

# Migrant's Access to Basic Services and Social Cohesion: Case Study of Kakuma Refugee Camp

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## ABSTRACT

Social inclusion and cohesion between migrants and the host community remains a mirage in many parts of the world. This is despite the commitment by various states and non-state actors to address this malady. The situation is usually exacerbated when migrants and/or local community are unable to access basic services. This study therefore examines how the (in-) accessibility of basic social services by immigrants affects social inclusion and national cohesion. The central argument advanced in this article is that access and/or failure to access basic social services by immigrants and/or host community significantly affects social inclusion and subsequently national cohesion. The primary data used to corroborate the secondary sources was obtained through interviews with experts. Opinions from the experts, among them, government officials, members of staff working with humanitarian agencies in the refugee camp, refugees and some members of host community were sought. Qualitatively, data was analyzed by triangulation of the forms of data collected, that is, the narratives, content and archival analysis for primary and secondary sources. The study depicts that social inclusion remains a challenge whether refugees have more or less access to basic social services than the host community. This is because social inclusivity or lack of it is due to the feeling of relative deprivation experienced when either group is disadvantaged. Based on the findings of this study, social inclusion could be enhanced by promoting equitable distribution of social services, opportunities and resources. Since humanitarian agencies focuses mainly on the refugees, the host government ought to invest in local population. Creating forums for inter-group dialogue among refugees and host community could also play a significant role in enhancing social inclusivity and cohesion.

**Key terms:** Migrant, Social inclusion, host community, Kakuma, refugee camp

## INTRODUCTION

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the phenomenon of immigrants and displaced people have become a major global challenge. This situation has been provoked by many causes including political, religious or ethnic persecution, effects of climate change and natural calamities, human rights violations and protracted conflicts among other pull and push factors in various parts of the globe (Saggar, et al, 2012). The challenges of immigrants and displaced people are likely to exacerbate globally in the coming decades since the pull and push factors seem to be intensifying (Schmid, 2016). This situation is particularly dire in Africa where misgovernance and the effects of natural calamities among others have compounded it.

Currently, there are more than 100 million people who have been displaced globally. This includes 26.6 million refugees, 4.1 million asylum seekers and 50.9 million internally displaced peoples among others (UNHRC 2022). Taetzsch observes that 86% of these migrants are found in the developing countries with precarious economic situation (Taetzsch, 2016). Chambers underscores this view by pointing out that Sub-Saharan Africa hosts almost a third of global refugees (Chambers, 1986). In Kenya for instance, a significant number of these refugees are found at the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps.

The Kenyan government and other development partners have devoted a lot of efforts to enhance social inclusivity and cohesion between the host community and the immigrants in these refugee camps. Despite these

efforts, social cohesion between these two groups remains a mirage. This is possibly due to the scramble for the access to basic services such as health care, education, clean water, food, good shelter and sanitation by migrants and/or host community (Chambers, 1986). This often leads to host community-refugee dichotomy, sometimes culminating into adversarial relations. This has far reached effects in terms of economic, social, and political dimensions, both at the national, regional and global levels.

This study therefore analyzes how the (in-) accessibility of basic social services by immigrants and/or host community affects social inclusion and cohesion, using Kakuma refugee camp as the case study. The paper seeks to address this lacuna by answering the following question: How does (in-) accessibility of basic social services by immigrants and/or host community affects social inclusion and cohesion? To answer this question, the paper examines the barriers that hinder migrants and host community from accessing basic social services and how this affects social cohesion. The paper further presents the conclusions drawn from the findings and prescribes nuanced mitigation measures.

## RELATED LITERATURE

### **Migrants/host community access to basic services: global perspective**

Regardless of the migration status, all people are entitled to fundamental human rights. This includes but not limited to cultural, social and economic rights such as participation in cultural life, access to food, water, education, healthcare, housing, social security and generally good standards of living (ICESCR, Art. 6-15). The 1951 UN refugee convention underscores that refugees should enjoy all rights entitled to nationals including right to employment and education. In 2016, UN member states reaffirmed their commitment to provide quality education and safe environment for refugees (UNGA, 2016).

Despite the commitment by various international legal instruments to protect migrants and ensure their ability to access basic services, provision of these services remains a mirage. By the end of year 2021, global statistics indicated that 48% of refugee children were out of school, with pre-primary enrolment rate of 34%, primary level at 68%, secondary level at 34% and only 5% for higher education (UNHCR, 2022). This underscores the fact that most refugees do not have access to quality education, which plays a significant role in shrinking their economic, social and civic opportunities.

