

Background

As part of an ongoing assessment of regional displacement of South Sudanese and in response to an increase in reported refugee returns from Kenya, REACH conducted an assessment in Kalobayei refugee settlement in Turkana County, Kenya. This was intended as an initial step to understanding factors influencing returns to South Sudan and to linking the humanitarian response across East Africa through the development of cross-border information streams.

The assessment was conducted from 27 November to 4 December and consisted of 4 key informant (KI) interviews with camp management and protection staff, 8 gender- and home region- disaggregated focus group discussions (FGDs) with a total of 80 refugees, and general observation of the area by foot and vehicle. Findings should be considered as indicative only.

Population movement

Refugees have been living in Turkana County for decades; Kakuma refugee camp opened in 1992. Since June 2016, most new arrivals have been placed in Kalobayei refugee settlement. Currently, Kalobayei hosts 38,000 refugees, 71% of whom are from South Sudan¹. Respondents primarily came from Torit, Magwi and Kapoeta in Eastern Equatoria State; a smaller proportion came from Central Equatoria, Western Equatoria, Jonglei or Unity States. Most travelled through Kapoeta directly into Kenya, though some reported diverting through northern Uganda during times of fighting along the roads in South Sudan.

Displacement to Kenya

Respondents generally came to Kenya because it was the most accessible location outside of South Sudan, regardless of the distance it took to travel there or the services available there. Some respondents lived closer to Uganda than to Kenya, but felt unsafe seeking refuge there due to the reported presence of armed actors along the border. Others chose Kenya because they had been there previously or already had family there. Some had previously been in refugee camps in Uganda and were looking for better

alternatives, especially in terms of educational opportunities for their children.

Respondents recounted having experienced indiscriminate violence and witnessing killing in South Sudan, in addition to widespread property destruction and theft. Many arrived in Kenya alone, with the rest of their family either dead or unaccounted for. Despite this, some refugees are returning to South Sudan already.

Returns

Most respondents in Kalobayei reported knowing people who had returned to South Sudan, with men more likely to say this than women. **The primary demographic said to have returned is youth².** Additionally, **women were more likely to return than men**, as men reportedly feared being accused of being aligned with armed groups and killed as they travel home.

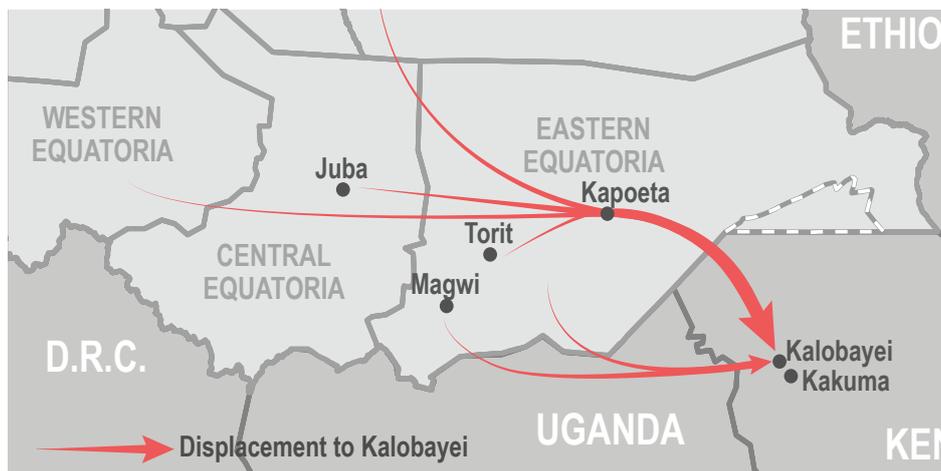
The majority of respondents stated they would not return to South Sudan until there is peace. In particular, many said they would wait until there is an internationally recognized peace agreement, a change in leadership, a disarmament campaign, and/or a formal repatriation programme. However, a substantial portion reported considering returning to South Sudan soon, regardless of the status of the conflict. Finally, a small portion reported planning to never return, preferring to stay in Kenya or another host country.

Push factors

Many respondents described a feeling of despondency and desperation towards life in Kalobayei that is pushing some people to return to South Sudan. Factors driving this were restricted opportunities for self-reliance, poor relations with the host community, and limited options for resettlement.

The primary factor pushing respondents and people they know to consider returning to South Sudan was insecurity in and around Kalobayei. Because firewood distribution has been delayed for months, refugees are forced to gather wood outside of the settlement. Respondents reported that when they do so **women are raped and men are beaten** by the host community. Furthermore, respondents

Map 1: Displacement of South Sudanese to Kalobayei Refugee Settlement, June 2016 - November 2017



Regional Displacement of South Sudanese

stated that their **shelters are often robbed** of food and non-food items in the night. This is particularly concerning because restrictions on using the soil³ reportedly prevent refugees from building substantial walls for their shelters; the tarp walls are easily cut open.

