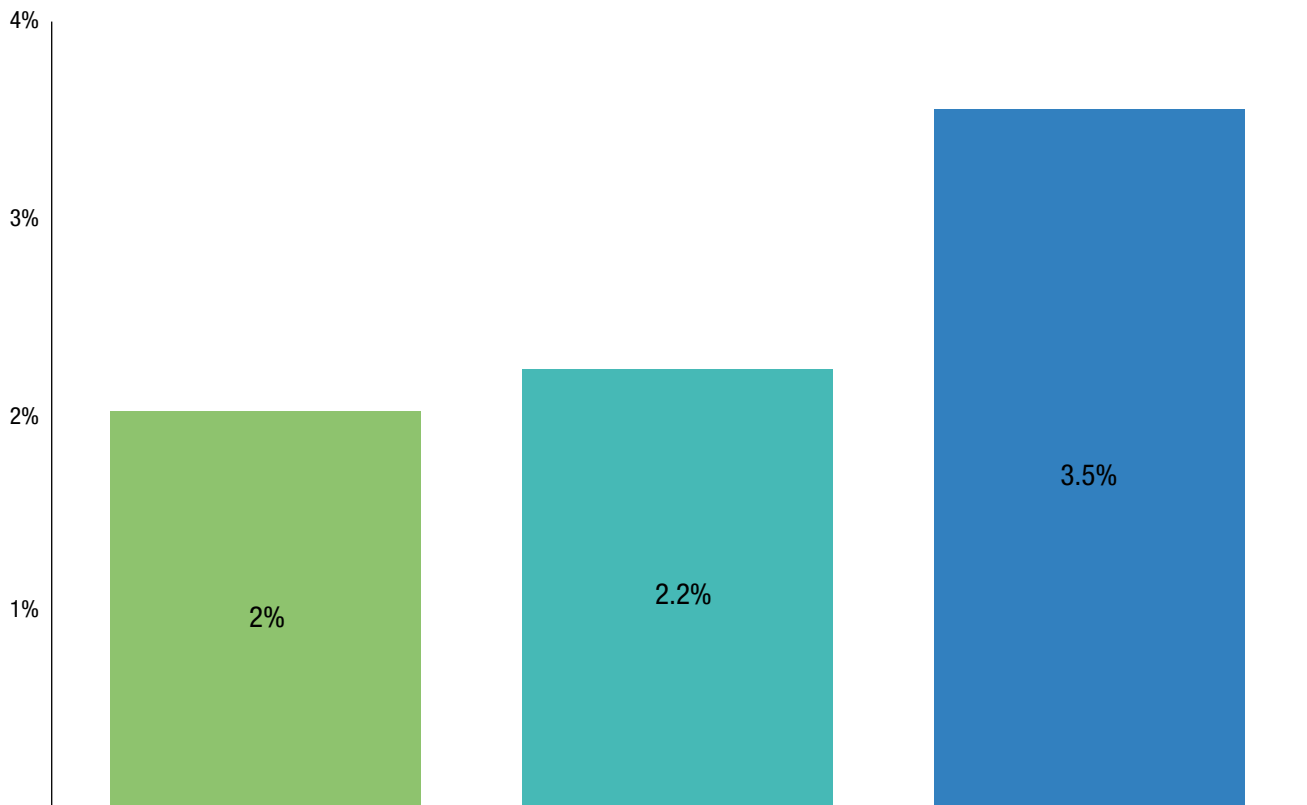
**Figure 3 Refugees and other migrants in Kenya as a percentage of the population, 1990–2019**



Source: Migration Data Portal (2020)

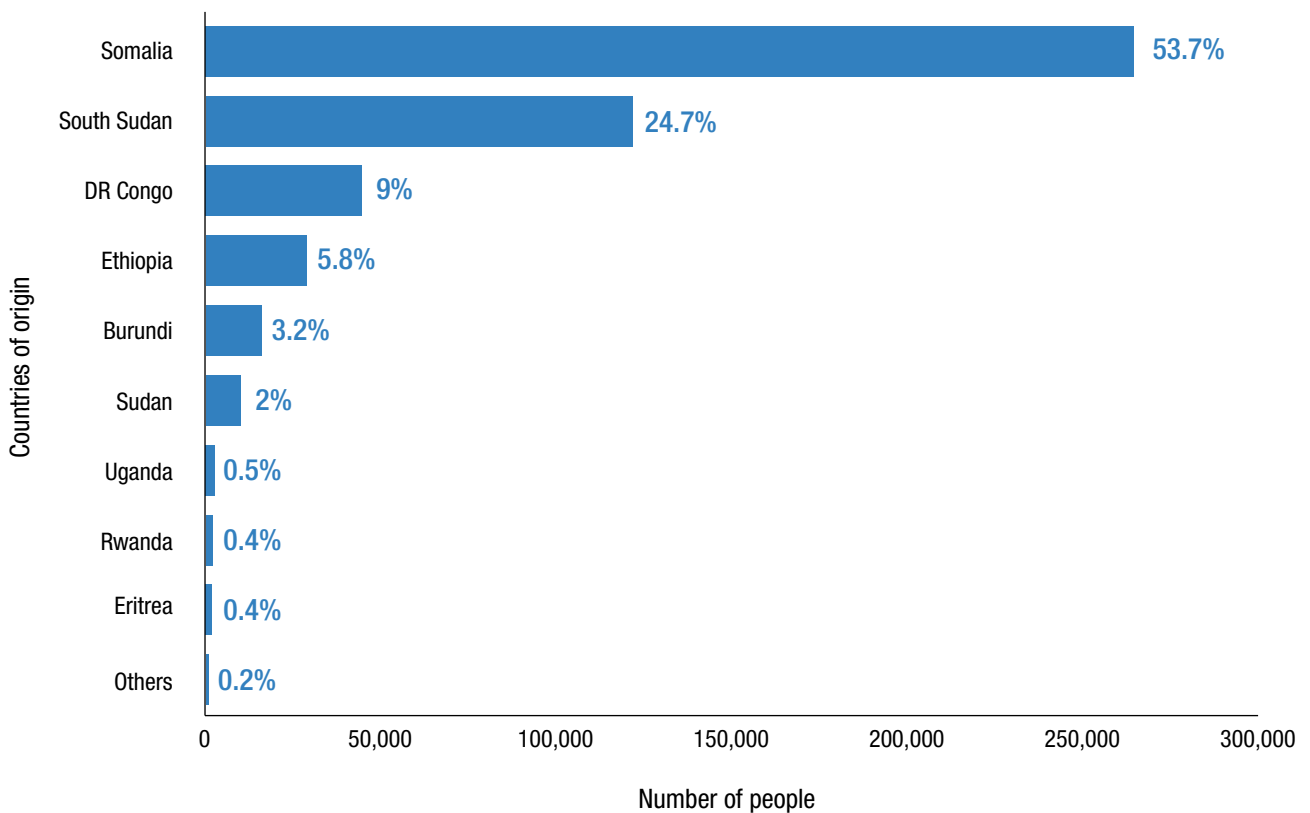
<sup>5</sup> East Africa is defined here according to UN geographic regions (<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49>).

