



Mixed
Migration
Centre

URBAN MIXED MIGRATION NAIROBI CASE STUDY

MMC Briefing Paper, November 2020



“In Nairobi there is a lot of access to services and jobs, since it is the capital city of Kenya and most opportunities are here including NGOs and UN offices.”

Somali woman, age unknown, Nairobi

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Special thanks: To all respondents and key informants for their time and valuable input.

Layout and design: Ziad Alhemdi

Suggested citation: Mixed Migration Centre (2020), Urban Mixed Migration – Nairobi case study, available at: <http://www.mixedmigration.org/resource/urban-case-study-nairobi/>

About this report

This publication was produced with the financial support of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the World Bank.

This report is a contribution to the MMC's vision that migration policies, responses and public debate are based on credible evidence, nuanced understanding of mixed migration, placing human rights and protection of all people on the move at the centre. More specifically, it contributes to the second strategic objective of the MMC, which is to contribute to evidence-based and better-informed migration policies and debates.

After a brief overview of the current mixed migration dynamics in Nairobi and the national migration policy framework, this case study seeks to explore mixed migration dynamics from three complementary thematic lenses: 1) Nairobi as a city of opportunities; 2) Nairobi as a city of risks and 3) Nairobi during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Besides the case study included in this report, MMC has carried out similar urban case studies in Bamako, Bogota, Kuala Lumpur and Tunis. The research methods, data sources and analysis structure have been aligned across all case studies, to allow the reader to draw comparisons between the specific situation of refugees and migrants across cities.

The other case studies can be found here:

[Urban case study in Bamako](#)

[Urban case study in Bogota](#)

[Urban case study in Kuala Lumpur](#)

[Urban case study in Tunis](#)

Also, the 2020 edition of the MMC annual report, the Mixed Migration Review, is dedicated to the theme of urban migration and can be found here:

[Mixed Migration Review 2020](#)

The information and views set out in this report are those of the author and the MMC and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) or any of the donors supporting the work of MMC or this report. Responsibility for the content of this report lies entirely with the MMC.

About MMC

The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs (Asia, East Africa & Yemen, Europe, Middle East, North Africa, West Africa and Latin America & Caribbean) and a central unit in Geneva. The MMC is a leading source of independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration.

The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of, and governed by, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). While its institutional link to DRC ensures MMC's work is grounded in operational reality, it acts as an independent source of data, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration for policy makers, practitioners, journalists, and the broader humanitarian sector. The position of the MMC does not necessarily reflect the position of DRC.

For more information on MMC visit our website:

www.mixedmigration.org



Contents

03	Acknowledgements
06	Glossary
07	Tables and figures
08	Key findings
10	Introduction
11	Methodology
13	Migration dynamics in Nairobi
16	Migration policy landscape
17	City of opportunity
19	City of risks
21	Direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19
24	Conclusions and recommendations
25	Annex - Interviews conducted

Glossary

4Mi	Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
MMC	Mixed Migration Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Tables and figures

Table 1: Quantitative data collection overview	11
Table 2: Qualitative data collection overview	12
Figure 1: Nairobi Sub-counties	13
Figure 2: “Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?” (April – June 2020)	22
Figure 3: “What impact has the coronavirus crisis had on your migration journey?”	22

ANNEXES

Table 3: Key Informant Interviews	25
Table 4: Refugee and Migrant Interviews	25

Key findings

Migration dynamics

- Nairobi has a well-established and diverse refugee and migrant population. Many refugees and migrants live in communities with co-nationals, which provides a 'safety net' for new arrivals. These social networks often present opportunities for orientation, community integration and informal employment which can be critical to establishing roots in Nairobi.
- Migration to and through Nairobi is heavily characterized by the refugee and asylum seeker landscape. Many asylum seekers travel to Nairobi irregularly with the aim of applying for asylum, and the perception that Kenya's positive urban refugee policies could provide a welcoming environment.
- Among refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers there is a perception that Nairobi is a 'transit' location, but many refugees and migrants stay between 5 to 10 years, and therefore Nairobi should be considered a temporary destination as well.

City of opportunity

- The top drivers of migration for refugees and migrants in Nairobi include: economic concerns, fleeing violence, and a lack of personal freedoms. Nairobi provides access to economic opportunities, safety, and access to asylum.
- Employment opportunities in the informal sector are available for refugees and migrants from all backgrounds. Social connections are critical to securing employment and housing, and some are connected with opportunities before arriving in Nairobi.
- The presence of NGO and UN organizations supporting refugees was cited as a key factor in choosing Nairobi as a destination or a transit location.

City of risks

- Refugee and migrant respondents emphasize their concern over socioeconomic risks in Nairobi over risks related to violence. Exploitation in employment situations such as, underpay, unfair conditions, and employment insecurity are the top reported risks.
- Many respondents and key informants also note that people are unable to make enough money to adequately provide for themselves. Though there are community structures which help with cost sharing, many refugees and migrants rely on remittances from friends and relatives in other (destination) countries to support themselves.
- Irregular status has a significant impact on many aspects of their lives and is a constant cause of stress. A lack of documentation or legal status limits access to services, as well as formal employment. While many refugees and migrants are employed in the informal sector, many employers remain hesitant to employ people who do not have identification due to the legal risks.
- Lack of access to security services and support mechanisms is a challenge for many refugees and migrants, this includes access to legal assistance. Refugees and migrants, regardless of legal status, fear reporting protection abuses to the police.

Direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19

- A majority of refugees and migrants in Nairobi lost income during the COVID-19 restrictions. Many respondents noted that this has put increased pressure on them to find ways to survive.
- One of the top impacts of the COVID-19 restrictions on refugee and migrant populations was the impact on movement, leading to people being stuck and losing livelihood opportunities.
- The reduction in access to asylum procedures presents a challenge to many in Nairobi. This is related to the restraints put on asylum agencies, but also on travel restrictions within Kenya.
- Respondents report that little is being done to assist them from the government or local organizations. Though assistance initiatives are available for Kenyans, refugees and migrants (particularly undocumented ones) do not have access to government support services.

NAIROBI



1. Introduction

This case study focuses on Kenya's capital city of Nairobi which hosts a significant refugee and migrant population who choose to either settle permanently or transit through to other destinations in and out of the East Africa region. This study sets out to fill a gap in knowledge of migration in Nairobi and contribute to a growing body of literature on mixed migration in urban areas. It does this by offering an overview of the current mixed migration dynamics in the city and the national migration policy framework and by examining mixed migration dynamics within the capital using three thematic lenses: 1) Nairobi as a city of opportunities 2) Nairobi as city of risks, and 3) Nairobi during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. Nairobi as a city of opportunities

Nairobi is often studied for its role as the host of major populations of refugees and asylum seekers. This element is very important for the orientation of the city within the migration space, however this case study looks further into the experience of both refugees and migrants. Nairobi's diversity provides many refugees and migrants with a 'built-in' social network, which may provide opportunities for livelihoods, as well as social protection through joining existing communities. Many refugees and migrants who travel irregularly to reach Nairobi often stay with co-nationals and find work in the informal sector.

2. Nairobi as a city of risks

While Nairobi may not be as "risky" as cities further along on mixed migration routes where insecurity is much greater (such as Aden or Khartoum), 4Mi data and key informant interviews have nonetheless indicated that a number of protection incidents occur in Nairobi. In particular, risks associated with irregular status have been widely reported by respondents in this report. Within Nairobi, most protection abuses and violations reported relate to economic exploitation and working conditions in the informal sector. This study also examines the impact of being 'undocumented' and the risk that can bring to a refugee or migrant in Nairobi. Irregular status can impact every part of a refugee or migrant's life; without documentation migrants and asylum seekers are limited in the economic opportunities and personal freedom available to them.

3. Impact of COVID-19 on the situation of refugees and migrants in Nairobi

Since March 2020, Kenya has adopted a proactive approach to address the impacts of COVID-19. As a precautionary measure, the government-imposed movement restrictions and closed non-essential businesses, forcing many in formal and informal sectors to close businesses or reduce hours. This case study examines how these measures and government restrictions have impacted the situation of refugees and migrants in Nairobi, including the extent to which they may have exacerbated vulnerabilities and impacted migration decisions.

