



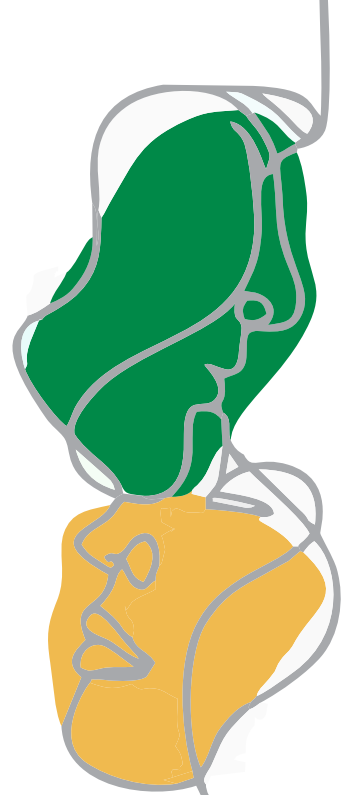
PEACE, PROSPERITY AND
REGIONAL INTEGRATION

GENDER ANALYSIS ON THE DYNAMICS OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN THE IGAD REGION

APRIL 2025



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CEDAW</i>	:	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
<i>CRRF</i>	:	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
<i>FGDs</i>	:	Focused Group Discussions
<i>FGM</i>	:	Female Genital Mutilation
<i>GBV</i>	:	Gender-Based Violence
<i>IDPs</i>	:	Internally Displaced Persons
<i>IGAD</i>	:	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
<i>IPV</i>	:	Intimate Partner Violence
<i>KIIs</i>	:	Key Informant Interviews
<i>M&E</i>	:	Monitoring and Evaluation
<i>MSF</i>	:	Médecins Sans Frontières
<i>NGOs</i>	:	Non-Governmental Organizations
<i>SEA</i>	:	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
<i>SGBV</i>	:	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
<i>UN</i>	:	United Nations
<i>UNESCO</i>	:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<i>O</i>		
<i>UNFPA</i>	:	United Nations Population Fund
<i>UNHCR</i>	:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<i>UNICEF</i>	:	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
<i>WHO</i>	:	World Health Organization

FOREWORD

The IGAD region continues to experience complex dynamics of forced displacement, driven by conflict, natural disasters and climate change. In such contexts, the gendered dimensions of displacement are often profound, with women, men, girls, and boys experiencing different vulnerabilities, risks, and opportunities across the displacement cycle. Although legal frameworks across the IGAD region seek to address the challenges of forced displacement, gaps remain in understanding and responding to the complex realities faced by displaced populations. Displacement often exacerbates pre-existing gender inequalities while creating new vulnerabilities. Without a comprehensive analysis of these dynamics, efforts to find solutions risk being incomplete or ineffective.

This Gender Analysis Report on the Dynamics of Forced Displacement in the IGAD Region represents a significant step toward strengthening gender-responsive approaches in refugee responses in policy and practice. More specifically, it aims to support the implementation of the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection endorsed in 2023 by the Ministers of Interior of the IGAD Member States. It highlights the distinct experiences and capacities of the diverse categories of displaced populations, and underscores the importance of embedding gender equality, inclusion, sensitivity and empowerment of women, men, boys, girls and marginalized communities at the center of displacement responses.

The findings and recommendations in this report are rooted in consultations with displaced and host communities, national refugee management institutions, refugee led organizations and partners across the region. They affirm IGAD's commitment to advancing gender inclusivity and sensitivity as enshrined in the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection (2023), IGAD Regional Gender Equality Strategy (2023–2030) and thematic declarations of the Nairobi Declaration in refugee protection. The Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia recognized the regional nature of the impacts of forced displacement and called for a strengthened framework for regional integration and cooperation. The Nairobi Declaration has since been translated into thematic declarations and plans of action on Education endorsed in 2017, on Jobs, Livelihoods and Self-reliance in 2019 and on Cross Border Health in 2022. Collectively, the Nairobi Declaration and its subsequent thematic declarations have established principles, best practices and concrete commitments on the part of hosting countries to support displacement-affected communities.

This work would not have been possible without the valuable contributions of Member States, partners, local organizations, and displaced communities, whose insights have shaped the understanding of gender disparities and displacement in our region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This Gender Analysis Report on the Dynamics of Forced Displacement in the IGAD Region is the product of a collaborative effort involving many individuals and institutions whose contributions the IGAD Secretariat gratefully acknowledge.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the leadership of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and to the Member States for their steadfast commitment to advancing gender equality and addressing the specific needs of displaced women, men, girls, and boys across the region. In particular, we acknowledge the support and contributions of the Refugee Commissioners, Directors General, and Gender Focal Points from the Refugee Management Agencies, whose inputs during consultations and validation workshops were instrumental in shaping this report.

We are also especially grateful to the displaced and host community members across the IGAD Member States who generously shared their experiences and perspectives, ensuring that the analysis remains grounded in the realities on the ground. Their voices have been central to the findings and recommendations contained herein.

We further acknowledge the valuable contributions of our partners who participated in the assessment across the region, as well as the local and refugee-led organizations who facilitated access to communities and provided critical insights. Their technical expertise, field support, and inputs during interviews, focus group discussions, and regional consultations significantly enriched the quality of the analysis.

Special thanks are also due to the IGAD Secretariat, particularly the Migration and Displacement Programme and the Gender Affairs Unit, for their leadership, coordination, and guidance throughout the development of this report. We also recognize the technical experts, researchers, and consultant whose professionalism and dedication were essential to the completion of this study.

Finally, we gratefully acknowledge the financial and technical support of the Government of Sweden through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), whose commitment to gender-responsive approaches to forced displacement made this analysis possible.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The IGAD region comprising Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda, hosts some of the largest refugee and internally displaced populations globally, with over 5 million refugees and 19 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) as of 2024. Despite progressive policy commitments, gender disparities persist in access to protection, services, and decision-making. This gender analysis explores the multifaceted dynamics of forced displacement in the IGAD region and assess vulnerabilities through a gender lens, highlighting how displacement impacts women, men, girls, boys and marginalized groups differently. The analysis sought to generate actionable insights to support the development and implementation of inclusive, equitable, and responsive refugee protection mechanisms across the region especially the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection.

The gender analysis used a qualitative, participatory, and intersectional methodology to analyse the gendered dimensions of displacement and protection. The assessment combined extensive desk review of literature and secondary data with primary data collection through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and field observations in selected refugee settlements and hosting areas in, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia South Sudan and Uganda. This mixed-methods approach ensured both breadth and depth of insight into gender disparities within refugee contexts. The analysis was guided by USAID's Gender Domains framework focusing on five critical areas: access to resources, roles and responsibilities, participation in decision making, knowledge and perceptions, and the influence of laws and institutional practices. A purposive sampling technique was further employed, including maximum variation and criterion sampling, to ensure representation across gender, age, disability, geographic settings, and displacement status. Data was collected from a diverse group including refugee women, men, youth, host communities, persons with disabilities, survivors of gender-based violence, and service providers.

Key Findings: Gaps and Good Practices in Advancing Gender Equality in Refugee Protection in the IGAD Region

i) Policy Implementation and Legal Frameworks

While IGAD member states have made commitments to gender equality, there remain notable disconnect between national commitments and effective implementation. Fragmented legal and policy environments, weak institutional capacity, and inadequate resourcing hinder effective gender-responsive programming. Displaced women and girls continue to face barriers to accessing essential services, including healthcare, education, and livelihoods. Reproductive health services are particularly inadequate and poorly integrated in refugee hosting areas.