**Figure 4 Refugees and other migrants as a share of the population in Kenya, sub-Saharan Africa and globally (2019)**



Source: UN DESA (2019a)

**Figure 5 Countries of origin for refugees in Kenya**



Source: UNHCR (2020b)

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491,000 individuals in 2020, over half of whom are from Somalia, alongside significant numbers from South Sudan (see Figure 5). The majority (84%) of Kenya's refugees live in camps, with a roughly even split between Kakuma and Dadaab (UNHCR, 2020b).

### 3.2 Current approach to refugee policy and implementation

Kenya's current refugee policy approach remains one of encampment. If refugees wish to live or travel outside of Kenya's camps, they must first obtain a special pass, which are only granted for a limited number of reasons (see Box 2). Despite these restrictions a significant proportion of refugees (16%) continue to reside in urban areas (UNHCR, 2020b). They are broadly tolerated by local authorities, but risk harassment, discrimination and ultimately relocation to camps if found in urban areas without permission (Campbell et al., 2011; RCK, 2012; 2015).

Kenya's refugee policy continues to be regulated by the 2006 Refugee Act, which in theory puts in place a relatively strong refugee rights framework. However, well-documented violations by Kenyan authorities and practical obstacles mean that many of the rights elaborated in the 2006 Act remain unfulfilled (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016).

Most notably, while Kenyan legislation in theory grants refugees the right to work they must obtain a work permit to do so, which are rarely granted to refugees. There are barriers inhibiting work permit access generally, as well as specific challenges for refugees, including restrictions relating to levels of pay, documentation and the requirement that permits are issued only in Nairobi (RCK, 2015; Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016; Samuel Hall, 2018). Despite these obstacles, evidence nevertheless shows refugees' strong

engagement in informal economies, both in camps and urban centres (see Box 3). Yet, many refugees remain economically vulnerable and, in terms of self-reliance and livelihood prospects, access to work permits continues to present a significant barrier (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016; Manja, 2019).

In recent years, Kenya has been a signatory to various regional and global policy frameworks focused on advancing greater support to refugees' self-reliance and inclusion; from various regional agreements to the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), for which Kenya became a pilot country in 2017 (although the process has since stalled – see O'Callaghan et al., 2019).<sup>6</sup> Various opportunities to make progress towards these commitments through local, county-level engagement have been documented. However, at the national level fundamental policy barriers to refugees' economic and social inclusion remain. A new Refugee Education Inclusion Policy is the only tangible policy shift following on from these commitments, whereas a slow process towards a new Refugee Bill, which remains pending, has more widely stalled hopes for greater national implementation of global and regional commitments (Hammond et al., 2020).<sup>7</sup>

### 3.3 Policies towards other migrants

Immigration into Kenya is regulated by the 2011 Citizenship and Immigration Act and counterpart 2012 Regulations.<sup>8</sup> This legislation covers various aspects relating to citizenship, admission and residence (Odipo, 2018). To date, much of the government's focus has been on outward, rather than inward, migration; little attention has been paid to the developmental benefits of migration into Kenya and how they could be enhanced through targeted policies. Migration does not feature in 'Vision 2030', Kenya's 22-year

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6 Relevant frameworks at the regional level include: the 2017 Nairobi Declaration on durable solutions for Somali refugees, 2017 Djibouti Declaration on refugee education and 2019 Kampala Declaration on jobs, livelihoods and self-reliance. At the global level, Kenya is a signatory to the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and 2018 Global Compact on Refugees.

7 A new Refugee Bill, containing various progressive elements, including relating to access to employment, land and property, passed through parliament in 2017. However, it was withdrawn by the president at the eleventh hour, citing a lack of public consultation. A new draft bill, published in June 2019, is currently making its way through parliament, although the bill has lost many of its predecessor's progressive elements.

8 The 2011 Act repealed and replaced the 1963 Citizenship Act, 1967 Immigration Act and 1973 Aliens Restriction Act.

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## **Box 2 Overview of Kenyan immigration, refugee and citizenship policies**

### **Immigration policy**

Citizens from EAC Partner States, alongside other countries who have signed bilateral exemption agreements, do not require a visa to travel to Kenya. The Government of Kenya has identified a list of 16 countries – including Somalia, Eritrea, Libya, Iraq and Syria – for which a more stringent ‘category three’ visa process is applicable (Government of Kenya, n.d.). Unlawful entry or presence in Kenya is a criminal offence and is subject to heavy fines or imprisonment (RMMS, 2016).