2. Methodology

To explore the three axes of this study, MMC used a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative data from its data collection project, the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism initiative (4Mi), and qualitative data through key informant interviews.

Both types of data were triangulated where possible and instances of convergence and divergence were explored in the results. The following sections provide a brief overview of the data.

What is the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi)?

Set up in 2014, 4Mi is a unique network of field monitors situated along frequently used routes and in major migratory hubs. It aims to offer a regular, standardised, quantitative and globalised, system of collecting primary data on mixed migration. 4Mi predominantly uses a closed question survey to invite respondents to anonymously self-report on a wide range of issues that results in extensive data relating to individual profiles, migratory drivers, means and conditions of movement, the smuggler economy, aspirations and destination choices. 4Mi data allow MMC and its partners to inform migration policies, debates, and protection responses for people on the move through the production of high-quality quantitative analysis grounded in evidence.

Quantitative data

MMC launched the 4Mi survey in Nairobi in 2014, and its current 4Mi core survey was launched in Nairobi in July 2017, collecting primary quantitative data on mixed migration dynamics, including individual profiles; mixed migration drivers, intentions and aspirations; conditions and means of travel; interactions with smugglers; and protection abuses (hereafter referred to as “4Mi data”). Starting in April 2020, the 4Mi was adapted for the interviews to be conducted remotely and for the survey to include a focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, with respondents being asked about the impact of COVID-19 on their livelihoods, protection situation, and mobility (hereafter referred to as “4Mi COVID phase 1 data”). This study draws upon the data collected from these instruments to examine the experiences of refugees and migrants in the context of the three themes.

Both surveys follow the same sampling scheme, which includes refugees and migrants who are: 18 years’ old and above, mainly from Eastern Africa, and who have been in Nairobi for less than 12 months. The last criteria is in place to capture people who are moving longer distances along mixed migration routes as well as people who are actively on the move, rather than settled refugee and migrant populations. Given the moderate sample sizes and non-randomised nature of sampling, the findings from the quantitative data should be treated with caution.

Table 1: Quantitative data collection overview

Data collection instrument	Sampled groups	Number of respondents (in Nairobi)
4Mi Core Survey (July 2017 – March 2020)	Refugees and migrants in Nairobi, mainly from sub-Saharan African countries of origin	375 (66% men, 35% women)
4Mi COVID-19 Survey version 1 (April – July 2020)	Refugees and migrants in Nairobi, mainly from sub-Saharan African countries of origin	43 (58% men, 42% women)

Qualitative data

Qualitative data collection took place in August and October 2020. MMC conducted qualitative interviews with two groups of key informants: (i) 5 interviews with mixed migration actors (governmental and non-governmental organizations), and (ii) 21 in-depth interviews with refugees and migrants in Nairobi.¹ The sampling of this second target group was carried out to achieve a diversity in origin countries and gender balance. Several neighbourhoods were targeted, given the presence of large refugee and migrant communities .

It should be noted that links between municipalities and neighbourhoods are tentative, as some neighbourhoods overlap on several municipalities and respondents' own perception of neighbourhoods' borders can vary.

Secondary sources

Secondary sources were referred to, primarily to provide information on migratory dynamics in Kenyan government policy, and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These included media reports, government documents, grey literature and operational dashboards from NGOs and international organizations.²

Limitations and ethics

Several limitations to the data are worth noting. As the 4Mi sampling process was not randomized the survey responses do not represent the entire refugee and migrant population in Nairobi. Additionally, the responses of participants in the 4Mi survey cannot be independently verified, and response bias may be a factor. Nonetheless, the findings from the survey can provide important insights into the current situation refugees and migrants are facing in Nairobi.

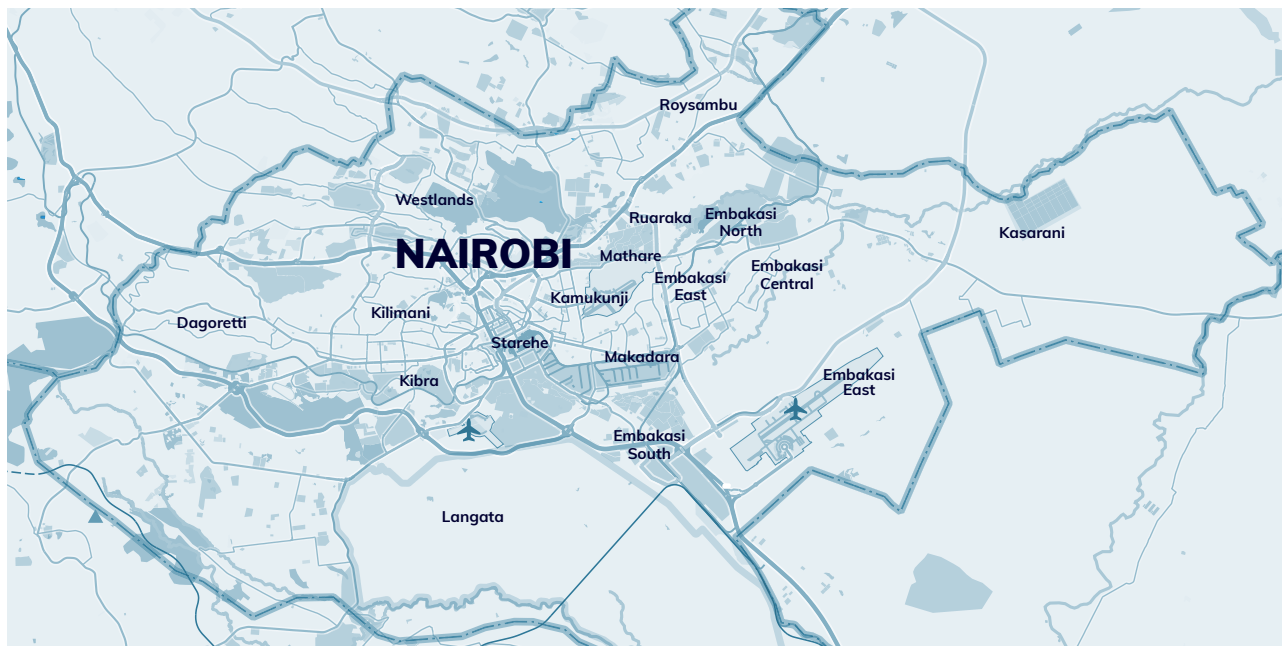
Informed consent and anonymity were communicated clearly with participants before, during, and after the interviews. For the Key Informant Interviews (KII) informed consent was communicated clearly with participants before, during, and after the interviews. When requested, information has been verified with participants prior to publishing and carefully anonymized.

Table 2: Qualitative data collection overview

Data collection instrument	Type of migration stakeholder	Type of migration stakeholder
Interviews with key informants	Governmental organizations	1
	Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	3
	Civil society	1
Interviews with refugees and migrants	Refugees and migrants, all countries of origin	21

3. Migration dynamics in Nairobi

Figure 1: Nairobi Sub-counties



Migration in Kenya as a whole and in Nairobi in particular is very dynamic, and the landscape of the city is diverse. Nairobi is the most urbanised centre in Kenya with the highest proportion of the population (62%) living in informal settlements across the country. It is one of the biggest cities in East Africa encompassing slums and middle-class areas with a population density of 6,247 people per square kilometre.³ It is also the most populated city in East Africa, with a current estimated population of 4.3 million people (or 1.4 million households) out of Kenya's 47.5 million.⁴

Nairobi is one of the top political and cultural centres in East Africa, and is often regarded as a destination for job seekers and people looking for better educational opportunities. Nairobi's economy generates over 60% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it was recently ranked as the sixth wealthiest city in Africa.⁵ A joint report published by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Danish Refugee Council showed that many of Nairobi's residents live below the poverty line (44% in 2005/6) and rely on the informal sector as a source of employment as casual

labourers, petty traders, and small business owners and in various semi-skilled self-employment activities.⁶ These sectors are also ones in which refugees and migrants tend to gravitate towards, although many rely on remittances for their income.

