



THE MOVED AND THE SHAKEN

How Forced Relocation Affects the Lives of
Urban Refugee Women and Girls



ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

All of the photos in this report are by ZamZam Mohammed, a Somali refugee woman who resides in Eastleigh, a neighborhood of Nairobi where the majority of Somali refugees live. ZamZam was a beneficiary of Heshima Kenya's programs from 2008 to 2010. In 2010 she participated in a project by Heshima Kenya to capture the life of the urban refugee. These photographs are from that project and reflect her life and the refugee experience. Her work was presented by the United Nations as part of a light box series. She continues to work and live in Eastleigh.

Published by Heshima Kenya PO Box 408077 Chicago, IL 60640 USA (01) 773 654 1180 heshimakenya.org

First published 2013 © Heshima Kenya 2013

Heshima Kenya is a US tax-exempt 501(c)(3) charitable organization and legally recognized non-governmental organization based in Nairobi, Kenya that works to identify, protect, and empower unaccompanied and separated refugee children and youth, especially adolescent refugee girls and young women from Somalia, DR Congo, Ethiopia, and Sudan. Heshima Kenya's specialized education, shelter, and advocacy programs work to create a social network that empowers this vulnerable population to strive for economic self-sufficiency and become community leaders in their own right.

This publication is copyright, but may be reproduced by any method without fee or prior permission for teaching purposes, but not for resale. For copying in any other circumstances, prior written permission must be obtained from the publisher and a fee may be payable.

Cover photo: Unknown woman and child in the Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi during the rainy season.

Typeset by Lorett Marketing Communications

THE MOVED AND THE SHAKEN

How Forced Relocation Affects the Lives of Urban Refugee Women and Girls

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was commissioned and funded by Heshima Kenya. It draws on numerous personal, semi-structured interviews and a literature review of the legal and policy ramifications of refugee displacement within Kenya.

Research design and authorship was by Rosalind Raddatz; Anne Sweeney, Heshima Kenya's Executive Director, and Jessica Brown, Heshima Kenya's Grants and Advocacy Coordinator, provided oversight and review.

Heshima Kenya is grateful to Alice Eshuchi for her organizational skills, research oversight, and frontline perspective in the preparation of this report. The author and Heshima Kenya thank Osop Abdi, Meselech Tezera, Manal Ali Said, and Mohammed Thail for their excellent research and interview assistance, as well as Jane Abudho for her legal insight and statistical research.

The research team would like to thank the many refugees and asylum-seekers who kindly allowed themselves to be interviewed for this project.

Heshima Kenya is grateful for the contribution provided by American Jewish World Service and to Loretta Marketing Communications for design. Rosalind Raddatz acknowledges the Trudeau Foundation for its intellectual and financial support and credits Ken Dryden for the title.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rosalind Raddatz researches peace negotiations, conflict resolution, and post-conflict gender issues in sub-Saharan Africa. She is a Trudeau Foundation Scholar and doctoral candidate at the School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa, Canada. Rosalind lives and works in Nairobi, Kenya.



THE MOVED AND THE SHAKEN

How Forced Relocation Affects the Lives of Urban Refugee Women and Girls

The security and futures of urban refugees in Kenya are under threat. Responding to numerous violent attacks along the Kenyan-Somali border and in Nairobi, in December 2012, the Kenyan Government announced a directive requiring all refugees and asylum seekers living in urban areas—especially those in Nairobi—to relocate to refugee camps. The directive also mandated closing all registration centers and halted services in cities. Though the directive was later overturned by the High Court, the unprecedented nature of this policy speaks to what the government is capable of pursuing. This is especially relevant as Kenya's security and political relations with Somalia remain tenuous and current rhetoric from the administration continues to advocate the expedited repatriation of Somali refugees.

Perilously absent throughout this time was the government's consideration of vulnerable refugees, particularly unaccompanied and separated girls and young women. This population is particularly susceptible to exploitation, assault, forced marriage, and abuse, resulting in severe barriers to accessing education, medical care, and employment. If forced to relocate to the camps, or repatriate without protection, these vulnerabilities would be grossly heightened.