Some countries have, however, made notable strides in aligning national legislation with international standards:

- *Ethiopia's Refugee Proclamation (2019) and Kenya's Refugees Act (2021)* reflect progressive commitments to refugee self-reliance and integration.
- *Kenya's Shirika Plan and Nairobi County Refugee Inclusion Strategy* promote affirmative action for refugees with consideration on matters of gender mainstreaming and topics around SGBV and cultural limitations and promote equitable access to quality education and training for all refugee and includes

Provision of sanitary pads for girls and dignity kits for learners in both refugee and host community children enrolled to schools for higher enrolment rates.

- *Uganda's Refugees Act (2006)* remains a best practice globally, granting refugees freedom of movement and access to land and services.

ii) Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention and Response

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains widespread in refugee settings, fuelled by weak legal protections, inadequate support systems, and entrenched cultural stigma. Survivors often struggle to report abuse or seek justice due to fear of retaliation, community backlash, lack of legal awareness, and limited access to psychosocial services. Despite these challenges some member states have taken initial steps to address GBV including integrating GBV response into national refugee frameworks and established string collaborating with partners to provide psychosocial support and legal aid.

iii) Leadership and Participation of Refugees in Decision Making

Across the IGAD region, refugee women remain largely underrepresented in leadership roles and community governance structures. Persistent discriminatory gender norms, structural barriers, and limited empowerment opportunities continue to hinder their active engagement in community governance and policy dialogues. As good practices there have emerged efforts to promote women's leadership through community-led initiatives that challenge gender norms and inclusion of women in Refugee Welfare Committees and training of female peer educators. Future progress depends on mandating gender parity in governance structures and supporting women's civic participation through targeted empowerment programs.

iv) Access to Education, Livelihoods, and Economic Empowerment

Access to education, livelihoods, and economic opportunities are essential for building the resilience and self-reliance of refugees. However, many displaced individuals, especially women and girls, face significant barriers to realizing their economic potential. Promising initiatives aimed at addressing these barriers include the expansion of TVET programs for refugees in Kenya and Ethiopia, as well as Uganda's integration of refugees into its National Development Plan (NDP III) and sectoral strategies, which enhance access to education and livelihoods for refugees. Additionally, the implementation of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in Ethiopia and Djibouti supports socio-economic inclusion and the development of localized solutions.

v) Regional Coordination and Harmonization

National responses to refugee protection often remain inconsistent and fragmented, limiting the effectiveness of IGAD's regional frameworks. There is insufficient harmonization of gender laws, policies, and standards across member states. The IGAD Nairobi Declaration and Action Plan, facilitated through the IGAD Support Platform, has sparked regional cooperation by fostering thematic declarations on refugee protection. These declarations focus on key areas such as refugee education, socio-economic inclusion, integrated health services, durable solutions, and cross-border coordination. The IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection similarly reflects the commitment of member states to adopt joint and harmonized approaches to refugee protection and management at the regional level.

Member states have demonstrated a strong commitment to joint planning and peer learning, signalling a collaborative approach to addressing refugee challenges.

vi) Coordination, Capacity, and Data Systems

The availability of gender-disaggregated data across the IGAD region remains a persistent challenge that significantly hampers efforts to promote gender responsiveness. Despite increased awareness of the importance of gender data in shaping inclusive and equitable policies, countries in the region continue to grapple with deep rooted structural, technical, and socio-cultural barriers that limit both the collection and use of such data.

Further, there is a pressing need to continuously strengthen technical capacities of refugee management agencies, line ministries and national statistical offices on collection and utilisation of gender-disaggregated data to inform policy and track progress. In many cases, national agencies operate in isolation, and gender focal points remain underutilized within refugee coordination platforms. IGAD can play a key convening role in addressing these gaps by supporting capacity-building efforts to promote gender-responsive data collection across ministries, departments, agencies, and national statistics offices.

Introduction and Background

1.1. Background on Forced Displacement in the IGAD Region

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) comprises eight countries: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. The IGAD region is recognized to be affected by displacement due to a combination of factors including political instability, conflict, poverty, environmental degradation, and recurrent humanitarian crises¹. These factors are intensified by climate shocks and impact the resilience of communities, create fragility, and trigger displacement across borders. The number of forcibly displaced people in the IGAD region has more than tripled over the past decade, amounting to over 5 million refugees and asylum seekers and 19 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) by 31st March 2024² with the majority being women, and children. Many of these displaced populations and their host communities are sometimes repeatedly affected and displaced by both conflict and climate related shocks, adding to complex drivers the region, including refugee movements generating a need for international protection in some circumstances³.

Some characteristics of the state of refugee protection in the region include first high refugee populations with countries like Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya among the top refugee-hosting nations globally. Uganda alone hosts over 1.5 million refugees, primarily from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, while Kenya and Ethiopia host significant numbers of Somali and South Sudanese refugees. Secondly, within the regional frameworks to address refugee protection, IGAD member states have adopted the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia (2017), the Kampala Declaration on Jobs, Livelihoods, and Self-reliance for Refugees, Returnees, and Host Communities (2019), the Djibouti Declaration on Education for Refugees, Returnees and Host Communities (2017), the Mombasa Declaration on Refugee and Cross Border Health Initiatives and the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection (2023).

These frameworks align with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and Global Compact on Refugees to foster shared responsibility and regional cooperation⁴. Third, there is *Protracted Displacement* whereby many refugees in the region face long term displacement, with limited prospects for the traditional durable solutions of voluntary return, local integration, or resettlement. This situation strains host communities and underscores the need for long term sustainable solutions⁵. Lastly, legal and policy challenges persist in addressing the challenges and consequences of forced displacement. Despite notable efforts, disparities remain in the implementation of legal frameworks and policies, as IGAD Member States operate at varying technical and financial capacities. As a result, many

¹ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). (2024). Regional displacement and resilience report. IGAD Secretariat

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2024). Forced displacement trends in the IGAD region. UNHCR.

³ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). (2024). Regional displacement and resilience report. IGAD Secretariat

⁴ IGAD. (2017b). Djibouti Declaration on Education for Refugees

⁵ UNHCR. (2023). Global Trends in Forced Displacement

refugees continue to face significant barriers in accessing rights and basic services such as education, healthcare, and employment⁶ in the hosting countries.

Since 2017, IGAD Member States have spearheaded a comprehensive regional and '*whole of society*' approach to enhance the protection and durable solutions for displacement affected populations. Endorsed in 2023, the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection reflects the IGAD Member States' collective commitment to providing a safe haven for refugees, ensuring their access to essential services and promoting their socioeconomic integration and reintegration into host communities while recognizing their contributions⁷.

This gender-sensitive perspective is paramount when considering the unique challenges faced by refugee women, men, boys, and girls in displaced settings. A gender analysis will help identify these distinct needs and barriers, such as gender-based violence, unequal access to resources and services, and limited economic opportunities. By integrating a gender lens into the implementation of the IGAD Policy Framework, it will guarantee that both male and female refugees receive equitable support that addresses their specific vulnerabilities and strengths. Furthermore, promoting women's leadership and participation within refugee communities is essential. Women often play pivotal roles in the resilience and well-being of their families and communities, yet they are frequently underrepresented in decision-making processes. Empowering women and ensuring their active involvement in all stages of refugee protection and integration can lead to more inclusive and sustainable outcomes. This document provides an analysis of gender dynamics towards the implementation of the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection.

In recognising gender-related challenges and the importance of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across the region, the IGAD Secretariat, in collaboration with its Member States, developed and endorsed the IGAD Regional Gender Equality Strategy 2023–2030. The strategy provides a comprehensive roadmap for integrating gender considerations into policies and programmes including refugee protection⁸. It highlights key areas for action, including the prevention of gender-based violence, the promotion of gender-responsive health and education services, and the creation of economic opportunities that are accessible to all genders. Through the successful implementation of the strategy, IGAD Member States not only uphold their commitments to refugee protection but also advance gender equality within their broader development agenda.