Many employment opportunities in Kenya (and East Africa) are concentrated in Nairobi, as are some of the key services and the organizations assisting refugees and migrants. The city is a major destination for internal migrants, as well as refugees and asylum seekers from around East Africa, and migrants looking to stay or transit through Kenya. An additional feature of Nairobi is the number of people who commute into the city daily for work, estimated to be more than 1.5 million people from surrounding areas.⁷ In addition to urban poor resident in Nairobi, there is also a high prevalence of circular migration linked to labour markets in slum areas, with people going back to their rural homes towards the end of the year; they may stay away for several months and not always return to the same area.⁸ Those who are evicted from slums are other profiles also resident in the capital.⁹

3 The next largest city, Mombasa, has a density of 5,495 people per square km. By comparison, the city with the highest population density in the world is Dhaka with a population density of 44,500 people and in Africa, Lagos in Nigeria has 13,300 people per square km.

4 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019). [2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census Volume I: Population by Country and Sub-County](#).

5 AfrAsia Bank (2018). [Wealth Report 2018](#).

6 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Danish Refugee Council (May 2012). ['Living on the Edge: A Livelihood Status Report on Urban Refugees Living in Nairobi, Kenya'](#).

7 Salon, Deborah and Sumila Gulyani (2019). [Commuting in Urban Kenya: Unpacking Travel Demand in Large and Small Kenyan Cities. Sustainability, volume 11, issue 14.](#)

8 Beguy, Donatien, Philippe Bocquier, and Eliya Msiyaphazi Zulu (2010). [Circular migration patterns and determinants in Nairobi slum settlements](#). Demographic Research 23: 549-586.

9 Metcalfe, V., Pavanello, S., & Mishra, P. (2011). [Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability in Nairobi](#). London: Overseas Development Institute.

Mixed migration landscape

Refugees and migrants in Nairobi have been described as both 'hidden and exposed', which presents challenges to obtaining accurate data as to their size and composition.¹⁰ It has been well documented that refugees are often present in Kenya, however there is a paucity of data on the broader mixed migration dynamics in the Kenyan capital. Many refugees and asylum seekers arrive into Kenya via mixed migration routes or irregular migration. Kenya has a sizable number of urban refugees, most of whom live in Nairobi. At end of April 2020, the total number of registered urban refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya was 81,016, with 59% between the ages of 18-59 years.¹¹ These were mainly refugees and asylum seekers from Burundi, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, and Uganda. Although only 81,016 were registered as refugees and asylum seekers, and as this case study shows, the total number of refugees and migrants is likely to be higher.

Given its key geographic location, Nairobi is also a key point for major mixed migration flows on all mixed migration routes from East Africa. Nairobi serves as a transit city for refugees and migrants intending to migrate towards the Gulf countries and the Middle East, as well on the southern route towards South Africa, and the route towards north Africa and Europe. 4Mi and key informant data shows that most refugees and migrants travel into Kenya using a mix of cheaper travel options (bus, lorry, car and walking). Nearly 75% 4Mi respondents noted that they used a smuggler for at least one part of their migration journey to Nairobi.

Mixed migration movements into and through Kenya include refugees, trafficked persons, irregular and economic migrants from other African countries particularly from East and Central African countries.¹² Some of the biggest groups of refugees and migrants in Nairobi include Congolese, Ethiopian and Somalis.¹³

Congolese

There are approximately 30,000 Congolese in Nairobi who are considered as a UNHCR population of concern, and an unknown number of migrants.¹⁴ The Congolese tend to be Christian and Swahili-speakers and integrate relatively easily into Kenyan society. Congolese live

in various suburbs throughout Nairobi and as noted by research from Dr. Naohiko Omata, "the nature of the relationships between Congolese refugees and their neighbouring Kenyan hosts is quite different from those of Somali refugees, primarily because Congolese refugees do not have ethnic counterparts amongst Kenya's citizenry in the ways that Somali refugees do. Instead, they take advantage of their command of Swahili – Kenya's national language – to find traction in the urban economies of Nairobi.¹⁵ Also, Congolese refugees can more easily 'blend in' while living in Nairobi, as they are not as profiled in the same way as Somali people".¹⁶ Research has shown that Congolese living in Kenya may accept lower pay for casual work, making them desirable employees for Kenyan business people in the informal sector.

Ethiopians

Currently Ethiopians make up around 14% of Nairobi's registered refugee population (around 11,000 people) but it should be assumed there are far more Ethiopian asylum seekers who have not registered, or are migrants.¹⁷ Ethiopians from the Oromo ethnic group form a sizeable proportion of non-Somalis living in the Somali-dominated Eastleigh neighbourhood, where the presence of an Oromo mosque facilitates community linkages; in another part of Nairobi there is a Coptic church which provides similar services for Christian Ethiopians.¹⁸ Living in areas such as Eastleigh provides multiple economic opportunities for Oromo, who often can find work in restaurants, shops, barbershops, as taxi drivers, or selling khat or coffee. For those who speak Somali, work can be obtained in Somali-owned businesses and trust can be developed with Somali businesses and customers. Studies have shown that Ethiopians are a highly transient population in Nairobi and will seek to move on either through resettlement or irregular migration with Eastleigh being a "way-station to somewhere else".¹⁹

Somalis

The city's 21,000 Somali refugees are largely concentrated in the well-known Eastleigh district of Nairobi, known as 'Little Mogadishu', despite the presence of other ethnic groups in the location as is described later.²⁰ Eastleigh itself has a total population

10 Pavanello, Sara, Samir Elhawary, and Sara Pantuliano (2010). [Hidden and exposed: Urban refugees in Nairobi, Kenya](#). London: Overseas Development Institute.

11 UNHCR (April 2020). [UNHCR Kenya Monthly Operational Update](#).

12 Daghar, M (30 July 2019). [Kenya now a key transit point for south bound migrants](#). ENACT Observer.

13 IOM (2018). [Migration in Kenya: A Country Profile](#). As there are not statistics on migrants in the city, statistics on refugees are used as a guide to support an estimate about the refugee and migrant population in Nairobi. Please note that in the context of this study we refer to "Congolese" as people from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

14 UNHCR (April 2020). [UNHCR Kenya Monthly Operational Update Urban Refugee Programme](#).

15 Omata, N. (2020). [Refugee Livelihoods: A Comparative Analysis of Nairobi and Kakuma Camp in Kenya](#).

16 Betts, A., Omata, N., Sterck, O. (2018). [Refugee Economies in Kenya](#). Oxford: RSC.p17.

17 O'Callaghan, Sorcha and Georgina Sturge (December 2018). [Against the odds: refugee integration in Kenya](#). ODI, London.

18 Carrier, N., & Kochore, H. H. (2019). [Being Oromo in Nairobi's 'Little Mogadishu](#). Mobile Urbanity: Somali Presence in Urban East Africa, 20, 76.

19 Carrier, Neil C. (2016). [Little Mogadishu: Eastleigh, Nairobi's Global Somali Hub](#). Oxford University Press.

20 Carrier, et al.

of 225,815 people and the proportion of migrants living in the area is unknown.²¹ The presence of a large Kenyan-Somali population in Eastleigh offers Somali refugees an opportunity for partial assimilation within the community,²² using ethnic and religious bonds to find income-generating opportunities.²³ The most popular economic activities include: selling clothing, vending cooked meals rice, and a range of casual labour positions, including shopkeepers, porters and restaurant workers. Most refugees carry out these activities only within Eastleigh, sometimes under informal employment by Somali-Kenyans also living in Eastleigh. Refugees are often able to manage businesses under joint-ownership with Somali-Kenyans and are registered with Nairobi's County City Council. Key informants for this study also noted that a similar structure was in place for migrants as well. Dr. Omata's research on Somalis in Kenya states, "the advantage of having a Kenyan as the 'front-side' of the business, avoiding cumbersome documentation issues and other procedures imposed on refugees while also decreasing the vulnerability to police harassment. In the case of Somali refugees in Nairobi, their ethnic bond can somewhat dilute the impacts of refugeehood on their economic activities".²⁴

Settlement within Nairobi

Social networks play a key role in determining where refugees and migrants reside in Nairobi. Particular locations are popular due to the existence of a variety of ethnic communities and neighbourhoods, as well as a relatively cheap living costs and the availability of work opportunities.