The following report highlights the lived experiences of more than 50 female refugees and asylum seekers in Nairobi, emphasizing their concerns and the exploitation they will face if forced to relocate. Their voices confirm that female asylum seekers and refugees need to be protected and empowered, instead of persecuted and coerced into further displacement. The Kenyan government, along with groups charged with protection of refugees, must move to consider how to adequately deal with Kenya's security concerns without neglecting its vulnerable populations.

BACKGROUND

With more than 600,000 registered refugees and asylum-seekers, Kenya has one of the largest refugee populations of any country in the world.¹ The majority of these hail from Somalia, while others come from Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and neighboring countries. The number of Somali refugees in particular has soared in the last two decades. In 1992, Kenya hosted nearly 285,000 registered Somali refugees.² By 2006, this number had tripled.³ Five years later—in 2011 alone—approximately

1 Although refugees and asylum seekers are required to register with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it is believed that there are thousands of non-documented refugees living in Kenya, making the total number of stateless people residing in Kenya much higher.

2 A. Kindley (2011) 'Between a Protracted and a Crisis Situation: Policy Responses to Somali Refugees in Kenya,' *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, p. 3

3 Ibid.

METHODOLOGY

This report is the result of more than 50 semi-structured interviews with refugee women and girls conducted by one lead researcher and four research assistants working on behalf of Heshima Kenya. Interviews were undertaken in Nairobi, Kenya between 20th January and 20th March 2013,

and were conducted in Somali, Swahili, and English. Interview subjects included refugee and asylum seeking women living in Nairobi and unaccompanied girls living at Heshima Kenya's Safe House and in the community, all originally from Somali, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and the

Democratic Republic of Congo. The lead researcher undertook a literature review, carried out key informant interviews, and analyzed existing data. International and Kenyan legal documents, along with legislative acts referring to refugees were considered. Media reports were also consulted.

150,000 Somalis came to Kenya seeking respite from the worst famine to affect the Horn of Africa region in 60 years.⁴

Most refugees in Kenya reside in camps, the largest of which is Dadaab—a complex of four camps located in the northeastern part of the country near the Somali border, with a population of well over one half million.⁵ The ongoing instability of the countries refugees originate from (particularly Somalia and DRC) means that there is little or no infrastructure to welcome and absorb returnees. Consequently, most refugees in Kenya become protracted, with limited opportunity and resources to pursue citizenship.

Refugees are by definition vulnerable, but women and girls are especially so. In addition to the constant worry of finding sufficient food for their children, nearly all female refugees endure daily threats of harassment, exploitation, and violence in Kenya. In particular, unaccompanied girls are especially vulnerable due to limited coping mechanisms and lack of family support. Women and children comprise the largest population in Kenya's camps and are also notably susceptible to sexual violence and human trafficking, as well as maternal and reproductive health difficulties.

Although most refugees in Kenya live in the established Dadaab and Kakuma camps, there is a significant number that reside in urban areas; at the time of writing it is believed that more than 100,000 refugees live in Nairobi. This population is increasingly targeted in the Kenyan media and by authorities as perpetrating political instability, small arms proliferation, and terrorist acts. On 18 December 2012, the Kenyan government announced a directive mandating all urban-based refugees and asylum-seekers be relocated to the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, and terminated registration and other services to refugee claimants in Nairobi and other urban centers throughout the country.⁶ In January 2013, Kenya's High Court temporarily halted the implementation of the directive, pending the hearing of a case filed by refugee protection organizations in Nairobi. In July 2013, the directive was overturned by the High Court.

According to UNHCR, there are currently 56,000 asylum seekers and refugees registered in Nairobi and other cities in Kenya. Somalis represent the majority (33,844), with Ethiopians (10,568) and Congolese

4 Refugee Consortium of Kenya (2012) 'Asylum Under Threat: Assessing the protection of Somali refugees in Dadaab refugee camps and along the migration corridor,' Refugee Consortium of Kenya with the support of the Danish Refugee Council, p. 13. Somalis comprise 83.5% of all Kenyan refugees and asylum seekers.