1.2. Overview of the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection and IGAD Gender Policy

The IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection is a regional initiative developed by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to address the complex challenges of forced displacement in the region. It provides a harmonized, rights-based approach to refugee protection, emphasizing inclusion, self-reliance, and durable solutions while fostering regional cooperation among its eight Member States: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya,

⁶Refugee Consortium of Kenya. (2021). Legal and Policy Challenges in Refugee Protection in Kenya.

⁷ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). (2023). IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection. IGAD Secretariat.

⁸ Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). (2023). IGAD regional gender equality strategy 2023-2030. IGAD Secretariat.

Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda. Endorsed in 2023, the Policy Framework is rooted in regional solidarity and seeks to advance sustainable solutions in line with international and regional legal instruments, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, the Global Compact on Refugees (2018), and the IGAD Regional Migration Policy Framework (2012).

The policy outlines 11 priority areas to address protection gaps and promote self-reliance including (1) access to territory and asylum procedures, (2) registration and refugee status determination (RSD) to reduce backlogs, (3) Civil documentation (e.g., birth registration, travel documents), (4) access to essential services (health, education, WASH) aligned with the Djibouti and Mombasa Declarations, (5) livelihoods and self-reliance, (6) climate adaptation (e.g., renewable energy, disaster risk reduction), (7) social cohesion to reduce tensions between refugees and host communities, (8) durable solutions, (9) addressing root causes of displacement (conflict, environmental degradation), (10) emergency preparedness, (11) resource mobilization through partnerships and innovative financing.

The policy commendably acknowledges gender equality as a core principle, laying an important foundation for inclusive and equitable protection for all. To translate this commitment into tangible outcomes, however, there is a valuable opportunity to deepen gender mainstreaming across all levels of implementation. This would involve proactively addressing three key areas: ensuring equitable access to protection and resources, promoting the leadership of refugee women, and responding to intersectional vulnerabilities with greater sensitivity and care.

First, refugee women and girls bring incredible resilience and strength to their communities, but they often face structural barriers in accessing services such as healthcare, education, livelihoods, access to documentation and legal support. By designing programs that intentionally remove these barriers, the policy can support equitable access that uplifts women and girls and enables them to thrive. Similarly, in displacement settings, men and boys face unique and often overlooked gendered challenges that can significantly affect their well-being, safety, and access to resources. While women and girls tend to receive more attention in the context of displacement, men and boys also experience distinct vulnerabilities that require targeted responses.

Second, refugees have the right and the capacity to shape the decisions that affect their lives. Yet, women especially remain underrepresented in key decision-making spaces. Promoting the participation of both men and women not only ensures more inclusive and responsive programming but also strengthens community resilience and social cohesion. When women are given the opportunity, they contribute insights and solutions that address specific needs and benefit the wider community.

Lastly, integrating an intersectional lens allows for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by individuals who experience multiple forms of vulnerability, such as women with disabilities, adolescent girls, or members of minority groups. Tailoring interventions to meet their specific needs contributes to more comprehensive and effective protection strategies.

At the regional level, the IGAD Secretariat and its member states endorsed the Regional Gender Equality Strategy (2013-2030), a strategic framework developed to promote gender

equality and the empowerment of women and girls across its member states. The strategy aims at ensuring that women and men, girls and boys, especially marginalized groups, benefit equally from IGAD's development initiatives. It also outlines an accountability structure for ensuring policy oversight and achievement of those results. The objectives of the Strategy include: -

- Promote gender equality and equity in all IGAD programmes, policies, and activities.
- Mainstream gender in regional integration, peace and security, development, agriculture, and humanitarian responses.
- Strengthen institutional capacity within IGAD and member states for gender-responsive planning and programming.
- Enhance data collection and use of gender-disaggregated data for informed decision-making.
- Promote women's participation and leadership in governance, peacebuilding, and development processes.

Recognizing the need for reliable gender data to address existing and emerging gender-related challenges and to meet reporting obligations under global and regional frameworks, the IGAD Secretariat, through its Gender Affairs Department, is currently developing a Gender Statistics Strategy. This strategy aims to guide the Secretariat in partnering with Member States, supporting national efforts, and harmonizing regional initiatives to produce, analyse, and share gender-disaggregated data effectively.

1.3. Rationale and Relevance of the Gender Analysis

The rationale for conducting a gender analysis towards the implementation of the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection stems from the recognition that displacement affects individuals differently based on gender and other intersecting factors such as age, disability, and socio-economic status. Gender analysis are vital tools for understanding how policies and interventions impact people in distinct ways, helping to ensure more inclusiveness.

In the IGAD region, forced displacement disproportionately affects women, girls, and other marginalized groups, exposing them to increased risks of gender-based violence, unequal access to essential services, economic exclusion, and limited participation in decision-making processes. Without intentional efforts to understand and respond to these dynamics, protection mechanisms risk perpetuating existing inequalities and failing to reach the most vulnerable. At the same time, it is essential to recognize that displacement also affects men and boys in specific ways, including exposure to forced recruitment, psychological trauma, and restrictive social expectations. Understanding these gendered experiences is critical for designing inclusive protection responses.

Integrating a gender analysis into the implementation of the IGAD Policy Framework will ensure that national policies, programmes, and administrative systems are not only responsive to diverse needs but also provide a solid foundation for the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of inclusive and equitable interventions. This approach will help identify and address the specific needs, capacities, and vulnerabilities of women, men, girls, boys, and marginalised persons at every stage of policy and program implementation.

1.4. Objectives of the Gender Analysis

1.4.1. General Objective

The overall objective of this assignment was to produce a gender analysis of the current dynamics of forced displacement in the region to inform the rollout and implementation of the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

Specific objectives of this consultancy were to: -

- (a) Assess gender gaps in refugee protection within the IGAD region.
- (b) Assess the impact of forced displacement examining how displacement affects women, men, girls, boys, and marginalised persons differently.
- (c) Analyse the current opportunities for implementation of the IGAD Policy Framework through a gender lens, identifying gaps, challenges, and best practices.
- (d) Examine how existing policies, programs, and protection mechanisms are addressing or failing to address gender-related concerns within displacement contexts in the IGAD region.
- (e) Hold focus group discussions and interviews with refugees, particularly women, men, and marginalised persons, to understand their specific needs and experiences.
- (f) Provide concrete recommendations and measures aiming at reducing gender disparities and inequalities in refugee protection through technical consultations with the relevant stakeholders.

1.5. Scope of the Analysis

This gender analysis was conducted across all IGAD Member States, with focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) carried out in selected refugee-hosting countries and communities. The selection was based on factors such as the number of refugees hosted, community diversity, and accessibility to the refugee hosting areas. This strategic approach enabled the inclusion of varied refugee hosting contexts, capturing a broad range of gender-related experiences and challenges. The assessment targeted both policy and operational levels of refugee protection to ensure a comprehensive understanding of gender-related challenges and opportunities. It focused on the unique and differentiated experiences of refugee women, men, girls, boys, and marginalized groups within the IGAD region. The analysis covered the thematic areas of protection, access to services, participation in decision-making, economic empowerment, and exposure to risks such as gender-based violence and forced recruitment. The analysis included a comprehensive desk review of existing literature, data, and policy documents related to gender and forced displacement in the region which covered the entire region. It also involved primary data collection through field visits to selected refugee camps and settlements, where direct engagement with refugee communities and key stakeholders took place. These stakeholders include IGAD Member States, UN agencies, NGOs, refugees, refugee led organizations, civil society networks, and community leaders. The selected sites for this gender analysis were carefully chosen to ensure the findings could be reasonably generalized across the IGAD region.