In terms of settlement factors, most refugee and migrant respondents, from different countries of origin and regardless of status and modality of arrival, reported that they chose their initial place of residence at the suggestion of, or to join their co-national communities or social networks. These social networks guide the new arrivals in orientation in the city, and key informant interviews report that refugees and migrants tend to live together in Nairobi for social protection and to share costs.

Drawing on the literature and the KI interviews, the main areas that refugees and migrants reside in are:²⁵

- Eastleigh – primarily Somali and Ethiopian refugees and migrants
- Githurai – Congolese and Burundians refugees and migrants
- Kasarani – primarily Congolese, Burundians and Rwandan refugees and migrants

- Kayole – comprised of informal settlements including of Congolese, Rwandese and Ugandan refugees and migrants
- Kawangare – Congolese, Burundian, South Sudanese refugees and migrants
- Mathare – primarily Ugandan, Congolese and Sudanese refugees and migrants but also some from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria, Tanzania and Somalia
- Majengo – primarily Tanzanian, Rwandese and Somali refugees and migrants
- South B – Burundian, Congolese, Ethiopian, Rwandese, and Somali refugees and migrants
- Umoja – primarily Congolese and Burundians refugees and migrants

For some, the choice is even further broken down by the areas refugees and migrants are from. For example, one Somali respondent noted that, "migrants from Galgaduud in Somalia tend to live in Eastleigh, South C and even Huruma parts of Greater Nairobi".

Nairobi considered as a 'transit' location, but many stay for years

According to 4Mi data, over 90% of respondents in Nairobi reported that they had not yet reached the end of their journeys, and only 2 respondents (out of 375) noted that Kenya was their final destination. Most 4Mi respondents were transiting through Kenya with an intention of travelling to other countries further afield, this often involved several stops along the way as they travelled through the country. Respondents noted they stopped in Kenya in order to: apply for asylum, rest, stay with friends/relatives, look for smugglers, wait for fellow travellers to catch up, or they were detained or blocked from moving on by authorities.

While the intention may be to stay in Nairobi in transit (or while waiting for refugee resettlement), most respondents noted that on average people stay in their communities in Nairobi for 5 to 10 years. This was corroborated by NGO key informants working with refugees and migrants, and government key informants noted that people stay at least a year. This timeframe could be influenced in part by the strong social networks common in-migrant communities in Nairobi, and respondents noted that resettlement timelines had a large impact on the length of stay. However, many respondents also reflected on life in Nairobi as 'safe' and better than their country of origin, and people simply end up staying longer than initially planned.

21 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019). [2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census Volume II: Distribution of Population by Administrative Units](#).

22 Betts, A., Omata, N., Sterck, O. (2018). [Refugee Economies in Kenya](#). Oxford: RSC.

23 Omata, N. (2020). [Refugee Livelihoods: A Comparative Analysis of Nairobi and Kakuma Camp in Kenya](#).

24 Omata, p17.

25 See IOM (2018). [Migration in Kenya: a country profile 2018](#). Please note that these locations include observations of interviewed respondents and key informants to illustrate findings, and provide by no means an exhaustive overview of settlement dynamics per nationality and/or group.

In addition, refugees and migrants report they feel a good sense of integration with local Kenyans. All respondents said there was no or very little separation between refugees, migrants and Kenyans in daily life. The only notable division was where people chose to pray and this was largely attributed to differences in language and choice to pray in one's own language. NGO key informants noted this intermixing, and highlighted that different communities rely on different networks with Kenyans in order to start or conduct businesses, for instance Somali refugees can work with Somali-Kenyans while Congolese refugees have the advantage of being able to communicate in Kenya's official language Swahili²⁶ that may assist them in building networks.²⁷

“We live and do everything together but, it depends on what you do as a work. For church, those who understand English and Kiswahili²⁸ pray with Kenyans and others have their own churches.”

(Rwandan man)

“There is not much separation between migrant communities and citizens, they are all mixed. Only for where they go for prayer they separate because of language barrier.”

(Burundian man)

4. Migration policy landscape

National policies

The Kenya Refugee Act 2006 provides the guidelines for the management of refugees.²⁹ Kenya's official refugee policy prioritizes accommodating refugees in camps located in remote parts of the country, and refugees risk losing documentation and entitlements if they move out of the camps. However, in practice Kenya has tolerated an increasingly large refugee population in the capital city of Nairobi. Many refugees still move out of camps for many reasons including seeking better livelihood opportunities and opportunities for onward migration in spite of security concerns which are detailed next.³⁰

While the right to work is provided for in the 2006 Refugee Act, refugees need a work permit to access employment, which are difficult to obtain in practice. The work permits only last 5 years, and are rarely granted.³¹

There has been significant focus in the last decade on the urban dimension of Kenya's refugee and migrant population and the need for adequate policy responses to meet the needs of the people and the host communities. However, there is a disproportionate amount of research on Nairobi's refugee population to the detriment of other groups, including migrants and trafficked persons. There is a need for greater policy attention on the intersection between urbanisation and mixed migration, regardless of migration status, which highlights the commonalities

in experiences between refugees and migrants including the opportunities and risks, as well as complex and migration drivers.

A 2018 IOM report recommended, “The Government of Kenya and concerned stakeholders should make explicit linkages between urban planning and migration in both policy and programming.”.³² This should also be interconnected with other urban development strategies that come under the responsibility of the Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development, as outlined in a 2011 ODI report.³³

Visa free travel and the East African Community

Kenya is an active member of the East African Community (EAC), an organization which brings together the countries of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan and the United Republic of Tanzania to cooperate on important political, economic, social and cultural issues. This includes defence, security and legal affairs.³⁴ Citizens of member states do not need visas to travel within the EAC.

26 Kenya's official languages are Swahili and English.

27 Omata, N. (2020). [Refugee Livelihoods: A Comparative Analysis of Nairobi and Kakuma Camp in Kenya](#).

28 Kiswahili (also known as Swahili) is one of the official languages of Kenya and is also spoken widely throughout much of East and Southern Africa.

29 National Council for Law Reporting with the Authority of the Attorney-General (2006). '[Laws of Kenya, Refugees Act, no 13 2006](#).'

30 O'Callaghan, Sorcha and Georgina Sturge (December 2018), [Against the odds: refugee integration in Kenya](#). ODI, London.

31 O'Callaghan, Sorcha and Georgina Sturge (December 2018), [Against the odds: refugee integration in Kenya](#). ODI, London.

32 IOM (2018). [Migration in Kenya: a country profile 2018](#), p191.

33 Metcalfe, V., Pavanello, S., & Mishra, P. (2011). [Sanctuary in the city? Urban displacement and vulnerability in Nairobi](#). London: Overseas Development Institute.

34 East Africa Community, EAC website. '[Overview of EAC](#),' (accessed 15 September 2020)

In addition, Kenya has a policy of visa-free access for nationals from most East African countries,³⁵ including Ethiopia and Burundi. Key informants from government and NGO partners noted this factor could be helpful for those migrating to Kenya, but is not necessarily seen as a factor in the decision-making process. This visa free access and the EAC free movement of persons typically only allows entry into Kenya but potential employees still require a work permit.³⁶ This leads many refugees and migrants (particularly those without documentation) to look for work in the informal sector. When interviewed, refugees and migrants noted that the visa free access was an attractive aspect of the migration journey itself, but the decision to migrate to or through Nairobi was typically more impacted by the opportunities the city offers (namely refugee assistance and livelihoods).