All foreign nationals residing in Kenya for over 90 days are required to register with immigration authorities for a Foreign Nationals Certificate (DIS, n.d.). In order to do so, they must hold a valid document allowing their stay in the country, whether this is one of several passes – issued for visitors, temporary business visitors, students and dependents – or a work permit (DIS, n.d.; Odipo, 2018). In practice, work permits are extremely difficult to procure due to cumbersome processes, insufficient information provision and high costs (both in terms of official fees, bribes and intermediaries) (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018). Since 2016 individuals receiving work permits have been required to meet particularly stringent requirements, including by proving their role could not be filled by Kenyan nationals (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018; Odipo, 2018). Those who have held a work permit for seven years and spouses of citizens married for three years are eligible for permanent residence, through which they can gain rights to employment and property (Odipo, 2018).

### **Asylum and refugee policy**

All individuals entering Kenya to seek asylum are required to register within 30 days (RMMS, 2016). The 2006 Refugee Act designates two categories of refugees: prima facie and statutory refugees. Prima facie refugees are those belonging to specific groups designated by the Ministry of Interior. In contrast, statutory refugees must undergo individual refugee status determination (RSD) – either as part of full or simplified procedures – undertaken by the Refugee Affairs Secretariat, with support from UNHCR.

Registered refugees are provided with a two-year UNHCR Mandated Refugee Certificate and subsequently a five-year Alien Refugee Certificate, which facilitate access to healthcare, education and work (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016; ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018). However, while the law stipulates that registration processes should take up to 90 days, in some cases it can take over a year before refugees receive registration documents (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018).

In principle, Kenyan law confers protections on refugees from arbitrary arrest, detention, and refoulement. However, violations are documented in practice (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018). Refugees need to seek permission to travel outside Kenya’s camps by obtaining a movement permit, which are issued for a limited range of purposes, such as medical treatment and resettlement interviews (RCK, 2015). Refugees have the right to work. However, this is not conferred automatically with registration documents and refugees must obtain an additional work permit – which in practice are close to impossible for refugees to obtain (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016; ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018).

### **Citizenship policy**

Kenya’s Constitution provides that a person who has been married to a Kenyan citizen for at least seven years can be registered as a citizen. Naturalisation is also open to individuals who have resided lawfully in Kenya for a continuous period of at least seven years if they meet additional conditions, including legal entry into Kenya, the ability to speak Kiswahili or a local language and the capacity to make a substantive contribution to Kenya’s development. While Kenya’s constitution does not bar refugees from naturalisation, the 2006 Refugee Act does not contain explicit provisions for them to do so and in practice many of the requirements are out of reach (Zetter and Ruaudel, 2016).

### **Box 3 In focus: harnessing refugees' economic contributions in development planning**

Numerous studies have documented refugees' economic contributions within Kenya, both in camps and urban centres, alongside significant benefits for hosting communities (Enghoff, 2010; Zetter, 2012; ReDSS and Samuel Hall, 2015; Sanghi et al., 2016; Betts et al., 2018; IFC, 2018; UNHCR and ILO, 2019; Manja, 2019). A study by IFC, for example, valued the market in Kakuma camp and town at \$56 million, with over 2,000 businesses (IFC, 2018).

While national policies have remained restrictive, recent years have seen increased efforts at local, county levels to better capitalise on these benefits, in particular by including refugees in development planning. While Kenya's decision-making on refugee management remains centralised, devolution processes present an opportunity to pursue wider progress at local levels (ReDSS and Samuel Hall, 2015). In Garissa and Turkana counties, where Dadaab and Kakuma camps are hosted, refugees have been included in the County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs), including through the Kalobeyi Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan in Turkana West (KISED) and the Garissa Integrated Socio-Economic Development Plan (GISED) (Hammond et al., 2020).

In Turkana, the KISED is a 15-year plan, extending the approach developed in Kalobeyi, a new settlement established in Turkana county in 2016, to the whole of Turkana West sub-county. Unlike the nearby Kakuma camp, Kalobeyi was designed for both refugees and host-community members, with interventions promoting self-reliance (such as specific training and agricultural projects) and integrated services available to both (UNHCR, 2018; Betts et al., 2019). While KISED has garnered substantial international attention and support in the context of local approaches to the CRRF, early evaluations have highlighted significant challenges due to hasty planning, poor design and high levels of humanitarian need requiring a more effective humanitarian–development nexus approach than has been achieved in practice (Samuel Hall, 2018). In Garissa county the GISED remains in the early stages of implementation; however, it includes numerous significant provisions, incorporating refugees into micro-finance and agricultural projects, and formalising taxation to include microeconomies within Dadaab (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018).

There is still much to learn through these models to ensure they result in better outcomes for both refugees and host communities. However, their existence represents promising avenues for the realisation of global and regional commitments beyond national politics. Both plans continue to attract significant international support, including through a second phase of EU Trust Fund investment, which expands support channeled towards Kalobeyi in its first phase to include Dadaab in Garissa County.

development plan, aside from a handful of mentions to remittances (Odipo, 2018). While the government has drafted a National Migration Policy and National Labour Migration Policy, both remain in draft form.

Cutting across the government's policy approach is the requirement – instituted in a 2016 Department of Immigration Directive – that Kenyan citizens are given labour market priority over foreigners. This has resulted in serious barriers for foreign nationals seeking permission to work in the country through work permits or special passes. Kenyan policies are – at least

on paper – somewhat more permissive towards migrants from the EAC, for example exempting them from fees for work permits. Yet in practice work permits remain inaccessible even for EAC citizens, with employers and government officials unaware of special exemptions and often failing to enact them (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018).

Obstacles to work permits have, rather than limiting immigration to Kenya, led to a growth in irregular entry and informal labour. With formal opportunities restricted to those who are highly skilled or able to afford the high costs related to work permits, many have nonetheless travelled

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to Kenya to seek work, but have instead been relegated to irregular status and informal work opportunities, facing associated challenges in accessing basic necessities such as bank accounts or healthcare (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018). The

Kenyan government often enacts 'crackdowns' on irregular migrants involving routines arrests, detention and deportations, which have specifically targeted Ethiopians alongside other groups (RMMS, 2016; Amnesty International, 2018).

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## 4 Public and political narratives: a mixed picture

The above policies are set in the context of various, sometimes conflicting, narratives around refugees and other migrants in Kenya, demonstrating dividing lines between actors. This chapter outlines central government rhetoric (through international-level engagement and domestic positioning), narratives at county government level and among civil society and the private sector.