Taetzsch depicts that refugee often poses severe 'socio-economic' burden. This is due to the high number of refugees competing for the limited socio-economic resources and opportunities (Taetzsch, 2016). Such competition culminates in refugee's inability to access socio-economic resources and opportunities due to what Holzer considers 'ghettoizing' of the refugee by the host communities (Holzer, 2014). This situation is often worsened when the host community and the refugees have different cultural and/or religious believes.

A significant number of refugees especially in the Global South lives in extremely dire environment where access to humanitarian aid or gainful socio-economic resources and opportunities is difficult. Omata opines that refugees at Buduburam refugee camp in Ghana are expected to pay for all basic services including food, electricity, water and public toilet among others. He argues that the only free services are the food rations given by UNHCR and World Food Program to HIV positive and chronically ill individuals (Omata, 2013). The scarcity of socio-economic resources coupled with the expectation to pay for basic services in refugee camps presents daunting economic challenges to both the refugees and caregivers.

Ruhs observes that high income countries quite often deny migrants access to basic services and welfare benefits. He points out that such countries restrict migrant's social rights such as public education, health services, employment, housing among other public benefits (Ruhs, 2008). Many migrants are thus frequently exposed to various forms of exclusion and exploitation, therefore presenting a number of obstacles to migrants in terms of participation and integration with the host community.

Ruh's argument corroborates Carmel's observation which depicts low-skilled workers as unwanted in many countries. These workers are criminalized, excluded and contained in impoverished camps (Carmel, and Paul,

2013). The analysis of various literature demonstrates that migrants face similar challenges all over the world. In China, migrants are excluded from affordable housing, insurance, health care, social security and their children are denied education in public schools (Liu, and Tao, 2012). Marginalization in terms of housing results in residential segregation and development of slums as evident in many parts of the globe.

Kyed observes that a refugee in Nairobi is unlikely to be employed. He argues that this ends in a vicious cycle since lack of employment means one is unable to buy food, which in turns means one cannot do most of the menial jobs that require physical strength. He further argues that a refugee in Nairobi has limited access to waste disposal, water, sanitation and sewerage. He opines that refugees also lack critical documents such as Identity Cards which are needed for one to obtain a job and/or get admitted in school among other services (Kyed, et al 2017).

Globally, many host communities often experiences almost similar challenges to the refugees. This is because most refugee camps are established in remote areas where the host have suffered many years of exclusion. In this case, the socio-economic conditions of the host community are not necessarily better than those of the refugees. The local Ghanaians and Turkana hosting Buduburam and Kakuma refugee camps respectively underline this argument. In these two cases, the host community considers themselves worse than the refugees who at least benefits sometimes from the aid given by UNHCR and other International Organizations.

### **Barriers preventing access to basic services**

Are there barriers that prevent immigrants and displaced people from accessing basic services? This study depicts that there is a myriad of barriers that makes it difficult for immigrants and displaced people to access basic services. Some of these barriers preventing migrants from accessing basic services emanate not from weak international legislations, but from failure to apply or implement them (Le Voy, and Geddie, 2009). These barriers differ from one country to another. They range from cultural differences, language barrier, high cost of basic services, administrative hurdles, to lack of information on the available services.

Krista depicts mistrust, fear and the threat of deportation from the host countries to be major barriers migrants often face when accessing basic services. The fear of deportation has made migrants unable to access legal assistance in many host countries, thus leading to gross violations of their rights. The widespread cases of abuse among migrants go unreported to the police due to the fear of being arrested and detained or worst deported to their home countries (Krista, et al 2012). The fear of deportation has also posed a lot of challenges to the migrant's ability to meet their basic needs and improve their well-being.

In many cases especially in the Sub-Saharan Africa, the host countries often relocate their migrants in remote areas with poorly developed infrastructure. The absence of infrastructure coupled with inadequate professionals who are familiar with the culture, histories and needs of the locals and the migrants, makes service delivery extremely difficult. The geographical barriers culminate into inadequate service providers relative to the population of the migrants, a situation that makes the provision of basic services extremely difficult.

The other key barriers that hinder access to basic services are institutional in nature. This includes practices, policies and attitudes of various institutions such as hospitals and health care centers that provide basic health services (Klerman, 1992). This is worsened by the various restrictive laws in many states that impedes immigrant's ability to acquire housing, public education, access to benefit programs and critical documents such as driver's license. Restrictions on freedom of movement and the requirement to have work permit has significantly constrained refugees' right to employment (Zetter, 2016).