Regional and global engagement

Kenya is a member of the African Union (AU) - European Union (EU) Khartoum Process, and is committed to

strengthening regional coordination in tackling the challenges posed by the mixed flows of irregular migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Kenya also endorsed the Global Compact for Migration in 2018, which addresses all aspects of international migration.

Kenya is a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, as well as the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. In 2016, Kenya signed the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which called for an end to strict encampment policies and integration of refugees into society. And in 2018, Kenya signed the Global Compact for Refugees. Both the Compact and the CRRF aim to help countries integrate refugees more to benefit from national education, health and employment opportunities. However, roll out of policies concerning refugees and migrants tend to be impacted by the variety of narratives on migration found at national and subnational level.³⁷

5. City of opportunity

Migration drivers linked to economic opportunities and protection risks

4Mi data shows that the main drivers for refugees and migrants on their decision to migrate from their country of origin include economic drivers (200/375), violence (200/375), and lack of rights and freedoms (146/375)³⁸. Key informants highlight the main reasons that Nairobi is attractive is because of the possibilities for jobs, safety and asylum or refugee protection and resettlement. However, these drivers are often intertwined and connected.

Interviews with refugees and migrants and 4Mi data show that respondents often note the comparative feeling of safety that Nairobi brings. While this is often tempered with reflection on the hard life they face in Nairobi, many refugees and migrants were driven to seek safety and better opportunities, which they are often able to experience to some degree.

“The place I am (Nairobi) is safer than where I came from, though life is not easy here.”

(Congolesse man)

“I experienced and witnessed many human rights violence before I decided to flee, especially in prisons and detention areas.”

(Ethiopian man)

Nairobi seen as a key stepping stone to refugee protection and resettlement

Nearly all refugee and migrant respondents mentioned that favourable Kenyan policies around refugees and, in particular, on urban refugee programmes were critical factors in choosing Nairobi as a city of destination or transit. The de facto Kenyan policy that tolerates urban refugees was mentioned by most respondents, regardless of their status. It is important to note that without refugee status, respondents are not able to access any of the protections or provisions of the policy, but these types of policies could unintentionally promote diversity and allow non-Kenyans to more easily integrate.

Refugee resettlement from Kenya to another country was highlighted by nearly all refugee and migrant respondents as a key draw to Nairobi as a destination or transit point. 4Mi data shows that very few respondents reported Kenya as their destination (2/375), and instead noted

35 Citizens do not need a visa for Kenya from: Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei, Burundi, Cyprus, Dominica, Ethiopia**, Fiji Island, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Malaysia*, Maldives, Mauritius, Namibia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Africa*, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, San Marino**, Swaziland (Eswatini), Seychelles, Tanzania, The Bahamas, The Gambia, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, Uganda, Vanuatu, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

36 East Africa Community, EAC website. ‘[Working in East Africa](#).’ (accessed 28 September 2020).

37 Hargrave, Karin and Irina Mosel with Amy Leach (2019). [Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants Kenya country profile](#).

38 The question “why did you leave your country of departure?” is a multi-select question and respondents can answer more than one driver.

other intended destinations including the USA, Australia, and Canada (which are traditional refugee resettlement countries). Respondents often reported that peers were being resettled from Nairobi to another country (Europe was often mentioned). This was particularly mentioned by Congolese, Somali, and Burundian respondents.

Though migrants would not be able to access resettlement services, migrant respondents still largely noted resettlement as a major factor in their travel to, and experience in, Nairobi. This could indicate that the importance of resettlement was widely acknowledged in the communities and that refugees and migrants often cohabitate together and could reflect on the visible presence of UN, NGO and resettlement services and organizations in Nairobi, as this was also indicated as an important consideration.

Working and living together

Migrants and refugees across the city often rely on and live with co-nationals.³⁹ Many respondents and key informants noted that the presence of long-term refugee communities was important for making Nairobi an attractive destination. Refugees and migrants rely heavily on their social networks for many aspects of their daily life. From their first arrival in the city, refugees and migrants tap into community networks in Nairobi for housing, resources, and employment. Many are able to integrate fairly quickly in their co-national communities, which can provide strong social bonds, a sense of community, and employment opportunities.

The main factors for choosing neighbourhoods were noted by respondents and key informants across all backgrounds: social networks and the availability of work opportunities. These factors often go hand in hand with livelihood opportunities driven by the social connections they make. One NGO key informant noted that in some outstanding cases for refugees or asylum seekers, the protection concerns which drove their migration could also drive them to avoid areas where their co-nationals would reside. For example, if they fled their country due to a political affiliation, this might put them at risk when among fellow co-nationals so they may choose to avoid certain neighbourhoods.

Refugees and migrants already settled in Nairobi have a strong influence on the decision-making on destinations for refugees and migrants. Key informants and respondents note that many refugees and migrants receive preliminary information from fellow co-nationals who have already settled in Nairobi and follow them to Nairobi (and often to their neighbourhood) where they can tap into the social infrastructure.

Key economic opportunities found through social networks

Employment opportunities play a role in the consideration of places of settlement, though this is intricately linked with the location of social networks / co-nationals. Employment in Nairobi is especially competitive for those who are considered non-skilled or semi-skilled, making social networks crucial to securing jobs in the informal sector. Some respondents noted a perception that they couldn't get work outside of opportunities provided by their ethnic group or community connections.

The majority of work being undertaken by refugees and migrants is in the informal sector, where they are employed in businesses as casual workers, and are engaged in petty trade including selling second-hand clothes. Those who sought after language skills are sometimes able to get work as translators with NGOs, and French-speaking refugees and migrants may be able to find work as French teachers. Women are more often employed as domestic workers and in childcare. In particular, South Sudanese noted that they could work as translators for NGOs, and that men were preferred to get jobs. And one respondent, a Rwandan, noted that other Rwandans he knew owned businesses in Nairobi.

An NGO key informant noted that refugees and migrants need to reduce the cost of commuting every day, so also tend to find employment near where they reside. The little pay in the informal sector and small levels of profit for small business force them to choose localities where they can walk to work and back. These decisions are also made considering the ability to share costs of rent and services.

39 Julie A. Tippens (2019). [Generational Perceptions of Support Among Congolese Refugees in Urban Tanzania](#). Global Social Welfare, p 64.

6. City of risks

Informal working conditions lead to protection risks

Key informants and migrant respondents emphasize socioeconomic risks faced by refugees and migrants in Nairobi over risks associated with violence and aggression. As noted above, though Nairobi has many work opportunities for refugees and migrants, nearly all is in the informal sector. Refugee and migrant respondents note that their primary concerns are related to unpaid or underpaid work. Respondents reported they often did not receive their salary on time, or did not receive it at all. Many are on uncontracted work (including street hawking), which could be dangerous, garner very low pay, and is characterized by job insecurity.

Many do not make enough to survive, and rely on remittances from abroad and community support

Though many are able to make more income in Nairobi compared to other towns in Kenya, many refugees and migrants do not make enough money in the informal sector to support themselves. The risks associated with informal work results in low income generation over time. Many respondents and key informants noted that refugees and migrants participated in savings groups in Nairobi and cost saving measures with other co-nationals. Nearly all refugee and migrant respondents, as well as key informants, reported that there was a heavy reliance on foreign remittances received from abroad (in other destination countries), even for those who are employed in Nairobi. A NGO key informant noted that in particular, Somali and South Sudanese often “survive on foreign remittances from relatives abroad.”

“Most refugees and migrants receive remittances from their family and friends. Some live with other people where they cost share and others are in savings groups where they help each other in case a need arises.”

(Somali man)

“Kenya has more opportunities for work than Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo, but the status that we have here hinders us from getting good work.”

(Congolese woman)

Specific risks for women

Of particular concern are non-partnered women arriving to the city without a network, who reported sexual abuse due to their having to rely on strangers for employment.⁴⁰ This also reflects a wider issue for women in Nairobi who reportedly often avoid public spaces due to the fear of sexual violence.⁴¹ Refugee and migrant informants noted that there was a risk of sexual harassment or abuse, with particular attention to harassment in the workplace.