In addition, respondents shared **severe concern about access to basic services**. Access to firewood, food, safe drinking water, healthcare, education, and police protection were consistently described as inadequate and unpredictable.

Exacerbating the above-mentioned issues, **opportunities for feedback and rectification through camp management are extremely limited**. The Refugee Affairs Secretariat managing both Kakuma and Kalobayei does not have an office in Kalobayei; the building that has been constructed for this purpose remains unoccupied. Therefore, communication with management requires a 30 km one-way trip into Kakuma town; most respondents reported not being aware that this was available, and others shared that they could not afford transportation and were afraid of harassment if going by foot.

Pull Factors

Reportedly, **youth have been returning to South Sudan to seek work**, as refugee life largely precludes opportunities for income generation. This is especially true in Kalobayei, where job training and loan programmes do not exist.

Respondents described hearing from relatives and other contacts who have remained in their areas of origin that conflict has subsided, which respondents stated has drawn some refugees to attempt return. Unfortunately, this reflects **a lack of reliable information on security in South Sudan**; often this news does not represent reality, leaving returnees stranded in areas of insecurity.

Changes in Global Refugee Response

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)⁴, approved by the United Nations General Assembly as part of the 2016 New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, is intended to guide a more predictable and sustainable refugee response across the world. One stated goal is **to better integrate refugee populations into existing host community services and infrastructure**.

Kenya, through the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees⁵ of March 2017, declared its intention to apply the CRRF to its own refugee response. Included in this cooperative agreement among East African nations are steps to promote refugee self-reliance by integrating them into existing development.

At least part of the difficult living conditions in Kalobayei are likely attributed to this transitioning approach to refugee response. As a *refugee settlement*, as opposed to a *refugee camp*, Kalobayei receives less robust support and programming than traditional camp settings, because it is expected that refugees will be integrated into the types of established host community services that would exist in a city.

However, necessary services are nearly non-existent. **Kalobayei is**

not a pre-existing city, but is being provided only limited refugee services as if it were. Refugees, along with the semi-nomadic host community, must develop a functioning new settlement for tens of thousands of people. This is extremely challenging in a semi-arid context that has never known permanent, large-scale infrastructure and services provision except for refugee camps⁶. These issues are exacerbated by restrictions, formal or informal, on refugees' ability to cultivate, run businesses and keep livestock. A settlement such as this can only survive with substantial outside support; otherwise, inhabitants will suffer.

Future Trends

Kalobayei

Insecurity and lack of basic services in Kalobayei will likely continue to fuel sporadic returns to South Sudan. However, if conditions continue to deteriorate in South Sudan, limiting potential returns, **refugees in Kalobayei may attempt to move to other areas across the region**, rather than remain in Kalobayei. This could instigate additional conflict with the host community in Turkana, other refugees in Kakuma, or neighbouring regions in Uganda or Ethiopia.

Kenya

In his inauguration speech on 28 November 2017, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta stated that **members of the East African Community, which includes South Sudanese, are welcome to work, own property, cultivate, marry and settle in Kenya**. The implementation of this deserves continued attention, as it may serve as a pull factor for large numbers of refugees across the region; it could lead to refugee settlement patterns that are increasingly urban, permanent and intermingled with Kenyan host communities.

Global

The CRRF outlines the international community's commitment to creating a global compact on refugees in 2018. This will enable humanitarian actors to refine lessons learned and to enable larger-scale implementation of a refugee response more rooted in existing host community settlements. Refugees in Kenya and around the world will likely continue to face challenges with accessing basic services as humanitarian assistance aligns with this new vision. **The global compact needs to account for these issues before expanding further.**

Endnotes

- 1 UNHCR. Kalobeyei Settlement Population Statistics. 30 Nov 2017. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/61089>
- 2 Post-pubescent, unmarried individuals ranging roughly between 14 and 30 years old.
- 3 The restrictions were described as applying to building walls, cultivating crops and burying the dead. It is unclear whether these are established policies, or simply points of contention with the host community.
- 4 http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1
- 5 <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/58248>
- 6 The population density in Kakuma camp is roughly 1,000 times greater than that of the Turkana host community: Sanghi, A; Onder, H; Vemuru, V. 2016. *Yes in my backyard? The economics of refugees and their social dynamics in Kakuma, Kenya*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group.