Criminalization of individuals and/or organizations that deliver humanitarian assistance is another major hurdle that prevents migrants from accessing basic services. In some countries, humanitarian activities have been restricted or banned, thus curtailing the access of basic services to vulnerable populations including migrants (IFRC, 2016). This criminalization is evidenced in punitive border control policies and legislations that categorizes provision of any services, especially to "illegal migrants" as a criminal offence.

High levels of uncertainty coupled with the requirement to prove residence has prevented migrants from accessing basic services. Migrants face a lot of uncertainty on their future, making it difficult to determine the appropriate curriculum to follow, the language to learn, the certification to receive, and the most suitable schools to prepare them for present and future employment prospects (Peterson, 2019). The practice of requiring children to prove residence before they are admitted in schools has led to low admissions. Further, high cost of books and transport among other costs has resulted to low school enrolment.

Lack of information on available basic services is a major barrier affecting immigrants. Migrants lack information on their rights, how and where to access basic services and what kind of services are available in their host country. This presents a major challenge for migrants to access basic services. Thus, access to information is considered a vital service in and of itself. This coupled with restrictive policies and legal frameworks significantly challenges migrant's ability to access basic services. This explicitly and/or implicitly deters migrants from accessing basic services in many host countries.

Most of the barriers identified in this section are artificial. However, these barriers play a major role in hindering migrants and host communities from accessing basic services in many host countries. The situation is particularly dire in global South, characterized by inadequate resources, where refugee camps such as Kakuma are located. By hindering the immigrants from accessing basic services, these barriers also indirectly play a significant role in preventing social cohesion between the immigrants and the host community. This study therefore seeks to address the deficiency in literature on how (in) accessibility of basic services affects social cohesion.

## **THEORY AND METHODS**

This study is anchored on the theory of relative deprivation which observes that conflict is inevitable when there is a perceived discrepancy between people's expectation and their capabilities in meeting those expectations. This often creates a gap between the people who consider themselves deprived and those who are considered privileged. Ted Gurr, one of the major proponents of this theory argues that people are likely to rebel when they have no hope of attaining some societal values (Gurr, 1971). He observes that social breakdown becomes inevitable in an environment characterized by relative deprivation.

Migdal and Katzenstein observe that social inclusion is compromised when people are deprived or consider themselves deprived of social equality, rights, political voice and other services they believe they are entitled to (Migdal, 2001, Katzenstein, 1996). They argue that relative deprivation is a key factor in fueling social disorder which sometimes manifest in form of looting, rioting, terrorism and even civil war. Saleh underscores this argument by stating that failure to provide basic services which people believe they are rightfully entitled to can provoke dissent among the affected group (Saleh, 2011). This theory helps the researcher to explain how relative deprivation among the migrants and/or host community affects social cohesion. The theory underlines how relative deprivation among migrants and/or host community leads to frustration-aggression, and subsequently lack of social cohesion.

In terms of its methodology, this study adopts a qualitative methodological approach with a descriptive design. This is basically a theory-based design that describes the situation studied, hence enabling researchers to examine the how and why of the particular study. Thus, descriptive design is deemed the most appropriate for this study since it allows an in-depth view of how (in) accessibility of basic services affects social cohesion and inclusion. The primary data was collected through key informant interviews targeting government officers, staff from the humanitarian agencies dealing with refugee issues, key opinion shapers among the host community and refugees.

A sample of fifteen (15) respondents was used in this study, which included, three (3) senior government officers, three (3) members of staff from the humanitarian agencies dealing with refugee issues, four (4) refugees and five (5) key opinion shapers among the host community. These respondents were selected using purposive and snowballing sampling techniques with a major focus on those individuals deemed knowledgeable on the subject matter under the study. Conversely, secondary data was collected through an in-depth review of both unpublished and published sources.

Table 1.1. The study sample size

Target group	Sample size	Percentage
Senior government officers	3	20%
Members of staff (humanitarian agencies)	3	20%
Refugees	4	26.6%
Host community	5	33.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Research Data, 2022

Qualitatively, data was analyzed where narratives from the interviews conducted were documented and triangulated with secondary data. Trends and patterns observed and the emerging themes were developed and explained. The emerging themes were used to explain how (in) accessibility of basic social services by either the refugees and/or the host community affects social inclusivity and cohesion. Since the study is qualitative in nature, it faces the major limitation of a small sample size as indicated in table 1.1, thus unlikely to be generalized to the population as a whole.