“It’s much worse for women since they take advantage of that and harass us more.”

(Somali woman)

Irregular status exposes refugees and migrants to risk

All refugee and migrant informants noted that irregular status has a significant impact on many aspects of their lives and is a constant cause of stress. Kenyan authorities regularly clampdown on irregular migration and undocumented people in the country, arresting people in and on their way to Nairobi for not holding valid documentation.⁴² The fact that many migrants and refugees do not have access to documentation can make them more likely to be harassed for random document checks and required to pay a bribe or some kind of extortion.⁴³

Documentation is key in the access to employment opportunities, both in the informal and the formal sector. Lack of documentation limits access to all services, not just employment, for people of all backgrounds and genders. Though many refugees and migrants are employed in the informal sector, many employers remain hesitant to employ people with no identification to avoid getting into conflict with the law. This leaves a majority of refugees and migrants to seek opportunities in small businesses such as barber shops, or engage in casual labour where documentation is not required. A government key informant mentioned that this was harder for men than women.

In addition, access to documentation can be problematic, and Congolese and Burundian informants noted that the translation of any documentation was problematic too, as Kenyan officials are disinclined to accept documentation and academic transcripts that are in French, and there are economic obstacles to having documentation officially translated.

40 International Rescue Committee (January 2017). [Violence in the City: A Systematic Review of the Drivers of Violence against Displaced Populations in Urban Crisis and Post-crisis Settings](#).

41 Makworo, M., & Mireri, C. (2011). [Public open spaces in Nairobi City, Kenya, under threat](#). Journal of Environmental Planning and Management, 54(8), 1107-1123.

42 Muchunguh, D. (22 January 2020). The Nation. [Eastleigh college closed, 50 immigrants arrested](#).

43 NRC and IHRC (2017). [Recognising Nairobi’s Refugees: The Challenges and Significance of Documentation Proving Identity and Status](#).

“The city council people bring a lot of problems to refugees in the market. When they find out you are doing business they confiscate your items and before they return you have to give them money and they will harass us since they know we are helpless.”

(Somali woman)

“Living in Kenya is hard without legal documents.”

(Somali woman)

General insecurity and corruption

Refugee and migrant respondents did not highlight major security concerns in Nairobi, and 4Mi data also shows that few protection abuses are reported in Nairobi. Though the city of Nairobi was not commonly reported in these types of risks, it is well understood that crime and violence are a feature of everyday life for many people residing and working in Nairobi.⁴⁴

4Mi surveys with respondents in Nairobi show Kenya as a dangerous country on their migration journey with respondents witnessing abuses (including robbery, sexual abuse, and death of a refugee or migrant) in other parts of the country.

Previous 4Mi findings from 2019 that show that overall for data collection in East Africa, the highest number of the bribery cases were cited in Kenya. Among all incidents of bribery that respondents experienced, bribes paid in Kenya account for 34% of the total, with Nairobi and Garissa being cited as the main hotspots.⁴⁵ Kenya ranks 137 out of 180 countries in the Corruptions Perception Index, according to Transparency International, with 45% of public service users reporting having to pay a bribe in the past 12 months (survey undertaken in 2019).⁴⁶

Smuggling and trafficking

Refugees and migrants moving along mixed migration routes through Kenya are heavily reliant on smugglers to facilitate part or all of the migration journey. Nearly 75% 4Mi respondents interviewed in Nairobi noted that they used a smuggler for at least one part of their migration journey. Using smugglers can further expose refugees and migrants to considerable risks, such as violent abuse, kidnapping and extortion once they reach Nairobi.

An NGO key informant reported that the visa free migration and lax enforcement of work permit

requirements increase the risk of human trafficking, particularly for girls and women, who are often forced into prostitution. Human trafficking is a growing concern for many countries in East Africa, and Kenya was identified in the US Trafficking in Persons Report 2019 as a source, destination and transit country for human trafficking.⁴⁷ Crackdowns targeting the perpetrators and victims of human trafficking are becoming more common in Kenya, and trafficking activities tend to be focused in Nairobi as the prevalence of trafficking in Kenya increases. Throughout 2019⁴⁸ and 2020,⁴⁹ Kenyan authorities increased efforts to crack down on human traffickers in Nairobi through investigations and prosecution of traffickers.

Lack of access to security or support structures

4Mi and KI data shows that many refugees and migrants are not able to access the appropriate channels to report protection risks. Though some services exist (particularly for refugees) such as ‘Kituo Cha Sheria’, a legal advice centre and UNHCR.

Refugee and migrant respondents were unaware of any local-level policies or services that they could access in case of a protection abuse or rights violation. Many noted that they were afraid to report any abuse cases to the police, because of their irregular status or the irregular nature of their work. This was especially pertinent in cases of violations in employment, as many respondents were working in uncontracted jobs in the informal sector.

Several respondents noted that new refugees could seek out some government services, and that it was likely that Eastleigh (where many Somali refugees reside) may offer more services for refugees. Refugees with recognized refugee status may be less afraid of their status, but many are still working in informal sectors and fear discrimination and harassment by the police. A UNHCR study found police harassment was one of the greatest protection concerns encountered on arrival by both men and women across all countries of origin.⁵⁰

From 4Mi data, respondents reported that Nairobi (19/41) was the top location where they needed assistance, but where they couldn’t get it. Respondents highlighted that access to legal assistance was their primary concern, with medical care and shelter also being important concerns.

A report from the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK) noted that as well as being scapegoats who are blamed

44 Campbell, Elizabeth, Jeff Crisp, and Esther Kiragu (2011). [Navigating Nairobi: A review of the implementation of UNHCR’s urban refugee policy in Kenya’s capital city](#). Geneva: UNHCR.

45 Mixed Migration Centre (October 2020). [Protection risks for people on the move from East Africa and Yemen](#).

46 Transparency International (accessed 15 September 2020). Transparency International Website. [Country data Kenya](#).

47 United States Department of State (June 2019). [2019 Trafficking in Persons Report](#).

48 The East African (6 August 2019). [Human trade is alive and thriving across East Africa](#).

49 The Nation (23 February 2020). [11 Kenyans rescued in human trafficking raid, 2 foreigners arrested](#).

50 Hough, Carrie (2013). [Newcomers to Nairobi: The Protection Concerns and Survival Strategies of Asylum Seekers in Kenya’s Capital City](#). UNHCR, Policy Development and Evaluation Service.

for taking jobs away from Kenyans, refugees and asylum seekers are often linked to insecurity in the country, which is exacerbated by the encampment policy which is justified on the grounds of security concerns.⁵¹ This mistrust and suspicion mean that refugees and migrants are often the victims of discrimination and harassment by security actors. Key informants noted conflicts have emerged between locals and refugees and migrants fighting for limited job opportunities. Refugees and migrants have been accused of “spoiling the market” as they are typically underpaid which makes some employers prefer them over Kenyans. However, it is important to note that this fear or persecution was not reported by refugee and migrant respondents.