5 The world's largest refugee camp, Dadaab, is home to nearly a million registered refugees (UNHCR camp population statistics, 27 May 2012). Three-quarters of the camp's population are women, children under 12, and the elderly (UNHCR camp population statistics, 6 May 2012).

6 UNHCR (2013) 'UNHCR position on the directive by the Kenyan Government on the relocation of refugees from the urban centers to the refugee camps.' Briefing notes, 25 January 2013. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/510275a09.html>

“They are trying to send refugees back to their countries or to the camps. It’s bad because if we go to the camps, we’ll have trouble same as our countries.”

ETHIOPIAN REFUGEE WOMAN, 17 YEARS OLD

refugees and asylum seekers (7,046) following suit. The remaining minority are arrivals from Eritrea, South Sudan and the Great Lakes region.⁷

There has been a sharp increase in the number of refugees reporting harassment, abuse, and extortion by Kenyan police and security officials since the December announcement. At the same time, everyday security and survival concerns at Dadaab and Kakuma are grave. The camps are overcrowded and living conditions are deplorable; residents have limited access to clean water, insufficient food, and little sanitation. Moreover, funding for the camps has decreased. UNHCR requires \$143.9 million alone to effectively operate the Dadaab refugee camp—yet its current operating budget is a mere \$36.5 million.⁸

Insecurity in the camps has increased tremendously in the last year as evidenced by targeted killings, looting, police abuse, aid staff kidnappings, and bombings.⁹ The security situation in Dadaab is especially dangerous with ongoing clashes between Kenyan troops and Somali belligerents in nearby border areas, as well as assassinations and bomb attacks within the camps.¹⁰ The climate of perpetual insecurity has made it harder for humanitarian organizations to carry out their work. Fewer staff are working in Kenya’s refugee camps today than in 2011, which means that the quality and quantity of their assistance is diminished.¹¹

Refugee women and girls living in Nairobi are anxious about the precariousness of their existence and fear for their safety and future if they are forced to relocate. The findings presented below outline their chief preoccupations.

FINDINGS

In the aftermath of the December 2012 directive, we carried out a number of personal interviews to develop a better understanding of the immediate concerns of refugee women and girls living in Nairobi. For two months, we spoke to a cross-section of refugee women from DRC and Somalia, as well as to 10 girls under the age of 18 who live in the community or at Heshima Kenya’s Safe House, a transitional

7 Ibid.

8 Refugees International (2013) ‘Kenya: Government directive leads to severe abuses and forced returns,’ Field Report, 27 February 2013. Available at: <http://refugeesinternational.org/policy/field-report/kenya-government-directive-leads-severe-abuses-and-forced-returns>

9 Ibid.

10 MSF (2012) ‘Dadaab: Shadows of Lives,’ Special Report, 20 June 2012. Available at: <http://www.msf-me.org/en/resource/resources-and-publications/special-reports-1/dadaab-shadows-of-lives.html>

11 Ibid.



More than three quarters of the Somali women we spoke to believe they will be raped at the camps.

shelter located in Nairobi. We explored their understanding of the directive and their expectations for life in the camps. We wanted to understand how forced relocation would impact their lives. We asked them about the things they value now and what they do not want to lose if they must go to the camps. We talked to them about their relationship with their community and what registration means to them. We also inquired about their security concerns in the camps and their experience with Kenyan authorities in the city. Our aim was to uncover and assess the similarities and differences in the understanding and fears of the directive as expressed by refugee women and girls from different countries.

Adult women in both the Somali and Congolese communities share a very clear understanding of forced relocation and the Kenyan government directive. They unanimously believe that the goal of the Kenyan government is to move all refugees and asylum seekers to the camps. “The government of Kenya wants us to go to the camp and this makes me lose sleep and hope. I am just filled with fear,” says 49-year-old P, from DRC. Somali UMF, 33-years-old, agrees, “Somali refugees will have to move to the camps. I think that the decision will come with a lot of problems.” Women from both communities did not indicate whether the directive also meant refugees and asylum-seekers could no longer register or receive services in Nairobi or other urban centers. According to the women we spoke to, the directive is understood as moving refugees from the city to the camps in distant regions.