Using a participatory approach, the analysis conducted focus group discussions and interviews with displaced individuals of various gender identities to capture their lived realities and specific needs. It also analysed the current implementation of policies and the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection through a gender lens identifying existing gaps, challenges, opportunities, and best practices. The outcome of the analysis includes actionable recommendations and concrete measures for enhancing gender-responsive planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of refugee protection initiatives under the IGAD Policy Framework. The scope of this analysis, therefore, not only informs immediate programming but also contributes to long-term, inclusive, and equitable policy development within the region.

2 Methodology

2.1. Analysis Methodology

The analysis adopted a qualitative methodology supplemented by an extensive desk review of relevant literature and secondary data sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in refugee protection across the IGAD region. This mixed approach was to give room for a deep understanding of the subject matter through both existing knowledge and primary insights from key stakeholders with desk review helping to supplement the FGD and KII findings.

The methodology was participatory actively involving refugees, host communities, local authorities, refugee led organizations and civil society organizations throughout the assessment process. This was achieved through focus group discussions, key informant interviews. These forums ensured that diverse voices were heard, local knowledge was integrated, and participants had a sense of ownership over the findings.

It was also intersectional in its approach, recognizing that gender disparities are shaped not only by gender identity but also by other factors such as age, disability, nationality, and socio-economic status. To operationalize this, data was disaggregated along these lines, and specific attention was given to the experiences of marginalized sub-groups such as women and girls with disabilities and older persons to better understand how overlapping identities influence access to protection and services.

2.2. Gender Analysis Framework

For this analysis, we used a gender analysis framework adapted from USAID's Gender Domains model. This model is well recognized and widely applied in both development and humanitarian settings because it provides a practical and comprehensive way of looking at gender issues. USAID developed this framework under their Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, building on earlier frameworks like the Harvard Analytical Framework and the Longwe Framework also known as the Women's Empowerment Framework.

The USAID Framework was selected for use because it aids in looking at gender dynamics in a holistic way, especially in a humanitarian context where gender inequalities are often heightened. In displacement situations, access to basic services can become even more difficult, gender roles can shift rapidly, and marginalized groups often have even less input in decision-making. Using the USAID Gender Domains made it possible to systematically capture these realities and ensure that the analysis could inform more targeted and meaningful recommendations.

The framework focused on 5 domains which were found relevant to this gender analysis. By applying this approach, the analysis was able to go beyond just identifying the symptoms of inequality and uncovered the deeper drivers that shape gender relations in these settings. This was critical in the design of recommendations that not only respond to immediate needs but also contribute to long-term, transformative change.

The framework examined these five interrelated domains:

Table 3. 1: Gender Analysis Framework

Domain	Key Focus Areas
Access to Resources	Who has access to and control over resources such as education, healthcare, land, housing, employment, and humanitarian services?
Roles and Responsibilities	What are gender roles, responsibilities, and time use in households, communities, and institutions?
Participation and Decision-Making	Who participates in decision-making processes at household, community, and policy levels?
Knowledge, Beliefs and Perceptions	What are the prevailing social norms, beliefs, and perceptions about gender and power relations?
Laws, Policies, and Institutional Practices	How do formal and informal policies, legal frameworks, and institutional practices impact different genders?

2.3. Analysis Design

The analysis was structured around the following components:

(a) Desk Review

A thorough review of existing literature, policies, strategies, and data on gender and refugee protection within the IGAD region. This included regional and national policy frameworks on refugee protection, reports from humanitarian and development agencies, academic research, and evaluations of existing programmes.

(b) Key Informant Interviews (KIs)

Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders such as IGAD Member State representatives, IGAD Secretariat, UN agencies, Refugee Led Organizations, NGOs, CSOs, women's rights organizations, and service providers involved in refugee protection. These interviews explored institutional practices, policies, gaps, and recommendations.

(c) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Separate FGDs were conducted with refugee women, men, youth, and marginalised groups to elicit community-specific gendered experiences, vulnerabilities, coping mechanisms, and aspirations.

(d) Field Visits and Observations

Fieldwork was conducted in selected refugee camps and settlements across representative IGAD countries. Observational methods were to complement interviews and FGDs to capture the physical, social, and institutional environments.

2.4. Analysis Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling as the primary approach, strategically selecting participants and sites based on their relevance to the study objectives. This approach ensured that the individuals and groups selected were able to provide rich, detailed information about gender dynamics and refugee protection within the IGAD region. Any potential bias was mitigated by using several data sources including secondary literature review. The factors considered in the purposive approach included: -

(a) Maximum Variation Sampling

This strategy ensures diversity across gender identity, age, disability status, geographic location (rural/urban, camp/host community), country of asylum, and type of displacement (refugees, asylum seekers, returnees). The aim was to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences to uncover common themes and contextual differences.

(b) Criterion Sampling

Participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the analysis, such as:

- Refugees and asylum seekers affected by displacement.
- Women, men, girls, boys, and marginalised groups.
- Survivors or individuals at risk of gender-based violence.
- Individuals with experience engaging with protection systems or humanitarian services.
- Stakeholders involved in policy design, service provision, implementation or advocacy.

2.5. Sample Size Selected

Countries, Refugee and IDP sites selected for site visit and FGD included: -

- Uganda: Nakivale Refugee site with refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi, Somalia, Rwanda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia.
- Kenya: Kakuma Refugee camp with refugees from South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
- South Sudan: Gorom Refugee Camp mainly comprising returnees and refugees from Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi, and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- Somalia: Juba camps mostly with refugee returnees and IDPs.

Table 3. 2 Sample Size for Focused Group Discussion

No	Country	No. FGD	
1	Uganda	4	7 Women
			7 Men
			7 Host Communities
			9- Mixed group (4 men 5 women)
2	Kenya	4	7 Women
			7 Men
			7 Host Communities
			9- Mixed group (4men, 5Women)
3	South Sudan	4	7 Women
			7 Men
			7 Host Communities
			9- Mixed group (4men 5Women)

4	Somalia	4	7 Women
			7 Men
			9- Mixed group (4 men 5-Women)
5	Ethiopia	4	9 -Women, 7 Men, Mixed group 5Women and 4 Men, Host communities 4 women and 3 men.
Total - Men			67
Women			78

For Key Informant interview, the selection was as follows: -

Table 3.3: Sample Size for Key Informant Interview

No	Entity	Number
1	IGAD Secretariat	7
2	UN Agencies (UNHCR)	3
3	Refugee led Organizations	3
4	Other NGO's	3
5	Government Officials	8
<i>Total</i>		<i>24</i>

2.6. Data Analysis

Following data collection through multiple methods, the qualitative data was analysed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights related to gender inequality, power dynamics, and refugee protection. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of refugees across different contexts. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, triangulation was applied, combining insights from focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), field observations, and desk reviews. This process helped to harmonize the data, enhance credibility, and provide a comprehensive picture of gender dynamics within refugee settings across the IGAD region.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

This analysis adopted ethical considerations proposed by UN Women on social research to ensure respect for the dignity and well-being of participants. Ethical research practices were central to every process of the gender analysis, ensuring the rights, safety and privacy of information for all participants particularly vulnerable groups such as survivors of SGBV, and marginalized communities⁹. The analysis adhered to the following core principles.

- i. Informed Consent-* Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the analysis, as well as their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained through clear verbal agreements, ensuring that participants understood their involvement. Participation was entirely voluntary, with a strong emphasis placed on non-coercion and respect for individual autonomy throughout the process.