A UNHCR study found police harassment and theft were the greatest protection concerns encountered on arrival in Nairobi by both male and female refugees across all countries of origin.⁵² The fact that many migrants and refugees do not have access to documentation can make them more likely to be harassed for random document checks and required to pay a bribe or some kind of extortion.⁵³

Following the attack on Westgate Mall by Somalia-based terrorist group ‘Al Shabaab’ in Nairobi in September 2013, there were crackdowns on Somalis throughout Nairobi who were rounded up by police and calls for refugee camps in the country to be closed. Under ‘Operation Usalama Watch’, a sports stadium in Nairobi became the place of detention for many Somali refugees and migrants and other undocumented migrants.⁵⁴ Similar security crackdowns occurred after the April 2015 attack at Garissa University College where Somali refugees were targeted by the police, rounded up and subjected to mistreatment.⁵⁵ More recently, in January 2019, Al-Shabaab carried out a terrorist attack at the Dusit D2 Hotel in downtown Nairobi. Following these incident there were again reports of abuses being committed during counter-terrorism raids that targeted Somalis.⁵⁶ This reinforces the interconnected nature between refugee policy and national security and the way in which security measures have targeted Somali migrants and refugees, especially those residing in urban areas.⁵⁷ Research from the Rift Valley Institute also notes that this increasing pressure on Somalis in Kenya contributes to driving migration seen in growing numbers of Somalis in Uganda and its capital city Kampala.⁵⁸

7. Direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and official responses to mitigate the spread has a significant impact on mixed migration in the region. Kenya implemented strict travel restrictions and widespread border closures, and increased surveillance activities to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. From March to August 2020, Kenya’s international borders were closed and from April to July 2020 movement in and out of Nairobi was banned, and a curfew was in place. This has made movement very challenging, and many refugees and migrants also face loss of income due to the strain on the economy and subsequent loss of access to work.⁵⁹ In addition to conventional basic needs (e.g., food, water, shelter, and medical care), COVID-19 has also prompted an overall increase in the price of goods and, at the same time, reduced availability of goods.⁶⁰

The pandemic and corresponding border closures also blocked repatriation activities including through IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration program, and the **voluntary repatriation of Somali refugees** from Kenya.⁶¹ In addition, IOM recorded 2,605 cases of stranded migrants across East African countries,⁶² the majority of which are 2,131 Ethiopians stranded in Djibouti, Somalia, and Kenya.⁶³

Of the respondents to the 4Mi COVID survey in Nairobi, interviewed from April to July, all were aware of COVID-19 and how to protect themselves. Nearly all (42/43) were wearing a mask and washing hands more regularly to help protect themselves and others.

51 Refugee Consortium Kenya (2015). [‘Myths and truths, livelihoods in Nairobi: the facts about refugee self-sufficiency and economic contribution in Nairobi.’](#)

52 Hough, Carrie (2013). [Newcomers to Nairobi: The Protection Concerns and Survival Strategies of Asylum Seekers in Kenya’s Capital City.](#) UNHCR, Policy Development and Evaluation Service.

53 For more on documentation see NRC and IHRC (2017) [Recognising Nairobi’s Refugees: The Challenges and Significance of Documentation Proving Identity and Status.](#)

54 Refugees International (2019). [Blogpost Meet Abdi Iftin.](#)

55 Human Rights Watch (2012). [Kenya Police and Military abuses against Ethnic Somalis.](#)

56 Human Rights Watch (2020). [World Report: country chapter Kenya.](#)

57 Omata, N. (2020). [Refugee Livelihoods: A Comparative Analysis of Nairobi and Kakuma Camp in Kenya.](#) Disasters.

58 Gianluca Iazzolino (2014). [A safe haven for Somalis in Uganda? Rift Valley Institute.](#)

59 Mixed Migration Centre (2020). [‘East Africa and Yemen Quarterly Mixed Migration Update, Quarter 2 2020’.](#)

60 Mixed Migration Centre (2020). [‘Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and migrants in Kenya and Somaliland’.](#)

61 IOM (2020). [‘DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX \(DTM\) COVID-19 REGIONAL OVERVIEW ON MOBILITY RESTRICTION’.](#)

62 Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania.

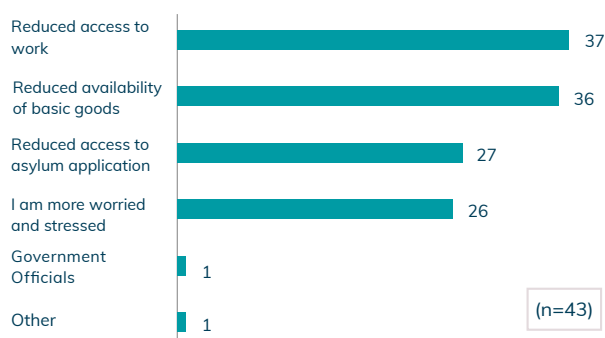
63 IOM (2020). [‘DISPLACEMENT TRACKING MATRIX \(DTM\) COVID-19 REGIONAL OVERVIEW ON MOBILITY RESTRICTION’.](#)

Impacts of COVID-19 on migration

4Mi data shows that COVID-19 movement restrictions have had a big impact on migration journeys. Most notably, 32 out of 43 4Mi respondents in Nairobi indicate that it is increasingly difficult to cross borders, and 19 out of 43 note that their migration plans are delayed because they are stuck. In key informant interviews with refugees and migrants, restricted movement was highlighted as a concern particularly among Congolese respondents. Key informants also noted that new asylum seekers and migrants were restricted access to the country by the ban on international travels as borders remained closed. Those who were in the pipeline to be resettled to third countries had their departures postponed. Despite this, almost half of 4Mi respondents (20/43) had no intentions to change their migration plans because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Loss of income

Figure 2: “What impact has the COVID crisis had on your day to day life?” (April – July 2020)

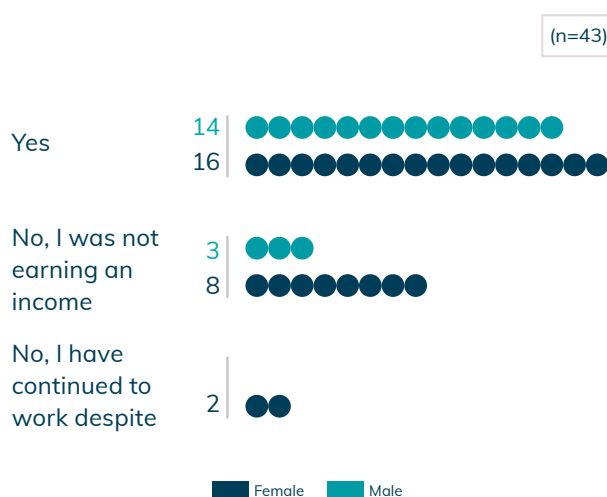


All refugee and migrant respondents note that the biggest impact of COVID-19 on day-to-day life is on the loss of jobs. In some cases, this affects other aspects of life, such as being able to afford housing. As was noted by refugee and migrant respondents, the reduced ability to pay for rent had led many to move to smaller and more cramped living quarters. Many informal businesses including barbershops, hawking, and market stalls were closed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Key informants also noted that those who do businesses by traveling around Kenya were affected by the cessation of movement, which in turn impacted their income.

Key informants from NGOs noted that there is a huge strain on the livelihoods of refugees and migrants and many have lost their income or had it drastically decline during the COVID-19 period. They noted common stories of refugees and migrants being evicted and many had to cost share on households bills and rent. One key informant noted “unemployment increased significantly... hitting them [migrants and refugees] hard as most

live hand to mouth”. By September 2020, refugee and migrant respondents reported that work had largely not resumed for themselves or their peers, and for those that had resumed work, income was drastically reduced. Nearly all respondents knew compatriots who had lost jobs, nearly all in the informal sector. 4Mi data shows that 70% of respondents had lost income due to COVID-19 restrictions (30/43). The loss of income meant they were unable to afford basic goods (28/43), they had increased worry or anxiety (17/43), they were unable to continue their journey (14/43) or lost housing (14/43).

Figure 3: “Have you lost income due to coronavirus restrictions?” (April – July)



Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, there are concerns about the impact on remittances for Kenya and other East African countries.⁶⁴ As noted in this case study, remittances play a key economic role for refugees and migrants in Nairobi, as respondents in Nairobi both receive and send remittances. Respondents noted that during COVID-19, they knew peers who had lost access to remittances as family abroad faced tough economic conditions. Further, 4Mi data shows that 20% of respondents (9/43) interviewed by 4Mi in Nairobi noted that they were unable to continue to pay remittances due to loss of income.

“Jobs are not there like before; people do not receive remittances like before since the people who used to send do not. There are increased prices of goods unlike before.”

(Somali woman, unknown age)

Increased stress

COVID-19 has mental and psychosocial effects on refugees and migrants especially as a loss of jobs has put more pressure on daily survival. 4Mi data shows that 40% of respondents in Nairobi noted that they were experiencing increased stress and anxiety.