Like Congolese and Somali women, underage refugee girls have a comparable understanding of the government directive and forced relocation. They believe it means ‘going to the camps.’ Similarly, their interpretations also reflect deep uncertainty. “I heard that they’re going to take us to the camps because they say that they don’t want any refugees in Kenya. Everything is changing, they say, because of the refugees,” says AT, a 17-year-old from DRC. Ethiopian AK, also 17, says, “They are trying to send refugees back to their countries or to the camps. It’s bad because if we go to the camps, we’ll have trouble same as our countries.”

The girls shared the opinion that the refugee camps are somehow ‘dangerous’ and ‘unsafe.’ AM, a 15-year-old from DRC explains, “They say that they want us to go to the camps, but the camps are very dangerous. I don’t know why, but on TV, they say that the government doesn’t want refugees in Kenya. They want us out.”

Indeed, all the refugee girls we spoke to are worried about ‘bad things’ happening to them if they go to the camps. HH, a 17-year-old Somali, tell us, “I will not survive there. I will get raped.” HA, another 17-year-old from Somalia, has a slightly different take, “It’s very unsafe because of wildlife, lack of water, and evil people are many there.” Repeatedly, girls spoke of their fear of being sexually assaulted if they went to the camps. “There, they rape people and treat people badly,” says AK, a 17-year-old, from Ethiopia. “The boys, they will do bad things to us. You can’t get what you need.”

Fear of sexual assault at the camps is widespread among refugee women as well, particularly those from Somalia. SAH, 38-years-old, reports, “I will be raped.” More than three quarters of the Somali women we spoke to believe they will be raped at the camps.

Conversely, Congolese refugee women emphasize a different fear. Almost all (95 percent) believe that if they go to the camps, they will be killed or will otherwise die. Unlike the Somali women who admitted that their fears of sexual assault are based on things they have heard about the camps, many of the Congolese women we spoke to have actually lived in refugee camps. A number had been interned in Gatumba camp near the Burundi-Congolese border in 2004 when armed combatants massacred and injured hundreds of refugees. NJ, a 27-year-old from DRC tells us, “The government of Kenya directive reminds me of Gatumba. It really worries me to go to the camps with my children and I think we shall be killed.” Likewise, 32-year-old MM, also from DRC notes, “It is similar to being in Gatumba; the massacre happened in just one night. I thought after the directive, they want to kill us again.”

Women who have lived in the camps and who have experienced violence there are adamant about not returning. “I can’t live in the camps,” Congolese 24-year-old A insists. “I fear I will be killed, just like what happened in Kawamba camp where I used to live.¹² It was burnt down and I lost many family members.” A number of women believe that perpetrators of the violence are currently in the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps. C, a 30-year-old from DRC says, “I fear my family and I will be killed because the people we fled from are also asylum seekers and most of them are in the camps.” The camps are a harbinger of death, says 32-year-old MM. “I see death. We were in Gatumba and attacked in a second, and the perpetrators may be in the camp.”

While most Congolese women expressed their fears of being killed in the camps, others reveal that they would rather die than contemplate moving to the refugee camps. “If I have to go,” 27-year-old NJ, from DRC tells us in no uncertain terms, “they will have to carry me as a dead body.” NF, a Congolese woman of 30 says, “I have lived in the camps before and I saw death with my own eyes. I don’t want my children to go through what I went through.” NE, a 35-year-old is resolute, “I will not go back to the camp. I faced mistreatment and torture there before. I would rather go back home to Congo and die.”