⁹ UN Women. (2020). Ethical and safety recommendations for research on the gendered impacts of COVID-19 and the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls . UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/05/ethical-and-safety-recommendations-for-research-on-the-gendered-impacts-of-covid-19>

- ii. Confidentiality-* Data collected from individuals and communities was anonymized and stored securely to protect identities to guarantee confidentiality. Names, locations, and identifying details were not collected to make data anonymous. Data sharing with external stakeholders is restricted to aggregated, non-identifiable formats.
- iii. Do No Harm-* Precautions were taken to avoid exacerbating vulnerabilities or exposing participants to physical, emotional, or social risks. To ensure this, field FGDs were conducted in safe, neutral spaces (e.g., community centres) to minimize exposure to harm. Sensitive topics such as SGBV were addressed with caution.
- iv. Cultural Sensitivity-* The researchers ensured respect for cultural norms, traditions, and power dynamics to guarantee inclusivity and trust. Collaboration with local NGOs and refugee-led organizations ensured cultural appropriateness in engagement methods

3.1. Regional Trends and Demographics of Forced Displacement in the IGAD Region

According to the 2023 UNHCR Global Report, the risk of gender-based violence significantly increases in situations of conflict and displacement, posing a serious threat to the safety and well-being of over 60 million forcibly displaced and stateless men, women, girls, and boys worldwide¹⁰. The 2024 UNHCR regional dashboard also indicates that women and girls account for over 47% of displaced people across the region. In certain situations, like the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan, they have made up as much as 90% of the displaced population, with women and children being the most affected¹¹. Due to the substantial refugee population and the diverse vulnerabilities experienced by displaced men, women, girls, and boys in the IGAD Region, gender issues cannot be lacking.

As of February 2022, there were an estimated 539,766 refugees living in Kenya. While the majority of Kenya's refugees live in Dadaab (44%) and Kakuma (40%) settlements (in Garissa and Turkana counties, respectively), approximately 16% (83,977) of the country's refugee population lives in Nairobi¹². The country of origin for most Kenyan refugees is Somalia (53.4%), with South Sudan (25.1%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (8.9%), Ethiopia (5.6%), Burundi (3.5%), Sudan (1.8%), Uganda (0.6%), Eritrea (0.4%), Rwanda (0.4%), and other countries (0.2%) also represented. According to UNHCR statistics, as of 31 May 2024, this number increased to 774,375 registered refugees and Asylum seekers with majority 56.1% coming from Somalia, 23.8% coming from South Sudan, 7.8% coming from DRC, 5.1% of refugees and Asylum seekers are coming from Ethiopia, 4.2% Burundi, while remaining percentage are coming from Sudan 1.5%, Uganda 0.5%, Eritrea 0.5% Rwanda 0.4% and other countries 0.2%. Out of this number, the Female gender accounts for 49.0% while the Male gender accounts for 51.0%. Women and children account for 80.0%. The table gives data for Kenya for the last five years

Table 3. 3: Kenya Refugees and Asylum Seekers by Age and Sex, 2020-2024.

Category	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024*
Children (< 18 yrs)					
Male	141,221	150,561	155,938	187,994	229,713
Female.....	129,024	137,502	141,693	170,941	209,542
Sub Total-Children	270,245	288,063	297,631	358,935	439,255
Adults (18+ yrs)					
Male	116,914	125,792	138,955	165,419	191,049

¹⁰ UNHCR. (2023). Global report 2023 . United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/globalreport/global-report-2023>

¹¹ Building a Gender-Equal Africa - UN Women East and Southern Africa Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

¹² UNHCR. (2024a). Kenya refugee statistics, May 2024. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/ke/>

Female.....	117,695	126,213	136,922	167,514	193,628
Sub Total-Adults	234,609	252,005	275,877	332,933	384,677
Total (all ages)					
Male	258,135	276,353	294,893	353,413	420,762
Female.....	246,719	263,715	278,615	338,455	403,170
Total	504,854	540,068	573,508	691,868	823,932

Source: Department of Refugee Services

By 31 August 2021, Uganda hosted more than 1.5 million refugees, representing one of the largest refugee populations in the world. Almost 107,000 (or 27.9%) of Uganda's refugees reside in Kampala. Refugee countries of origin are predominantly South Sudan (60.8%) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (29.0%), with smaller numbers of refugees from Somalia (3.5%), Burundi (3.1%), Rwanda (1.6%), Eritrea (1.4%), Ethiopia (0.3%), Sudan (0.2%), and other countries (<0.1%) also represented. As of September 2024, the number increased to 1.74 million refugees and asylum seekers. Most refugees come from South Sudan (55%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (31%), Somalia (3%), Burundi (2%), Sudan (3%) and other nationalities (6%). Refugees primarily live in settlements within 12 districts, alongside host communities, resulting in economic and environmental challenges. An additional eight per cent reside in Kampala¹³. Approximately 95% of Ugandan refugees live alongside host communities in designated settlements, within which the Government of Uganda allows freedom of movement and provides shelter and land for agriculture.

The Sudanese refugee population remains the largest, comprising 487,652 individuals (94.7%), followed by 14,075 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (2.7%), 5,824 individuals from Ethiopia (0.1%), 3,337 individuals from Eritrea (0.1%), 2,756 individuals from Central African Republic (0.1%) and 1,151 individuals from other nationalities. Since the Sudan conflict, the Government of South Sudan is recognizing Sudanese and other nationals who are fleeing from Sudan and seeking asylum as refugees on prima facie basis. 56% of the refugees are female, with women and children collectively representing 84% of the total refugee population. Among the refugees, only 3% are aged 60 and above, 40% fall within the age range of 18–59, and 57% are 0–17 years old. The majority of refugees are hosted in Upper Nile and the Unity States, accounting for 86% of the total population. Asylum-Seekers Contrasting with the demographics of the refugee population, 34% of the asylum-seekers are female, and when combined with children, they constitute 43% of the asylum-seeker population. Amongst the asylum-seekers, the Ethiopians are the largest population group, comprising 1,218 individuals (45.4%), followed by Burundians with 534 individuals (20.0%), Eritreans with 475 individuals (18.0%), Ugandans with 340 individuals (12.6%), and Congolese with 26 (0.1%), individuals and 68 individuals from other nationalities. Contrast to the demographics of refugee population, 81.9% of asylum-seekers fall within the age range of 18–59, 16.9% are between 0–17 years old, and 1% are aged 60 and above¹⁴.

¹³ UNHCR. (2024b). Uganda refugee statistics September 2024 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/ug/>

¹⁴ UNHCR. (2025). South Sudan: Refugee Population Statistics (March 2025). United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Retrieved April 28, 2025, from <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/ssd>

As of December 31, 2024, Ethiopia hosted a total of 1,073,275 forcibly displaced individuals, comprising 1,002,481 refugees and 70,794 asylum seekers. This makes Ethiopia the third largest refugee hosting country in Africa. Majority 40.0% of the refugees comes from South Sudan, 33.7% comes from Somalia, 16.7% of refugees come from Eritrea, 8.5% Sudan, 0.2% of refugees comes from Yemen while others composed of only 0.8%. Majority of the refugees 36.8% are found in Gambela Ethiopia, with only 7.5% found in Addis Ababa. 47% of refugees are women and girls, and 59% are children¹⁵.

Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Somalia were approximated at 39,000 individuals, primarily from Ethiopia and Yemen as of February 2025 with nearly 3.86 million people displaced within Somalia due to conflict, insecurity, and climate related factors such as droughts and floods. Since December 2014, over 52,000 Somali refugees have voluntarily returned home with UNHCR assistance, mainly from Kenya, Yemen, Djibouti, and Libya. Anecdotal data on stateless persons or those at risk of statelessness also indicate that some 125 individuals in Somalia may be at risk of statelessness¹⁶.