### **Kakuma Refugee Camp: The Case Study**

Since the establishment of the Kakuma refugee camp in 1992, a number of actors have provided basic services to refugees with little regard to the host community. These actors include UNHCR, International Rescue Committee (IRC), National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), government of Kenya among others. IRC for instance provides free health services to the refugee with limited access by the host community, who are viewed as intruders when they seek health services there (Ali, et al 2017). One respondent underscored this view by asserting that Turkana should not be allowed to access health care at the camp since this leads to long queues at the facility (Interview with a refugee, 2022). This kind of attitude is a major cause of dissent, tensions and negatively affects social cohesion.

Access to water remains a major source of conflict between the host community and the refugees. Water shortage compels both groups to scramble for it at hand dug wells in river Tarach and/or at water points within the camp (interview with Turkana local leader, 2022). Horn underscores this view by stating that both the host community and refugees face acute water shortages (Horn, 2010). Besides, UNHCR notes that though refugees have more access to safe drinking water than the host community due to the boreholes at the camp, the influx of refugees in the last decade has led to high demand for water. The scramble for this precious resource negatively affects social cohesion.

Decades of misgovernance in Kenya, coupled with a desire to prioritize development in high potential areas as was underscored in sessional paper No. 10 of 1965, has made several regions lag behind in development. This includes Turkana County, where the Kakuma refugee camp is located. The host community of the Kakuma refugee camp has suffered a lot of exclusion since independence, a development that has made it lag behind economically. Data by UNHCR for instance depicts that the host community has a lower school attendance rate than the refugees at the primary level (UNHCR, 2021). This is because a number of agencies, including UNHCR, have played a significant role in providing refugee children with free education. These organizations provide high quality learning facilities and materials and have been accused of poaching the best teachers from the host community (LWF employee, 2022). This has culminated in unhealthy competition between the refugees and the host community, subsequently compromising social cohesion.

The growing number of refugees have sometimes exceeded the resources at the camp. This has often culminated in some refugees scrambling for the little resources owned by the host community thus leading to unnecessary competition. One respondent underscored this assertion by pointing out that refugees have flooded the few boarding schools in the host community, making them unsuitable for learning due to overcrowding in classes (Chairlady, local group, 2022). This depicts that the sense of relative deprivation exists between the host community and the refugees regardless of who has more resources than the other. However, this culminates into open disdain when one group feels that they are severely disadvantaged compared to the other group.

Don Bosco vocational training centers have been established in Kakuma refugee camp to offer vocational training. These centers provide training in mechanics, tailoring, plumbing, masonry, dress-making, welding among other courses (Gayatt. 2010). This provides skills that empower refugees to set up their own businesses. Though a few youths from the host community are admitted into these programmes, they are not a priority since their admission doesn't attract funding from donors. One interviewee expressed a lot of discontent, claiming that the locals often feel left out of this programme, though they are equally needy (member, host community, 2022). This creates the sense of deprivation and later conflict as argued by the theoretical foundation of this study.

While NCKK is responsible for the construction of shelter for the refugees, the host community continues to live in semi-permanent structures which are highly dilapidated (government official, 2022). Data from the NCKK indicates that over 70% of households have adequate shelter at the Kakuma refugee camp (NCKK 2021). Unlike the host community, refugees receive iron sheets for roofing from UNHCR and other agencies (UNHCR, 2022). While most services offered by the national government are extended to refugees, those offered by humanitarian agencies at the camp, including shelter, are not extended to the host community (senior security officer, 2022). This situation fuels the feeling of unfairness, which has created displeasure within the local community.

Physical security is another critical service refugees appear to be enjoying more than the host community. The government of Kenya has availed adequate security officers, including General Service Unit (GSU), regular police and the Administration Police (AP) to enhance security at the Kakuma refugee camp (Jeff, 1999). Conversely as observed by one respondent, security of the host community has been compromised since the establishment of Kakuma refugee camp. He asserted that since then, there have been incidences of highway robbery and night attacks (elder-host community, 2022). The host community has also been a theatre of cattle rustling in the region, a development that has significantly compromised their security.

Both the refugees and the host community face food shortage. However, Aukot argues that refugees are far better than the host community in terms of food security due to the assistance given by the various agencies (Aukot, 2003). Though the food rations given to the refugee are inadequate, the host community believe humanitarian agencies give a lot of food to the migrants while excluding them, yet most of the members of the host community are often hunger stricken due to the harsh climatic conditions. One interviewee admitted that the food rations given to the refugees are inadequate to last a month as expected (employee of Lutheran World Foundation, 2022). He however observed that the host community sometimes demand food just like refugees due to their dire economic situation.