All the women we spoke to, regardless of their origin, shared a grim view of the current security situation in the camps, and stated that if they were forced to relocate, they would fear for their personal safety. Statistical evidence indicates that refugee women’s fears are legitimate. Last year, from February to May 2012, there was a 36 percent increase of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) in the Dadaab camps compared with the previous three months.¹³ Since then, we have reason to believe that this number has only increased. Meanwhile, funding for SGBV programming in the camps has decreased by 50 percent.¹⁴

“It’s not safe because women and girls are raped there,” says HAW, a 40-year-old Somali. Indeed, all of the Somali women we interviewed believe that security in the camps has always been inadequate, and will

¹² Kawamba is the site of Kala refugee camp near the Zambian-Congolese border.

¹³ Oxfam (2012) “The Human Costs of the Funding Shortfalls for the Dadaab Refugee Camps.” Briefing Note. Available at: <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/the-human-costs-of-the-funding-shortfalls-for-the-dadaab-refugee-camps.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

“I have lived in the camps before and I saw death with my own eyes. I don’t want my children to go through what I went through.”

CONGOLESE REFUGEE WOMAN, 30 YEARS OLD

remain so. “It will be very bad,” says MMI, 29-years-old. “There are stories of rape and abuse in the camps, while we are moderately safe in the city.” In fact, most women indicated that they felt some semblance of personal safety in Nairobi, and that this would not be the case in the camps.

“There will not be peace in the camps for me and my children,” says 63-year-old Congolese N, “nor is there any security.” All of the Congolese refugee women we spoke to were vehement in their resistance to go to the camps, and they insisted that there would be little or no security to provide them with decent protection. Says, 49-year-old P, from DRC, “There is no security at the camp for us *banyamulenge* because the other Congolese want to kill us.”

FINANCIAL & PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE + COMMUNITY

Most of the Somali women we spoke to had little personal experience of life in the camps. Nonetheless, they expressed concerns about what they thought might happen to them if they were forced to relocate. In addition to a widespread fear of sexual assault, many of their worries pertained to the loss of personal and financial autonomy. “I believe that my life will become hard since I have to start all over again,” says FMA, 39-years-old. “I am the source of living for my family.” HAW, 40-years-old, notes, “I think I will stop being independent and will no longer have my freedom.” FIN, 45-years-old, frets, “It means that I will have to be dependent on organizations and people since I will not have any source of income.”

Refugees and asylum seeking women living in Nairobi and other urban centers typically live in precarious financial situations and often have no guarantee of a meal from one day to the next. Yet they value what little monetary independence they have, and claim they do not want to lose this if they are required to move. “I don’t want to leave the freedom and security I have obtained here in Nairobi,” says 49-year-old P, from DRC. “I feel like my mind will shut down. I will not be able to think and come up with ideas for my business and I will lose means of sustenance.” 37-year-old Somali ZS says, “I will definitely miss the environmental conditions in Nairobi, my business, and also my children’s education.” Interestingly, half of the Somali women noted that they would not want to forgo the favorable climate conditions of Nairobi for the harsh and arid climates of the camps and outlying rural areas.

As they spoke of the work they engage in to earn a living, we noted some differences between Somali and Congolese refugees. More often than not, Somali women are self-employed entrepreneurs, often selling goods from modest market stalls. Somali AMS, 28-years-old, tells us, “I am a hawker, selling clothes.” Thirty-nine-year-old FMA, also from Somalia, says, “I mostly spend my time selling clothes and sweets.



Somali women and girls express a particular fear of sexual violence, while Congolese women believe they will be killed or otherwise die.

I enjoy making sweets that I sell to children.” Some Congolese women engage in small-scale sales as well, but more are hired as housekeepers and child-minders. NJ, 30-years-old from DRC, explains, “I make liquid soap, which I sell daily. I also do household chores for my neighbors to earn some money.” Congolese E is 40 years old and says, “I am a maid but I leave in the afternoon to cook for my children and take them to school.”

With few exceptions, almost all refugee women are mothers, and their greatest preoccupation is providing for the wellbeing of their children. Thirty-five-year-old NE, from DRC says, “I spend most of my time doing house chores for other families and wonder about how to get money to feed my family.” Somali MA is 39-years-old and notes, “My business is what is most important since it brings food for my children.”