### 4.1 Central government narratives

The discussion here focuses primarily on narratives advanced by Kenya's current administration – led from 2013 by President Uhuru Kenyatta – although in many respects dating back to previous governments. Overall, narratives from Kenya's central government are marked by a contrast between its international and domestic positioning.

Kenya's central government has been relatively positive in its rhetoric around refugees and other migrants on the international stage, reflecting international and regional commitments – to refugees' inclusion and self-reliance on the one hand and to wider regional freedom of movement on the other. Kenya's government has welcomed regional freedom of movement internationally as a component of Pan-African identity, building on sentiments espoused by previous governments. In a 2017 speech to regional leaders, President Kenyatta emphasised that 'the free movement of people on our continent has always been a cornerstone of Pan-African brotherhood and fraternity' (Dahir, 2017).

Kenya's government has not been as effusive in its praise for refugees' contributions in international fora compared to neighbours such as Uganda (Hargrave et al., 2020). Instead, the government has often emphasised pressures linked to refugee hosting and the need for greater international support. For example, speaking at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, the Chief Administrative Secretary of Kenya's Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government highlighted challenges

faced by Kenyan host communities, calling for a focus on the root causes of forced displacement and responsibility sharing for Kenya's 'disproportionate burden, which has persisted for far too long' (Government of Kenya, 2019). However, the government has nonetheless supported global and regional commitments towards refugees' inclusion; in the same statement, saying, 'we are aware that empowerment of refugees will ultimately lead to sustainable solutions'.

In contrast, domestic government rhetoric around refugees and other migrants has long evidenced a markedly more negative tone, which Kenya's current government continues to perpetuate. Far from Pan-African brotherhood, their recent focus on privileging Kenyans for employment reflects a more divisive 'us and them' mentality, including towards Kenya's East African neighbours. Rather than emphasising inclusion, refugees, and increasingly other migrants, have been caught up in a prevailing government discourse that portrays outsiders as a threat to national security.

Security-focused narratives often centre on ethnic Somalis, depicting them as threatening, violent, and to blame for terrorist incidents – although alleged connections have not been substantiated by evidence. While especially prominent in the aftermath of high-profile terrorist incidents from 2013 onwards, security-focused narratives date back to the large-scale arrival of refugees in the early 1990s (RCK, 2015) and build on long-held discrimination towards Kenyan Somalis (Freeman, 2019). In 2011, Assistant Minister of Internal Security Orwa Ojode described Al-Shabaab as 'like a big animal with the tail in Somalia and the head of the animal is here in Eastleigh [a Somali neighbourhood in Nairobi]' (quoted in O'Callaghan and Sturge, 2019). Such narratives are often amplified by the media, who have blamed Somalis for everything from a measles outbreak, to environmental degradation and illegal weaponry (Jaji, 2014), while more broadly portraying refugees and other migrants as a security threat (Kisang, 2017).



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Overlapping this is a more pervasive narrative around ‘illegal immigrants’, who are depicted by the government as a threat to the integrity of Kenya’s border management, and are often linked to criminality and corruption. This spans all those living, working or travelling through Kenya without appropriate documentation; from refugees and other migrants working without permits, to irregular entrants, to refugees living in urban areas without correct permission. Some groups have been singled out, particularly those from China and Nigeria, alongside Somalis (Achuka, 2018; The East African, 2018).

## 4.2 County government narratives

In contrast, there is a more positive narrative concerning refugees at the level of county government, particularly in Turkana and Garissa. County governments have demonstrated openness towards refugees, seeing their presence as an opportunity to further county-level development. In contrast to national authorities’ domestic positioning, county governments have espoused far greater openness to refugees’ social and economic inclusion. In the context of wider devolution processes, and in areas receiving a small portion of the national fiscal budget, local governments have recognised the possible gains for host populations through refugees’ inclusion, for example through their fiscal contributions to county budgets, alongside wider gains in terms of skills transfers to host economies and supporting their diversification (ReDSS and Samuel Hall, 2015). Recognition of such benefits has been a key component of county-level discussions, while also being manifested in practice, through the inclusion of refugees in CIDPs.

Notably, for county governments this is part of a wider balancing act; they have been clear that their primary interests are in beneficial outcomes for citizens (ReDSS and Samuel Hall, 2015; ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018). As such, they have pointed to pressures linked to Kenya’s camps, notably environmental degradation and, in Garissa county, echoing the security concerns cited at the national level. Nevertheless, county governments have proved relatively steadfast in their support to refugees’ inclusion. In Garissa county, this has come despite pressure from local

politicians, who lobbied against refugees’ inclusion in its CIDP (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018).

## 4.3 Private sector narratives

Positive narratives can also be identified among Kenya’s private sector. Recent interventions by Kenyan businesses targeting refugees have largely focused on financial inclusion, mobile money and the energy sector (see Box 4). Engagement by actors such as Equity Bank – an East African financial services provider headquartered in Nairobi – is presented as part of a broader commitment to supporting inclusion among marginalised groups. Explaining the bank’s decision to extend its services to refugees, Equity Bank Director for Special Projects Allan Waititu has stated, ‘[it] was a lateral expansion [...] part of a strategy to become a financially inclusive bank’ (Berfond et al., 2019). Similarly, in 2019 Michael Joseph, CEO of Kenyan mobile-network provider Safaricom, explained, ‘forcibly displaced people [...] are among the most vulnerable populations in the world. Safaricom believes that no matter the circumstances, no one should be left behind’ (Aluel, 2019).

Kenya’s private sector actors have also sought to highlight refugees’ and other migrants’ potential development contributions, and the need for policy change that facilitates them. For example, the Kenya Private Sector Alliance has been key in calling for wider implementation in Kenya of EAC commitments to freedom of movement, citing the development potential of national policy change that facilitates free movement of labour (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018).