The overcrowded Kakuma refugee camp has been characterized by poor sanitation, a situation that is often a source of conflict in the area. One interviewee noted that most toilets at Kakuma are pit latrines which gets filled up very fast (refugee, 2022). This forces the refugees to use the nearby bush around river Tarach as toilets, a development that often culminates into conflicts since river Tarach is the main source of water for the host community. This significantly compromises social cohesion between the host community and the refugees in the area.

There is also a lot of resentment over the manner in which job opportunities are given by UNHCR and other agencies (Omata, 2012). One respondent asserted that the host community rarely gets jobs due to corruption. He opined that jobs are never advertised and when the host community raises complains, the area leaders are given bribes to silence them. He thus argued that most jobs offered by UNHCR and NGOs operating at the camp are dominated by people from other parts of the country (Chief-host community, 2022). Most respondents observed that refugees are also unable to acquire decent jobs since they do not have work permits. The ensuing situation plays a key role in promoting a sense of relative deprivation among the refugees and the host community, subsequently compromising social cohesion.

The influx of refugees in Kakuma has led to the host community-refugee competition for scarce natural resources, leading to the buildup of tensions since the host community associate their dwindling resources to the presence of refugees. One respondent expressed her fear by stating that refugees are all over the place cutting down trees, expanding the camp and at the same time displacing the locals. She observed that the host community is really suffering and does not benefit in any way from Kakuma refugee camp, thus something ought to be done

(youth leader- host community, 2022). Such perceptions depict the level of discontent among the host community towards the refugees, a move that undermines social cohesion in the region.

60% of the respondents observed that the refugees generally enjoy basic social services more than the host community, who are equally needy. This situation has subsequently exacerbated feelings of relative deprivation. These feelings have negatively affected social inclusion and cohesion, thus fomenting structural violence. To enhance social inclusion, most respondents highlighted the need for the local government to invest more resources in provision of key services to the host community. Others underlined the need to encourage intermarriages, hold frequent peace meetings, share resources equitably, counseling especially for refugees who experienced wars in their country of origin and repatriation of refugees where possible.

## KEY FINDINGS

This study seeks to examine how the (in-) accessibility of basic social services by refugees affects social inclusion and cohesion. The study demonstrates that refugees to a great extent enjoy some basic social services such as health care, water, vocational training, shelter and physical security more than the host community. This situation provokes feelings of relative deprivation and encourages the host community to encroach the refugee camp in order to access these services, thus heightening adversarial relations between the refugee and the local community.

The study further shows that when migrants are unable to access some basic services such as good sanitation, primary and secondary boarding schools, they are forced to share the limited resources owned by the local community. This heightens the “we-they” dichotomy as the two groups compete for the scarce resources. This also provokes bellicose relations between the two groups, subsequently compromising social cohesion.

Thus, this study depicts that social cohesion will remain a mirage whether refugees have more or less access to basic social services than the host community. This is because the horizontal inequalities in terms of accessibility of basic services by the refugees and/or the host community provokes feelings of relative deprivation in either group, a situation that negatively affects social inclusion and cohesion.

The perception among the host community which views the refugees as the privileged group has far-reaching consequences on social cohesion and integration. When the refugees are perceived to be more privileged in terms of the access to basic services than the host community, a sense of relative deprivation is fostered that subsequently undermines social cohesion. This paper observes that besides distribution of basic services and resources, even the perception of not equitably distributing these services and resources makes social cohesion remain a mirage. The paper argues that social cohesion is undermined when there are perceptions of inequitable distribution of basic services and resources since this culminates in a sense of relative deprivation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings of this study, there is a need to promote equitable access to social services, opportunities and resources between the refugees and the host community in order to enhance social inclusivity. The mandate of agencies operating at refugee camps could be expanded to enable them offer their services to both the refugees and the members of the host community.

The study further recommends the need for the host government to invest more in the provision of basic services to the host community. This would alleviate the suffering and feeling of relative deprivation by the host community who do not benefit from the aid given by the humanitarian agencies operating in Kakuma refugee camp. This would play a fundamental role in promoting social cohesion and integration between the host community and the refugees.

There is also a need to hold frequent peace meetings, promote respect for human rights for both the host and the refugees, do counseling mainly for refugees who have seen many atrocities in their country of origin and where possible promote integration of the refugees with the host community in order to avoid “we-they” dichotomy.

Such forums are critical in addressing the “we-they” perceptions and subsequently promoting social cohesion and integration between the host community and the refugees.

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**Declarations of Interest.** The author declares no competing interests

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