Amidst their working activities and concern for their children, both Somali and Congolese refugees and asylum seeking women highlight the importance of the communities that they belong to in Nairobi. We have a good and peaceful community here,” says 49-year-old P from DRC. “We always look out for each other and assist anyone who is in need.” Indeed, community is one of the things refugee women would not want to lose most, and they worry this will happen if they must relocate. “I will lose my good community,” worries Somali UMF, 33 years old. “I don’t want to lose this.”

LOSS OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Refugee girls and women are rightfully concerned about their education and safety prospects if they are forced to relocate. According to UNICEF, in 2011 only one-third of school-aged children in Dadaab were receiving an education.¹⁵ More than two-thirds of the population in Kambioos camp (in Dadaab) are children. Although gender-based violence is widespread, Oxfam estimates that 80 percent of this camp’s children do not receive child protection services.¹⁶ Aside from the camps and organizations like Heshima Kenya, there are virtually no other educational opportunities for refugees.

Unaccompanied minors do not have the same kind of community experience and support as adult refugees. The girls we spoke to indicate that their sense of community is predominantly grounded in the bonds they have with the staff at Heshima Kenya, along with the other girls that they shared their time with. AT, a 17-year-old from Somalia says her most valuable relationship is with “Heshima and all the

15 Manuel Moreno and Kyle O’Donoghue (2011) ‘For Somali refugee children in Kenya, the new school year offers a fresh start,’ UNICEF Newline. Available at: http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/kenya_59760.html

16 Oxfam (2012) “The Human Costs of the Funding Shortfalls for the Dadaab Refugee Camps.” Briefing Note. Available at: <http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/the-human-costs-of-the-funding-shortfalls-for-the-dadaab-refugee-camps.pdf>

people there who love me. They love and care about me here.” Nearly all the girls that spoke to us echoed this view. For many girls, Heshima Kenya is the only family they have in Nairobi.

Vital to all the girls we spoke to is the education that they receive at Heshima Kenya. “I never knew anything about scarves and tailoring in my life,” says AT, “but here I’ve learned all these. I like English and Math the most.” The opportunity to attend school and learn a vocational skill is a refugee girls’ most important daily activity. AK, a 17-year-old from Ethiopia states that the best part of her life is “My education; I’m learning here at Heshima.” DN, a 17-year-old from DRC, best explains the significance of education to refugee girls at Heshima. “Education is the key of life and without it I can’t achieve my dreams. Heshima is important because they support my education. I couldn’t go to school without them.”

FEELINGS OF COMMUNITY

There are some glimmers of cheer for refugee and asylum-seeking women in Nairobi. All the women we spoke to claim that their communities are a source of great personal support. Somali women tend to identify fellow Somalis as members of their community, and some declare that their relationship is strong enough to weather the upheaval of relocation. “I have a good community,” says HAW, a 40-year-old Somali. “I don’t think it will change at the camp because we have a strong bond.” However, other women worry about how their community will change if they are forced to move. Somali SAH, 38-years-old, explains, “Yes I have a good community, but we will change at the camps because everyone will fight for their rights and no one will help you there.”

Both Somali and Congolese refugee women maintain strong community ties with their fellow countrywomen. However, unlike many Somalis, Congolese refugee women are somewhat integrated into the Kenyan community as well. “Kenyans are good people,” says 65-year-old R from DRC. “I even take care of their children. I feel safe and even their children come to my house.” Refugee women from DRC are more likely to have favorable impressions and actual meaningful relationships with Kenyans than Somali refugee women. “Here I have neighbors who can help me if I have a problem, both Congolese and Kenyans whom I have lived with for three years and I have not had any difference with them,” says N.

Relationships with Kenyans allow refugee women to feel safer and more grounded in Nairobi. Some women fear that this will change if they are forced to relocate. “I live with the Kenyan community and have not had problems,” says Congolese MM, 32-years-old. “I won’t have such a community in the camps.”