64 Odhiambo, J (24 June 2020). [Impact of COVID-19 to the Economy of Kenya](#). University of Nairobi.

The reduction in work and income has led to several social impacts, including loss of shelter, and people unable to afford enough food. One key informant also mentioned that many refugee children are falling behind in education because they don't have the money or infrastructure to participate in online learning. The reduction in access to asylum or resettlement has also led to stress. Key informants in particular noted accelerated psychological distress among refugees as hopes of resettlement reduce.

Key informants reported that relocation of refugees from Nairobi to refugee camps by the Kenyan government and UNHCR was being considered and profiling of refugees by Kenyan authorities was increasing.

All respondents consider Nairobi a riskier place than before the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of access to livelihoods to make ends meet. There is also recognition that though Nairobi was more dangerous because of COVID-19, this was reflective of global concerns and the overall situation of the pandemic. One key informant noted that "Job losses and lack of access [to services] has been the cause of all protection concerns and mental health conditions."

Access to assistance is severely limited

According to 4Mi COVID data collected between April and June 2020 in Nairobi, zero respondents had received any extra assistance since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Refugee and migrant respondents echoed this sentiment, with many noting that they needed help and were not receiving anything. Respondents noted that there has been no support during COVID-19 for refugees and migrants, but that local Kenyans were receiving assistance. An NGO key informant reported that refugees in some locations have reported discrimination by local administrators in regard to receiving COVID-19 support. Though respondents from all backgrounds noted this obstacle, it may disproportionately impact migrants. A key informant from the government noted that many activities have been ongoing to target the refugee community, including information campaigns directed at refugees on COVID-19, sensitization programs and training, but no similar activities have been implemented for migrants, including undocumented migrants.

However, many respondents and all key informants noted that the barriers to service provision and work that many refugees and migrants face were similar challenges that many Kenyans in Nairobi also face, in particular faced by the urban poor. The impact of COVID-19 has also been significant on refugees in urban areas where they may lack access to information and basic sanitation highlighting the urgency of addressing gaps in healthcare and access to migrant and refugee populations in Nairobi.⁶⁵ Reduced economic opportunities for all could lead to increased competition for the dwindling resources and opportunities thus exposing refugees and migrants to more risk.

Refugee and migrant respondents did not report increased discrimination, and only 1 of 43 4Mi COVID respondents noted they had experienced increased racism and xenophobia. However, key informants did note that there was some increasing competition with Kenyans over the already limited livelihoods opportunities and on the access to assistance.

"All I can say is that coronavirus made life difficult because we are unable to continue our journey, even to get documents allowing us to stay here has been impossible because all offices were closed."

(Congolese woman)

65 Alio, Mustafa, Shaza Alrihawi, James Milner, Anila Noor, Najeeba Wazefadost and Pascal Zigashane (2020). 'By refugees, for refugees: Refugee leadership during COVID-19, and beyond,' Kaldor Centre, 20 April 2020.

8. Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusions

This case study has outlined the different ways in which Nairobi can be studied with a mixed migration lens. It is clear that the role of Kenya and Nairobi as a major hub for refugees and asylum seekers plays a significant role in Nairobi's migration dynamics. Also, the presence of deeply established ethnic and cultural communities in Nairobi provides a safety net for newly arrived refugees and migrants which allows them to settle quickly in the city and provides a regular supply of opportunities for work (mostly in the informal sector). Though Nairobi is largely recognized as a city of transit, many refugees and migrants stay for more than 5 years and establish lives within the city. Thus, Nairobi should also be recognized as a medium- or long-term destination – though these stays might be unintentional.

Many refugees and migrants seem drawn to Nairobi by its pivotal role in the refugee resettlement space and their perception of favourable Kenyan policies around urban refugees. In addition, the promise of work and better access to services is an important element of Nairobi's appeal. Though a relatively accepting environment exists for refugees and migrants, many do not have legal status in the country or the right documentation. This irregular status is a source of constant stress for many refugees and migrants, and impacts all aspects of daily life. Though this does not seem to impact the ability of refugees and migrants to access employment, the largely informal nature of such employment comes with inherent risks, including exploitation and harassment by employers and local authorities.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and official responses have a significant impact on mixed migration in the region. Kenya implemented strict travel restrictions and widespread border closures, and increased surveillance activities to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. This has made movement very challenging, and many refugees and migrants also face loss of income due to the strain on the economy and response guidelines. In addition to conventional basic needs (e.g., cash, food, water, shelter, and medical care), COVID-19 has also prompted an overall loss of jobs and, at the same time, increased price of goods. There is also reduced access to asylum procedures, which is felt hard by those who would or perceive that they would benefit from this.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, this study puts forward the following recommendations for programming and policy:

1. Implement the objectives and actions of the Global Compact for Migration (GCM), adopted by Kenya. The GCM also offers a blue print for targeted responses to COVID-19 for people on the move. For example, access to health care should be available for all - irrespective of migration status ; maintaining “firewalls” between immigration enforcement and access to services; releasing migrants from immigration detention; extending work and residency permits; regularising status; eliminating discrimination and promoting evidence-based public discourse on migration.⁶⁶
2. Foster collaboration between partners working across the migration sector (including government, NGOs, and academia) to expand the narrative of mixed migration dynamics in Nairobi beyond the singular refugee and asylum lens.
3. Learn from the community structures which support the socio-economic integration of refugee and migrant populations in Nairobi, and build on the best practices of formal and informal support mechanisms which are able to reach the most vulnerable groups.
4. Improve coordination between authorities, NGOs and civil society to improve support and assistance to refugees and migrants in Nairobi, with particular focus on access to decent work and protection.
5. Support local authorities and security sector actors who have direct engagement with refugees and migrants to ensure adherence to rights-based security sector governance for those in mixed migration flows.
6. Work with local authorities, NGOs and civil society to ensure that assistance, which helps support people impacted by the socioeconomic shocks of COVID-19, is available for a wider group of refugees and migrants.

66 For more detailed findings and recommendations on the relevance and use of the GCM in the COVID-19 response see Mixed Migration Centre (2020), [COVID-19 and the Global Compact for Migration. Is a Compact born in a crisis born again in the whirlwinds of three global crises](#); and United Nations Network on Migration (2020), [The Global Compact for Migration \(GCM\): Well Governed Migration as an Essential Element of Effective COVID-19 Response](#).

Annex - Interviews conducted

MMC conducted 26 key informant interviews for this case study. The informants provided inputs based on their first-hand experience of the mixed migration dynamics within Nairobi. Two main categories of informants were interviewed for this case study: 21 refugees and migrants living in Nairobi for less than 24 months; and 5 'key stakeholders' who have significant roles in their government or organization regarding international migration and/or action regarding refugees and migrants in Nairobi.

Table 3: Key Informant Interviews

#	Organization
1	Danish Refugee Council Kenya
2	International Rescue Committee
3	Refugee Point
4	Kenyan Refugee Affairs Secretariat
5	Refugee Consortium of Kenya

The refugees and migrants interviewed for this case study were contacted by 4Mi data collectors or staff during September 2020, and key stakeholders participated directly in interviews or by email with the author during September and October 2020.

Table 4: Refugee and Migrant Interviews

#	Country of origin	Sex
1	Burundi	Male
2	Burundi	Male
3	Burundi	Female
4	Burundi	Unknown
5	Congo	Female
6	Congo	Male
7	Congo	Male
8	Congo	Male
9	Congo	Female
10	Congo	Female
11	Congo	Male
12	Congo	Male
13	Congo	Female
14	Congo	Unknown
15	Eritrea	Female
16	Rwanda	Male
17	Rwanda	Female
18	Somalia	Male
19	Somalia	Female
20	Somalia	Female
21	South Sudan	Male



The MMC is a global network consisting of seven regional hubs and a central unit in Geneva engaged in data collection, research, analysis and policy development on mixed migration. The MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise on mixed migration. The MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. The MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

The MMC is part of and governed by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). Global and regional MMC teams are based in Amman, Copenhagen, Dakar, Geneva, Nairobi, Tunis, Bogota and Bangkok.

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