## 4.4 Civil society narratives

Civil society narratives focus on refugees’ and migrants’ rights and protection. Civil society mobilisation is particularly strong with regards to refugees; through prominent actors such as the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK) and Kituo Cha Sheria. Over the past decade, civil society in Kenya has broadly moved from opposing government policy to playing a more direct role in influencing it – through lobbying, training to authorities and technical support (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018). Particular success has been

seen in terms of work to secure refugees' inclusion in national healthcare systems. Civil society actors have also pursued legal challenges in high profile cases, prompting the Kenyan High Court to step in on several occasions to declare the government's policies unconstitutional.

Civil society engagement has been less prominent with regards to other migrants. Yet a notable exception to this is the Pan African Citizens Network (PACIN), a regional civil society organisation that has been advocating

for labour migrants. PACIN lobbies for Kenya to relax its labour and visa requirements for African citizens to promote freedom of movement and, ultimately, migrant protection (ACMS and Samuel Hall, 2018). Labour migrants have also benefitted from support from unions such as the Kenya Union of Domestic, Hotels, Educational Institutions, Hospitals and Allied Workers (KUDHEIHA), which champions the need for improved working conditions for both nationals and foreign workers (ibid.).

#### **Box 4 Private sector engagement with refugees**

Kenya's private sector is an example of good practice within the region. There are significant private sector investments targeting refugee populations, which are far more established than those in neighbouring countries such as Uganda (Hargrave et al., 2020). This reflects changing approaches regionally around longer-term engagement with refugee issues, and progress around the application of the CRRF (see O'Callaghan et al., 2019; ReDSS, 2019).

Some examples of good business practice include:

- **The Humanitarian Private Sector Partnership Platform (HPPP):** The HPPP is the East Africa partner of the global Connecting Business initiative (CBI). The regional platform, which contains several Kenya-based actors, aims to forge connections and provide information to businesses seeking to engage with refugees.
- **Safaricom:** Safaricom, a leading Kenyan mobile network provider, provides mobile money services to refugees through M-Pesa, launched in partnership with Vodafone Group. Safaricom has also worked with Vodafone, UNHCR and Huawei to bring technology to classrooms in refugee camps through the Instant Network School programme.
- **Equity Bank:** Since 2012 Equity Bank has supported financial inclusion by providing bank accounts for 52,000 refugees in Kenya, as well as cash transfer and credit services. Products are designed so that refugees can progressively access more extensive products and credit services, including group savings and lending products.

However, critical barriers remain to greater private sector engagement, including refugees' concentration in remote areas where Kenya's camps are located. Private sector actors also face sector-specific challenges, including barriers to refugees' access to financial services and mobile money transfers. For this reason, private sector actors are increasingly seeking a role in policy development and advocacy with county and federal governments, using their influence to create a more conducive legislative environment for interventions.

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## 5 Public attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: what do we know?

Like in many other low- and middle-income countries, polling on public perceptions of refugees and other migrants in Kenya is limited, although data is less scarce than other African nations (Hargrave et al., 2020). Kenya is not covered in several of the key global datasets covering immigration and refugees, and where included the range of questions polled is limited.<sup>9</sup> Consistent polling over time is limited, rendering it difficult to accurately chart whether and how attitudes have evolved. Available data does not identify how attitudes vary with different segments of the public.<sup>10</sup> Nor has polling addressed the salience of issues concerning refugees and other migrants to the Kenyan public – namely, how important they are considered relative to other topics.

### 5.1 Attitudes towards immigration

Several datasets measure Kenyans attitudes towards ‘migrants’ or ‘immigration’. However, it is important to note that the wording of polling questions does not always make clear whether this includes refugees. Overall, polling suggests that most Kenyans favour lower immigration levels but are relatively accepting towards migrants once in the country (see Table 1). Kenya ranks 40th out of 138 countries in Gallup’s Migrant Acceptance Index – scoring 6.51, well above the world average (5.29) and roughly in line with the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (6.47) (Esipova et al., 2017).<sup>11</sup> According to Afrobarometer, over three quarters of Kenyans would like or are neutral towards having immigrants or

foreign workers as neighbours; having become considerably more positive – and less neutral – on this question over time. On the one hand, this overall picture suggests some support for policies aiming to restrict immigration into Kenya. On the other hand, it also suggests that public opinion does not offer particular support for unduly heavy-handed measures.

While available data does not measure attitudes towards different groups, key informant interviews demonstrate that attitudes are likely to vary depending on nationality. It was suggested that perceptions be understood through the broader lens of persistent tribalism in Kenya and frequent stigmatisation of those perceived as different from one’s own tribe or ethnic group – as well as long-held discrimination towards specific groups, such as ethnic Somalis. Less welcoming attitudes are likely towards those associated with crime and irregular migration in public narratives, particularly Chinese, Nigerian and Somali migrants, or Ethiopians in transit.

### 5.2 Attitudes towards refugees

Additional polling has been conducted to explore Kenyans’ attitudes towards refugees. Yet national polling remains scarce given the size and longevity of Kenya’s refugee population. Polling on attitudes towards refugees consists chiefly of a 2018 survey by the Pew Research Center, the inclusion of Kenya in one global Amnesty International poll in 2016 (its ‘Refugees Welcome Index’) and a more detailed national study conducted by

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9 For example, Kenya was not among the 26 countries included in Ipsos’ 2019 Global Refugee Study. Nor was it included in the recent seventh wave of the World Values Survey, which includes several questions relevant to migration – although efforts have been made to identify funding and partners to facilitate its inclusion in future.

10 For example, while detailed attitudinal segmentation has been carried out in several high-income countries aimed at understanding how attitudes towards migrants are distributed across different segments of the public and how these interact with broader opinions and values (Dempster and Hargrave, 2017), no such segmentation exists in the Kenyan context.

11 Gallup’s Migrant Acceptance Index is based on data from the 2016 Gallup World Poll, producing a score for each country based on the proportion of respondents who consider migrants living in their country, becoming their neighbour or marrying a close relative a ‘good thing’.