In fact, one of the most significant differences between urban female refugees from Somalia and those from DRC is their integration into Kenyan life (or lack thereof) and experiences with xenophobia. Many Congolese refugee women adopt western dress and can visually ‘pass’ as Kenyans. As a result, they typically experience less hostility from Kenyan citizens and authorities. Somali women and girls generally wear Islamic dress, which, coupled with a different complexion, makes them a recognizable visible minority. “On the streets, they always call us Al-Shabab,” says HA, a 17-year-old from Somalia. According to the Somali girls we spoke to, discrimination is common and is acutely felt by minor unaccompanied refugees in Nairobi. Somali HH, also 17-years-old, says, “They always make a point of putting us down because this is not our country but theirs.”

PERSONAL SAFETY IN NAIROBI

It is important to acknowledge that while refugee women and girls have a good reason to fear for their safety in the camps, their personal security is not assured in urban areas. Again, minor girls are at particular risk of SGBV. “They are not nice. They try to kiss you, the men,” says AK, 17-years-old, from Ethiopia. “They say come, come, and they grab your arm and they pull you. In Eastleigh [a Nairobi neighborhood where a many refugees live], a man tried to take kiss me, but my sister came and fought with him. He threatened to beat and kill us. He removed his belt and threatened to beat my sister.” Although Congolese refugee women are more integrated into Kenyan communities, unaccompanied minor girls from DRC are not immune to gender-based violence in the city. “I was even raped,” Congolese DN, 17-year-old, tells us. “At that time, I knew they [Kenyans] weren’t good.”

In addition to the discrimination and sexual violence they have experienced at the hands of Kenyans and refugees alike, many female refugees told Heshima researchers that they experienced harassment by the Kenya police. Most refugees and asylum seekers in Nairobi are registered with the UNHCR, whose mandate it is to protect and assist them. Even so, along with the threat of relocation to the camps, many refugee women and girls live in daily fear of the Kenyan authorities. “I am afraid of the police and what will happen to me if I come across them or if they arrest me,” says ZS, a 37-year-old from Somalia.

In fact, nearly all Somali women and girls we spoke to had a story of abuse or extortion by the local authorities. “I think about my security since recently I was attacked by the police,” says 39-year-old FMA. “Six of them took my money and I live in fear of what will happen next.” Similarly, AHD, a Somali 50-year-old tells us, “They have arrested me and my children several times and we had to pay Kshs.15, 000 [approximately \$175 USD or €135 EUR] as bribe. They don’t care about any papers from UNHCR.”

Minor girls are also conscious of the real possibility of being targeted for bribes or being threatened by the Kenyan police. “The police came into our house and went through our stuff,” tells HA, a 17-year-old from Somalia. “They stayed for an hour. They realized there was nothing and they made a comment that we probably came from Somalia recently. I think my mother gave them a bribe to go away.” When asked if they had been extorted, assaulted or threatened by police, nearly all girls related a personal experience or knew someone who had. HH, a 17-year-old from Somalia, simply shook her head and said, “Not yet.” All girls anticipated it was merely a matter of time before their turn came.

BARRIERS TO REGISTRATION As a result of their experiences with Kenyan authorities, refugee and asylum seeking women are of two minds as to whether being registered is of value to them. Those who appreciate being registered state that it makes them feel safe and allows them to access additional assistance, including medical care. “Yes, I believe it will help since now I am not getting assistance or protection because I lack a mandate,” explains 47-year-old NP, from DRC. Indeed, the majority of Congolese women (76 percent) say that they are happy to be registered. “Before I got registered I could not get any assistance,” says 49-year-old Congolese P. “Now I am able to get help.”

Somali women, on the other hand, are less effusive about the benefits of registration, with 60 percent stating that they feel their registration papers are not well recognized and that they do not get additional benefits. “I do have the documents,” says FIN, a 45-year-old from Somalia, “but it does not mean



anything because the government continues harassing us and they don't recognize it, so I believe it doesn't make me safe." Similarly, 33-year-old UMF from Somalia says, "The policemen don't even recognize me and they tear up the papers."