Djibouti is considered an oasis of peace in a region in perpetual conflict. As of March 31, 2025, the total number of refugees and asylum seekers is: 33,227 of 11,424 households, that is 24,411 refugees and 8,816 asylum seekers. In the village of Ali Addeh: 17,152, that is 56%, in the village of Holl Holl, 8,042 which is 23%, in the Markazi camp 2,657, which is 6% and lastly in Djibouti city urban area 5,170, which is 15%. Ethiopian nationals (43 percent) constitute the largest refugee group in Djibouti, followed by Somalian at (41 percent) and Yemenis (11 percent). In Djibouti, 85 percent of refugees and asylum seekers live in rural areas while 15 percent in urban areas. Around 56 percent of them live in Ali Addeh village, 23 percent in Holl Holl village, 15 percent in Djibouti City, and 5 percent in Markazi camp¹⁷. Table below shows the refugee data by gender in Djibouti.

Table 3. 4: Population of refugee by Gender

Location	Female	Male	Grand Total
Ali Addeh	8868	8283	17151
Djibouti	2113	3158	5271
Holl Holl	3885	4228	8113
Markazi	1098	1594	2692
Grand Total	15964	17263	33227

In Summary, as of 30 November 2024, the IGAD region was host to 5.1 million refugees and asylum-seekers. The majority of refugees and asylum-seekers are from South Sudan, currently at over 2.2 million. Some 21.6 million people are internally displaced in the region as a result of conflict and natural disasters. About 389,000 refugees have returned to their countries of origin since the beginning of 2024. The region also hosts over 87,000 stateless persons in

¹⁵ UNHCR. (2024c) Ethiopia refugee statistics, November 2024. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/et/>

¹⁶ UNHCR. (2024d). Somalia operational update, September 2024. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/so/>

¹⁷ UNHCR. (2024e). Djibouti factsheet, November 2024. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://www.unhcr.org/dj/>

Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan¹⁸. There has been progress in regard to refugee protection among IGAD member states and the summary is presented in the Table below: -

Table 3. 5 Progress on Refugee protection among IGAD member States

Country	Legal Framework	Institutional Arrangements	Policy Focus	Regional/International Alignment
Djibouti	Refugee Law (2017)	ONARS (Office National d'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Sinistrés)	Protection, access to basic services, legal identity	Signatory to 1951 Refugee Convention, OAU 1969 Convention, IGAD commitments
Ethiopia	Refugee Proclamation (2019)	Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS)	Local integration, self-reliance, access to education and work	Strong IGAD engagement ; CRRF/GRF participant ; 1951/OAU conventions
Kenya	Refugees Act (2021)	Department of Refugee Services (DRS)	Camp-based policy, but the new law supports integration and durable solutions	1951/OAU conventions, IGAD Nairobi Déclaration, CRRF
Somalia	Refugee Act (2024)	National Commission for Refugees and IDPs (NCRI)	Return and reintegration of Somali refugees; internal displacement	Nairobi Declaration signatory; OAU Convention
South Sudan	Refugees Act (2012)	Commission for Refugee Affairs (CRA)	Refugee protection, right to work, freedom of movement	Party to 1951/OAU conventions; IGAD Nairobi Déclaration, CRRF
Sudan	Asylum Act (2014)	Commission of Refugees (COR)	Local integration, urban and camp-based settlements	1951 Convention/OAU Convention; IGAD member but facing political instability, IGAD Nairobi Déclaration,
Uganda	Refugees Act (2006), Refugee Regulations (2010)	Office of the Prime Minister – Department of Refugees	Progressive: local integration, land access, education, healthcare	Global model for CRRF; strong IGAD and international cooperation, IGAD Nairobi Déclaration,

3.2. Access to Land and Resources

Access to essential resources and services such as healthcare, education, shelter, water and sanitation, livelihoods, and legal documentation is a critical aspect of protection and well-being for displaced populations. However, access is not equal. Gender, age, disability, and other social and economic factors often determine who can benefit from available services and who is left behind. In displacement settings across the IGAD region, women, girls, and marginalized groups face significant barriers in accessing these resources, which further deepens their vulnerability and limits their opportunities for recovery and resilience.

¹⁸ UNHCR. (2024f). Regional overview: IGAD displacement figures, November 2024
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <https://data.unhcr.org>

Addressing these disparities requires targeted, gender-responsive approaches that ensure inclusive service delivery and equitable resource allocation.

"Women and girls do not access equal resources and they suffer most when it comes to displacement due to cultural norms within the camps." KII (with GBV UNHCR)

In IGAD member states (e.g. Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda) gender disparities in refugee contexts are deeply influenced by socio-economic norms that restrict women's and girls' access to and control over assets and resources. Past studies indicated that refugee women have limited access to income generating activities and land compared to their male counterparts¹⁹. In 2023 however, UNHCR reported notable progress in promoting gender inclusivity in access to Cash Based Interventions (CBI) for refugees and asylum seekers in asylum countries across the East and Horn of Africa. Kenya had the highest percentage of females accessing cash assistance at 67.68%, followed by Djibouti at 63.49% and South Sudan at 61.95%. These higher figures were largely attributed to cash assistance provided specifically for hygiene kits, which are targeted exclusively at females²⁰.

In Uganda, despite the progressive refugee policy that allows access to land and work for refugees, women often face challenges due to patriarchal norms and unequal intra-household decision-making powers. Female-headed households and widows in particular experience heightened obstacles both in securing housing, land, and property rights and in addressing related disputes²¹. A study by Betts et al. (2019) found that only 15% of female refugees in Uganda reported owning or co-owning land allocated to them, with the majority under male control.²²

Similarly, in Ethiopia's Gambella region, refugee women reported barriers in accessing humanitarian services such as healthcare, shelter, and education due to both logistical and cultural barriers. (*From FGD Discussion Gambella*)

¹⁹ IGAD. (2023). Gender Equality Strategy 2023–20230. <https://igad.int/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IGAD-Gender-Strategy-2023-2030-2.pdf>

²⁰ UNHCR, East, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region - Gender Equality, 2024 Annual Update

²¹ Meskers, J. (2019). Owned spaces and shared places-Refugee Access to Livelihoods and Housing Land and Property in Uganda

²² Betts, A., et al. (2019). Refugee Economies in Uganda: What Difference Does the Self-Reliance Model Make? University of Oxford. https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/news/refugee-economies-uganda_jan2019.pdf



Figure 3.1: Women Participating in FGD in Gambe la

3.2.1. Access to Education

An analysis of access to basic education among the refugees within the IGAD region revealed low access to education amongst the displacement communities, which is mainly attributed to the inadequate education institutions in refugee and settlement camps and low source of income for households. According to UNHCR data from 2022, on the East Horn of Africa, and Great Lakes region, approximately 1.11 million out of 2.17 million refugee children were out of school. The gross enrolment rates are estimated at 40% at pre-primary, 67% at primary school, 21% at secondary school and 2.1% at tertiary school²³. Nevertheless, it was noted that the problem has greatly affected girls and women as compared to the other gender. Cultural norms that prioritize boys' education were highlighted as a key barrier to refugee girls' schooling. While a few scholarship programs exist, they are insufficient and fail to meet the needs of the steadily increasing number of children in refugee and displacement camps

"Although we have schools here, but only boys who access schools, girls are always not given priority and being married off as early as they turn 12 to 15 years old."
(Comment from FGD at IDP camp in Somalia)."

According to UNHCR and UNICEF (2019), over 50% of refugee children globally are out of school, and girls are particularly disadvantaged. The barriers to education include cultural norms, safety concerns, lack of resources, and inadequate educational infrastructure in refugee camps²⁴. The *Refugee Education Program* (2020) provides evidence that providing

²³ UNHCR. (2022). Education Report 2022: Staying the course – The challenges facing refugee education. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
<https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/63cabf374.pdf>

²⁴ UNHCR & UNICEF. (2019). Education for Refugees: Overcoming Barriers. [UNHCR & UNICEF Report](#)

education and skill development opportunities to refugee women and girls helps to reduce gender-based violence and promotes social cohesion. Women and girls who have access to education are more likely to gain employment, improve their mental health, and contribute positively to their communities²⁵.