**Table 1 Kenyan attitudes towards ‘immigrants’/‘migrants’/‘immigration’**

Data source	Year	Key findings
Pew Research Center	2018	60% of Kenyans would favour lower levels of immigration 23% support maintaining current levels 15% would favour higher levels
Gallup Migrant Acceptance Index	2016	Score of 6.51 Kenya ranked 40th most accepting of 138 countries worldwide
Afrobarometer	2014–2015; 2017–2018	In 2017–2018 50% of Kenyans would somewhat or strongly like having immigrants or foreign workers as neighbours – compared to 40.6% in 2014–2015 In 2017 27.4% ‘would not care’ – compared to 39.6% in 2014–2015 20.8% would somewhat or strongly dislike it – compared to 18.9% in 2014–2015

Sources: Pew Research Center (2018); Esipova et al. (2017); Afrobarometer (2018)

the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in 2018.<sup>12</sup> Such polling data is supplemented by a number of qualitative studies and smaller surveys documenting refugee–host interaction in refugees’ immediate communities.

Available data suggests that, contrary to negative central government and media narratives, there is some level of support – and even pride – nationally for the role Kenya has played in hosting refugees. The Pew Research Center’s polling found that in 2018 almost six in ten Kenyans had favorable views of refugees (Pew Research Center, 2020). Likewise, IRC’s survey documented that 90% of Kenyans felt the country had been a good example to others in terms of hosting refugees (IRC, 2018). In line with global trends, the Pew Research Center’s polling found that favorable views are most common about younger and more highly educated Kenyans; according to the survey, two thirds of those aged 18 to 29 had positive views of refugees, compared to just 46% of those aged over 50 (Pew Research Center, 2020).

There is some evidence that narratives around security threats, particularly in connection to Somalis, may have found traction among the Kenyan public. For instance, there were reports that during Operation Usalama Watch in 2014, some refugees were shunned from using public transport for fear that they may be terrorists (RCK, 2015). However, polling suggests that the breadth of this sentiment appears limited. IRC’s 2018 poll found that – while 40% of respondents had heard securitised narratives through their information sources (Figure 6) – only 27% felt that security

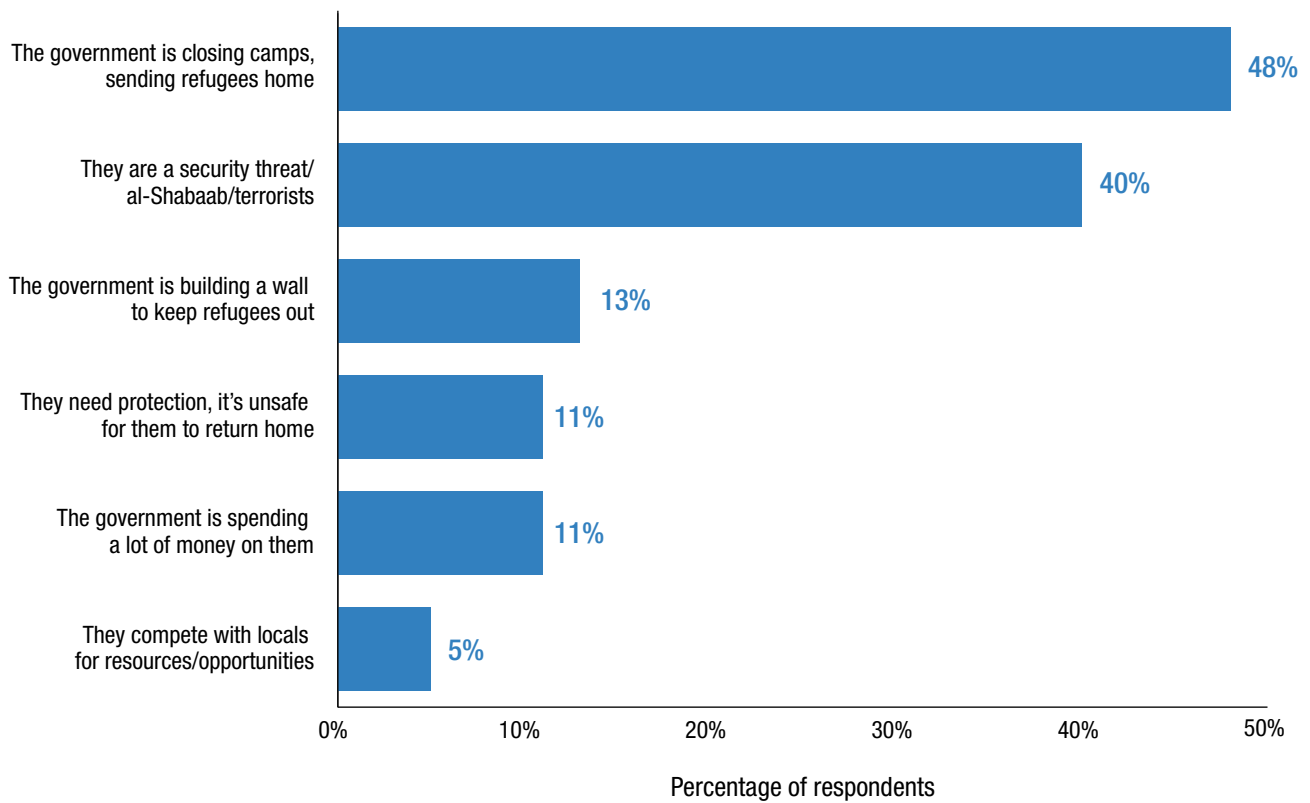
concerns best characterised their perspective towards refugees (see Figure 7). Notably, the same poll also indicated that – although present – economic concerns surrounding refugees’ presence in Kenya are not especially acute at the national level. Very few of those surveyed prioritised concerns around pressure on national resources (13%) or competition for job opportunities (4%), while almost three quarters supported refugees’ right to work in Kenya (IRC, 2018).