Several women from both communities noted that one advantage of being registered was that the invariable police bribes that they must pay when they are detained are lower when they show their registration papers. "The bribe you pay is smaller compared to someone who isn't registered," says FMW, 48-years-old from Somalia. Registration papers do not prevent refugee women from being stopped by Kenyan authorities, but they can smooth the process. According to 35-year-old Somali KMW, "If you are not registered then the police can take you anywhere, but they left me alone after I showed them my papers."

CONCLUSIONS

The Kenyan government's directive was untenable. In addition to violating international law, there was no evidence that it would have ameliorated Kenya's security. Refugees and asylum seekers in Nairobi represent only 8.6 percent of all registered claimants in Kenya and there was no indication that any urban refugees are implicated in domestic terrorist activities. However, it was clear that such a move would certainly cause grave upheaval in the already fragile lives of refugees, especially girls and women.

Refugee women and girls unanimously understood the Government of Kenya's directive and are aware of the government's ongoing negative perception of them. All were—and continue to be—overwhelmingly anxious about their safety should they be required to relocate to the camps or elsewhere. Somali women and girls expressed a particular fear of sexual violence, while Congolese women believed they would be killed or otherwise die. There is no guarantee that women and girls will be safe from harm if they are forced to relocate or are repatriated without due consideration.

Refugee women also fear what they might lose if they are forced to live in the camps. They believe that relocation will result in the loss of their financial autonomy and their means to earn a living. However precarious their finances, refugee women in Nairobi work hard for their families' survival. Additionally, refugee and asylum seeking women strongly value the communities that they belong to. They feel sustained and comforted by their community ties and worry that these will be lost if they must move to the camps. Regrettably, considering the squalid conditions in Kenya's already overcrowded and under-funded camps, their worries are likely valid.

The refugee girls we spoke to have limited community relations and have come to Heshima Kenya for protection; they especially value their ongoing access to education. The threat of relocation preoccupies all of them greatly, but their greatest concern is losing their means to an education. Kenya's refugee camps are underfunded and services by the UNHCR and other non-governmental organizations are being curtailed. Unaccompanied girls relocated to the camps have no assurance that they will be able to pursue their education.

The refugee and asylum seeking women and girls we spoke to are survivors of harrowing experiences in their home countries. They have fled to Kenya to escape war and famine and now work hard for their daily survival. Though they do not feel a great sense of control over their futures, they rightfully believe

that forced relocation will limit what little autonomy they do have. Life in camps will greatly curtail their capacity to make choices for their personal wellbeing and that of their families. While Kenya's concern for its security is valid, the needs of vulnerable urban refugee women and girls need to be at the forefront of future repatriation or relocation initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE GOVERNMENT OF KENYA

- Exempt refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls in Nairobi who have been identified by UNHCR and partner organizations as especially vulnerable from moving to insecure and over-crowded camps that will subject them to further abuse.
- Protect refugees from violations, especially by security officers, and take disciplinary action against officers who are perpetrators of such violations.

TO THE UNHCR

- Encourage the government to exempt urban refugee women and girls from moving to the camps due to their susceptibility to abuse and exploitation. This especially includes girls and women who have been identified as “vulnerable” by UNHCR and other aid organizations.
- Encourage the government to resume the ongoing registration of refugees and asylum seekers in urban areas.
- Develop more comprehensive protection strategies for unaccompanied refugee minors, especially adolescent girls.

TO REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

- Remain vigilant, especially against abuses perpetrated by security officers, and report to UNHCR and other refugee protection organizations.
- If you have any particular difficulties, you are experiencing intimidation, or if you otherwise need help or information, please contact the UNHCR, Heshima Kenya, or other refugee serving organizations operating in Nairobi.



HESHIMA
KENYA

Heshima Kenya
www.heshimakenya.org

United States
PO Box 408077
Chicago, Illinois
(1) (773) 654 1180

Kenya
PO Box 63192-00619
Nairobi, Kenya
(254) 735 912 333