"Women and girls are mostly affected with the displacement, social norms, cultural practices and male chauvinism make it hard for women and girls to access education and other basic services" FGD response from Ethiopia Gambela.

A report by UNESCO 2021 indicates that refugee girls in IGAD member states face considerable challenges in accessing education. According to UNHCR (2022), only 39% of refugee girls in secondary school across IGAD states complete their education, compared to 60% of boys. Factors such as early marriages, gender-based violence (GBV), and household responsibilities disproportionately limit girls' access to education. Furthermore, the lack of adequate sanitary facilities and menstrual hygiene support in refugee schools discourages girls from attending classes regularly²⁶. The results further revealed that in many refugee camps, girls are not encouraged to attend school, especially adolescents who are forced to marry at an early age by their parents. Many of the girls do not complete primary education, hence creating a big gap in secondary schools. During the focus group discussions, a girl was able to share her own story about how she got pregnant and was never allowed to return to school.

This explains the plight of girls in accessing education which is a basic right. Particularly in the Somali community, FGDs revealed that young Somali girls generally do not go to school and the reason is that the young ones first go to Madrasa and mosque which is a social and religious discrimination.

"It is a requirement of our faith that we must attend madrassa and that is the main thing here, after that the lady is good. We don't even have formal schools here, but we have madrassa." (One elder at the camp reiterated during FGD).

The lack of transportation, schools are often located far from families, they face challenges due to the poor pavement and also distant locations which enable students not to reach school on time. As a result, many children face long and unsafe walks to reach school, which causes late arrivals, disrupting the learning process for both the student and the class. Frequent absenteeism, especially during harsh weather conditions or in areas with insecurity and lastly dropouts, particularly among girls and younger children who may not be able to manage long commutes or are kept at home for safety reasons.

²⁵ Refugee Education Program. (2020). Gender and Education for Refugee Girls. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/refugee-education-report-2024.pdf](https://inee.org/sites/default/files/resources/refugee-education-report-2024.pdf)

²⁶ UNESCO. (2021). Education for Refugee Girls: Challenges and Opportunities. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.



Figure 3.2 Men taking part in FGD in Juba Camp Kismayu

In Uganda, the participants in Nakivale were requested to indicate the available education opportunities for themselves or their children. The feedback included:

- Public schools (56%) – The majority of the participants have access to public schools for their children in the camp, although the schools are generally crowded and underfunded.
- Community programs (28%) A number of participants mentioned education programs operated by communities, such as informal classes and adult literacy programs. These programs are seen as accessible but not inclusive.
- Online courses (25%)– Some of the participants, particularly the youth, showed interest in online educational centres, although internet and technology access are limited for most refugees.
- None (10%)– Some of the participants, particularly older individuals, indicated that they have no form of access to education due to the lack of infrastructure or funds.
- Others (5%)– Some respondents mentioned NGO-sponsored education programs but noted that they are limited in scope and not available to everybody.

The analysis identified several other factors that are directly hindering refugee girls and boys from accessing education. The main factors are summarised as follows: -

- *Poverty*. Many refugee families struggle to afford school fees, uniforms, books, and other materials.
- *Child Labour*. Economic hardship often forces children into work to support their families instead of attending school.
- *Legal barriers*. Many refugee children in Kenya and Uganda, particularly in Kakuma, Dadaab and Nakivale refugee camps, lack birth certificates or identification documents. Without these, they face difficulties in accessing education, especially secondary education.

- *Early Marriage and Pregnancy:* Cultural and economic pressures push many refugee girls into early marriage, preventing them from continuing their education.
- *Gender-Based Violence:* Girls face risks such as harassment and sexual violence on the way to school or within educational institutions.
- *Cultural Norms:* In some refugee communities, educating boys is prioritized over girls due to traditional gender roles. This is common in Somalia camps.
- *Language and Curriculum Challenges:* Refugee children in most cases do not understand the language of instruction in their host country, making learning difficult and host country curricula in most cases are not adapted to refugee learners' needs, making integration into the education system harder.

3.2.2. Access to Healthcare

Access to healthcare emerged as a significant issue during the focus group discussions. Across refugee and settlement camps, there is generally limited access to quality healthcare services, which impacts the health of all refugees, including men, women, boys, and girls. However, refugee women and girls face even greater challenges. The healthcare systems in these camps are often underdeveloped, lacking adequate equipment and trained personnel. Some countries, such as Ethiopia, are making strides to improve this by integrating refugees into local healthcare systems. Despite this, women and girls still face significant barriers to accessing reproductive health services, such as prenatal and postnatal care, contraception, and safe abortion services were permitted by law. These challenges are compounded by financial constraints and the lack of support from male family members, often due to religious and cultural practices.

"I am dealing with multiple health problems, including ulcers, unexplained swelling in my arms, eye pain, and significant pain in my left leg, which was injured during the war—it also itches. Additionally, I have seven children who lack school fees and other essential needs." (A 40-year-old woman at Kakuma refugee camp narrating problems she has with access to health services and education during FGD.

WHO (2020) reports that refugee women and girls face increased risks related to maternal health, including high rates of maternal mortality and complications from early pregnancies. These risks are compounded by the lack of access to essential health services in refugee settings²⁷. However, most host communities' members indicated that NGOs are only focusing on refugees but have neglected them, yet they are the people who are hosting the refugees. This creates a picture of a poor state of healthcare even for the host communities.

"My hearing is impaired due to the torture I endured in Congo; I have some infections due to STD's which has caused trauma in me. I suffer from back pain, and many other problems but no doctor to attend to us here". (One woman in FGD discussion in Nakivale).

²⁷ WHO. (2020). Maternal and Reproductive Health in Refugee Contexts. [WHO Report](#)

An analysis by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, 2020) highlighted the impact of displacement on the reproductive health of refugee women. The absence of skilled birth attendants, inadequate prenatal care, and the prevalence of sexual violence significantly increase the vulnerability of women in refugee camps²⁸. UNFPA (2020) emphasizes that access to reproductive health services for refugees is vital for ensuring that women can make informed decisions about their health. Furthermore, addressing sexual violence and providing comprehensive post-rape care can significantly improve the health outcomes of refugee women²⁹.

In Ethiopia for instance, in one of the KII, the development partners discussed the challenges faced by women and girls, particularly refugees, in accessing essential services and justice in Ethiopia. They explain that while the government has a positive response and legal frameworks in place, there are significant capacity and resource limitations. Access to services like one stop centres for gender-based violence (GBV) is limited due to distance and functionality issues. For access to justice, mobile courts and partnerships with universities provide some support, but challenges remain, including lack of forensic evidence and difficulties for refugees to travel to court. They emphasize the government's commitment to gender equality but highlight the need for more resources and capacity building to effectively implement these policies for forcibly displaced populations. In Ethiopia for instance, in one of the KII, the development partners discussed the challenges faced by women and girls, particularly refugees, in accessing essential services and justice in Ethiopia. They explain that while the government has a positive response and legal frameworks in place, there are significant capacity and resource limitations. Access to services like one stop centres for gender-based violence (GBV) is limited due to distance and functionality issues. For access to justice, mobile courts and partnerships with universities provide some support, but challenges remain, including lack of forensic evidence and difficulties for refugees to travel to court. They emphasize the government's commitment to gender equality but highlight the need for more resources and capacity building to effectively implement these policies for forcibly displaced populations." (KII-Interview).