While polling indicates more public positivity towards refugees than reflected in prevailing central government narratives, it nonetheless indicates support for the government’s overarching policy approach. Surveys have shown majority support for encampment, restrictions on refugees’ ability to integrate with Kenyan host communities, and ultimately their repatriation. According to one poll, over two thirds of Kenyans support the government’s policy of encampment (IRC, 2018). Another poll found that just 22% of Kenyans would be prepared to accept refugees into their homes, neighbourhoods or villages (Amnesty International, 2016). A nationwide Ipsos survey in June 2016 found that almost seven in ten respondents supported the government’s announcement to close Dadaab and return refugees home (Ipsos, 2016).

Yet, it is noteworthy that these national trends do not necessarily reflect the views of those living in most immediate proximity to refugees. Most Kenyans have not interacted with refugees (see Figure 8) and the minority who do so live in

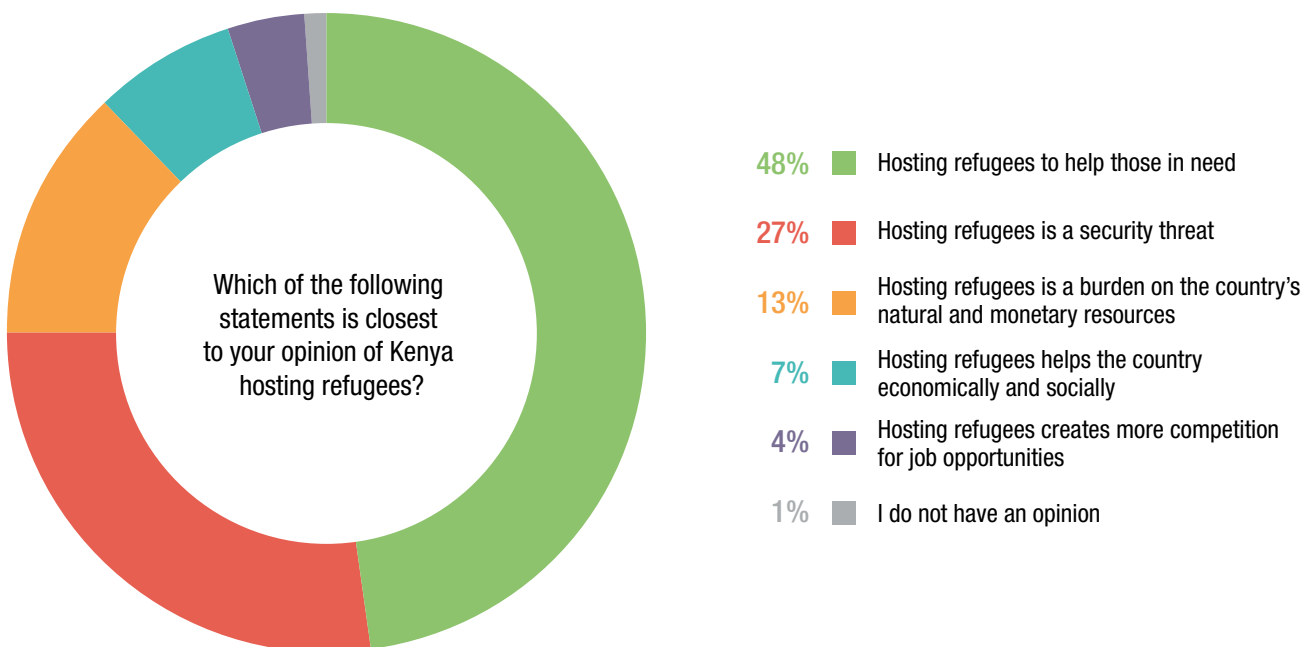
12 Parallel studies were also carried out by IRC in Uganda and Tanzania.

**Figure 6 What have you heard about refugees from your sources of information?**



Source: IRC (2018)

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



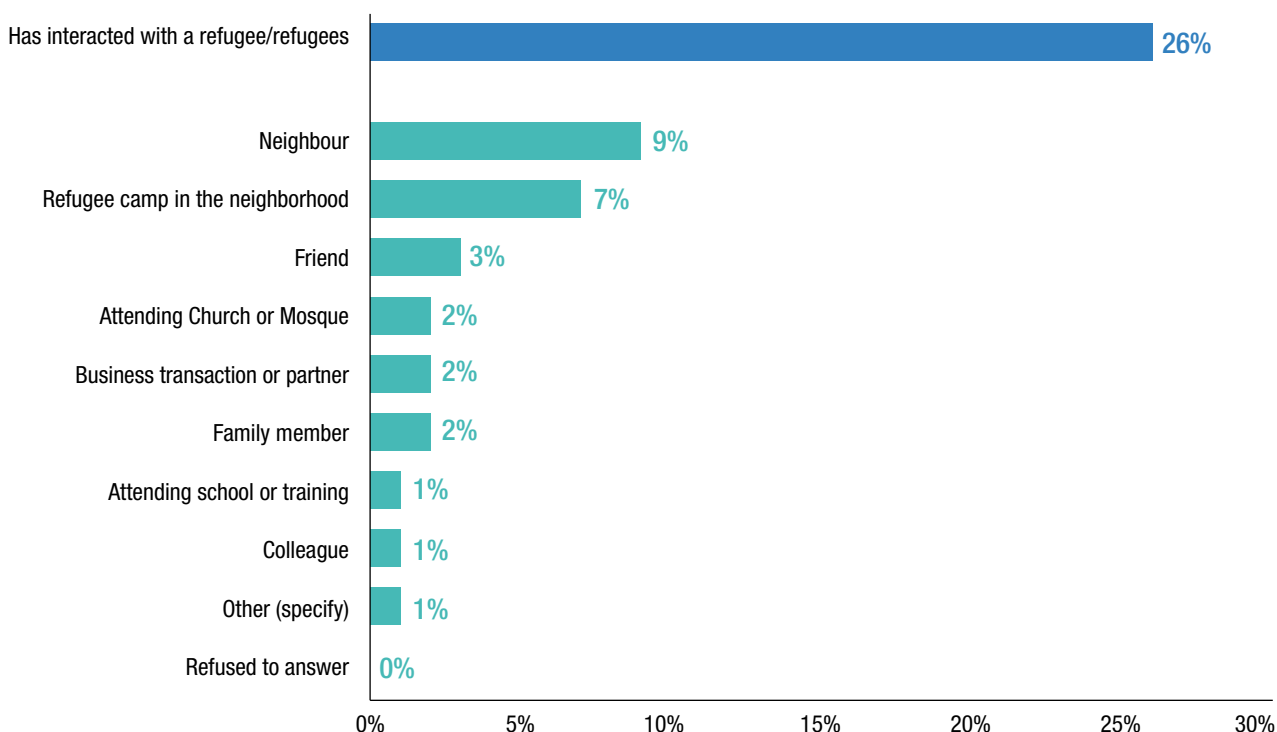
Source: IRC (2018)

areas surrounding Kenya’s camps or in urban areas, such as Nairobi’s Eastleigh, where refugees are concentrated. A number of qualitative studies have charted the evolving relationships between host community members and refugees, demonstrating more positive perceptions of integration among those already experiencing it to some extent. For example, studies on Kakuma camp and its Turkana hosts, highlight how relationships between refugees and the host community have been shaped by friendship and positive interaction (Ohta, 2005; Vemuru et al., 2016; O’Callaghan and Sturge, 2019). Likewise, a recent study on Dadaab camp has documented mutually beneficial market exchanges between refugees and host communities, as well as a sense of ‘brotherhood’ supported by a common language and culture between refugees and host communities (UNHCR and ILO, 2019).

The same Dadaab study documented negative perceptions of repatriation among host communities, connecting reduced refugee populations to cuts to food aid and staff costs, with significant impacts on the local economy.

These studies also reflect a sometimes delicate balance in immediate host communities, which, as highlighted above, county governments have walked a fine line to navigate. While experiences are not as acute as, for example, parts of neighbouring Uganda (Hargrave et al., 2020), there is evidence from communities surrounding both Dadaab and Kakuma documenting tensions arising from environmental pressures posed by the camps, as well as, in Turkana, a perception of refugees being favoured by aid agencies for assistance (de Montclos and Kagwanja, 2000; Alix-Garcia et al., 2017; Betts et al., 2019; UNHCR and ILO, 2019).

**Figure 8 Have you interacted with a refugee/refugees in any way? If so, where/how?**



Source: IRC (2018)

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## 6 Recommendations

There are various entry points for actors seeking to engage with narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants in Kenya; from government at all levels, civil society and the private sector, to regional and international organisations. This study offers the following recommendations to actors already engaging, or interested in engaging, in this space:

### 1. Invest in polling data to better understand Kenyan attitudes towards refugees and other migrants.

While some conclusions can be drawn from available data, more effective engagement can be supported through a scale-up of relevant polling, as part of wider efforts to strengthen the availability of such data in low- and middle-income countries, including across the wider region. This could include:

- Exploring how Kenyan attitudes towards refugees and other migrants can be more consistently included in existing global, regional and national datasets.
- Supporting more detailed national studies; in particular, exploring possibilities to undertake attitudinal segmentation and measuring the salience of immigration and refugee-hosting among the Kenyan public.
- Measuring whether and how perceptions have been influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts within Kenya and the wider region.

### 2. Advocacy efforts seeking policy reform and policy-makers themselves should proactively ground their efforts in what Kenya's public thinks.

From civil society to the private sector, various actors in Kenya have played active roles in calling for reforms to Kenya's policy landscape. Advocacy efforts, including those linked to implementation

of recent international and regional commitments, can be strengthened by drawing on public opinion. This would be supported by more extensive polling. However, available evidence already suggests promising entry points, for example:

- While evidence suggests that Kenyan citizens are unlikely to support policies proactively seeking to increase immigration levels, Kenyans nonetheless demonstrate broadly welcoming attitudes towards migrants and foreign workers. This suggests that there is likely to be space for pragmatic migration policies that are not unduly heavy handed.
- Recent polling indicates space among Kenya's public to support greater realisation of refugees' right to work. Efforts to advance refugees' inclusion should, however, be sensitive to diverging national perspectives in terms of support to economic and social inclusion: capitalising on openness to the former, while – given current public support for encampment – simultaneously exploring what needs to be done longer term to build support for the latter.

### 3. Build space for wider reforms by amplifying existing positive narratives, specifically around the development benefits of hosting refugees and other migrants.

While there is a need to continue to challenge negative central government and media narratives that focus on security risks, criminality and 'illegal' migration, there should be the pragmatic recognition that, domestically, such narratives are highly entrenched and any shifts are likely to take time. Those seeking to constructively engage in this space should focus on amplifying existing positive narratives by:

- Building on positive elements within public opinion, for example many Kenyans' sense of pride in refugee hosting and broadly welcoming attitudes towards foreign

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- workers, as well as positive experiences of citizens living in refugees' immediate hosting communities.
- Amplifying positive narratives from actors already proactively engaging in this space, such as county governments, the private sector and civil society.
  - Pursuing opportunities to link narratives that emphasise the development benefits of hosting refugees and other migrants – as well as broader arguments for inclusion – to wider conversations regarding the response to Covid-19 and the economic and social recovery from the pandemic.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all those who shared their expertise by participating in interviews for this research. Many thanks also to Nassim Majidi, Kerrie Holloway and Marta Foresti for their invaluable review and comments. Finally, thanks to Katie Forsythe and Ottavia Pasta for editorial and design support.

## About the project

*Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants: implications for action* is a two-year project led by ODI's Human Mobility Initiative, funded by the IKEA Foundation. It aims to provide detailed and practical recommendations to help businesses and investors influence attitudes to migrants and refugees, with a focus on Germany, Sweden, the UK and the US and more in-depth studies of attitudes in Kenya and Uganda. Briefing papers will feed into broader events and roundtable discussions where practice, partnerships and policy can be developed and shared among businesses and sector experts.



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