"While healthcare access was seen as equal, girls face disadvantages in education and resource distribution, often due to cultural norms prioritizing boys. Early and forced marriages were also cited".(FGD, group discussion in Gambela)

In refugee contexts, cultural patriarchy often persists or worsens due to stressors of displacement³⁰. Girls are disproportionately withdrawn from school and subjected to child marriage as a survival or economic strategy³¹(UNHCR, 2022; Girls Not Brides, 2021). In Gambella specifically, reports indicate that girls are twice as likely to drop out of school compared to boys, often to help at home or due to early marriage³² (UNICEF, 2020).

²⁸ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). (2020). Health Care for Refugee Women: Challenges and Solutions. [MSF Report](#)

²⁹ UNFPA. (2020). Refugee Health and Reproductive Rights. [UNFPA Report](#)

³⁰ Girls Not Brides (2021). Child Marriage in Humanitarian Settings.

³¹ UNHCR (2022). Education in Exile: A Global Overview

³² UNICEF Ethiopia (2020). Adolescent Girls and Young Women: Gender Assessment in Gambella Region.



Figure 3. 3: Men in Gambela taking part in FGD

Leaders of refugee led organizations in South Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya reported that maternal mortality rates in refugee camps remain alarmingly high, primarily due to the inadequate provision of maternal health services. These services are often underfunded, understaffed, or completely absent in certain areas, leaving pregnant women without access to antenatal care, skilled birth attendants, or emergency obstetric services. Limited access to contraception also contributes to high-risk pregnancies and poor maternal health outcomes. Additionally, cultural barriers, such as traditional beliefs and gender norms, discourage some women from seeking medical care, particularly for reproductive, maternal, and mental health issues.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is another significant health and protection concern. Women and girls in displacement camps are at heightened risk of sexual violence, and the aftermath of such violence is worsened by inadequate access to specialized medical treatment and psychosocial support. Survivors often face stigma, fear retaliation, or lack trust in the system, which prevents them from seeking help. The absence of trauma-informed care and confidential GBV services further deepens the health disparities experienced by survivors.

In both Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya and Gorom Refugee Camp in South Sudan, the most common health problems identified by respondents included malaria, respiratory infections, malnutrition, waterborne diseases, and untreated chronic illnesses. Mental health conditions were also prevalent, often linked to trauma, prolonged displacement, and a lack of psychosocial services.

Systemic barriers to healthcare access were consistently highlighted in focus group discussions. A major issue raised was the lack of adequate healthcare infrastructure. Several respondents noted the absence of functional hospitals or clinics in some areas of the camps. Where healthcare facilities did exist, they were often overwhelmed and under-resourced, struggling to meet the needs of large refugee populations.

Financial constraints were another significant barrier to healthcare access, especially when specialized treatment or referral services were needed. Most refugees lacked the financial means to pay for services not covered by humanitarian programs, resulting in delayed care or untreated conditions. Respondents also pointed out shortages of essential medicines and medical supplies, such as antibiotics, pain relief, and chronic disease medications, even in functional facilities. Transportation and distance challenges were also major concerns. Poor road infrastructure and the lack of affordable or reliable transportation made it difficult for refugees to reach healthcare centers, particularly in emergencies. In many cases, refugees had to walk long distances often while ill or carrying children to access basic care.

Respondents were asked to identify the most common health issues they faced in both Kakuma and Gorom Refugee Camps. The results revealed the following:

- Malnutrition (46%)– Many refugees reported inadequate food and poor nutrition, leading to weakness, stunted growth in children, and increased vulnerability to diseases.
- Mental health issues (34%)– A large number of respondents experienced stress, trauma, anxiety, and depression due to displacement, lack of livelihood opportunities, and uncertainty about the future.
- Chronic illnesses (25%)– Refugees suffering from conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and respiratory infections often lacked long-term treatment or had irregular access to care.
- Lack of prenatal care (37%) –Pregnant women faced significant challenges in accessing maternal health services, putting them at high risk of complications during delivery.
- Other (15%)– Additional issues included recurrent infections, sanitation related diseases due to poor living conditions, and limited access to vaccines.

When asked about access to medical care, the responses were as follows:

- Yes (55%) – Some refugees reported having access to medical care, but the health centres were often overcrowded and under-resourced.
- No (45%) – Respondents cited several barriers to accessing healthcare, including:
 - Poor healthcare facilities: In some areas, there are no operational hospitals or clinics.
 - Financial constraints: Most refugees cannot afford the costs associated with specialized care.
 - Restricted medicines and supplies: Even where facilities exist, they are often lacking essential drugs.
 - Transport and distance issues: Some refugees struggle to reach healthcare centres due to poor roads and a lack of transportation.

The majority of focus group discussion (FGD) participants acknowledged that cultural and gender-related barriers also hinder access to healthcare in the camps. Women and gender minorities reported experiencing discrimination and stigma when seeking services. The shortage of female health providers made it particularly difficult for women to access reproductive and maternal health services due to cultural sensitivities and discomfort with male practitioners. Additionally, traditional beliefs in some communities discouraged the use of mental health services and certain medical treatments, further limiting access to necessary care.



Figure 3.4: Refugee in South Sudan taking part in FGD discussion

Summary of major factors hindering access to health among refugees and host communities:-

- *Limited healthcare infrastructure:* Inadequate health facilities, medical equipment, and essential medicines in refugee camps and host communities.
- *Overburdened healthcare systems:* Host countries often struggle to accommodate large refugee populations, stretching available resources, this is evidenced in Kakuma, South Sudan and Nakivale camps.
- *Cultural and gender norms:* Some refugees may be hesitant to seek medical care due to cultural stigmas, especially reproductive and mental health issues common in Jubba Somalia IDP camps.
- *Poor sanitation and living conditions:* Overcrowded refugee camps lead to higher disease outbreaks with limited response capacity. This is the common scenario across the camps we visited.
- *Language barriers:* Refugees may not speak the local language, making communication with healthcare providers difficult especially in Djibouti given that most refugees are coming from English-speaking countries.
- **LGBTQ+ Refugees** are not recognized due to religious and cultural factors in most camps.
- *Mental health issues:* The majority of the respondents experienced stress, trauma, anxiety, and depression due to displacement, lack of livelihood opportunities, and uncertainty about the future.
- Lack of prenatal care for pregnant women as they have difficulties accessing adequate maternal health services, with a significant risk of delivery complications.

Table 3. 6: Summary of access and control of resources among different genders

Category	Men	Boys	Women	Girls
Access to food	Generally prioritized in distribution, may have better access	May receive food but often through family; access may be adequate	May face discrimination; may eat last or less in households	Often last to eat; may face food insecurity due to age and gender
Access to education	Often prioritized; more likely to access higher education	Access varies; may face dropout due to work or insecurity	Lower enrolment and retention; burdened by domestic roles	High dropout rates due to early marriage, domestic chores, safety concerns
Access to health services	Generally better access and mobility	Often depend on caregivers for access	May face mobility, financial, and cultural barriers	Limited access due to age, gender norms, and dependency
Access to shelter	May be prioritized or able to negotiate space	Dependent on family	Often less secure shelter; may face overcrowding	Highly vulnerable to unsafe and overcrowded living conditions
Access to WASH (Water, Sanitation, Hygiene)	Fewer restrictions on access	May have access but less privacy	Often responsible for water collection; face risks at facilities	Face privacy and safety issues; limited access to menstrual hygiene support
Control over resources (e.g., cash, food, assets)	Often primary decision-makers	Limited or no control	Limited control; may rely on male relatives	No control; completely dependent on adults
Access to livelihoods/income-generating activities	Greater opportunities due to mobility and networks	Often too young, but may work informally	Limited access due to cultural roles and safety concerns	Very limited or no access
Participation in community decision-making	Often included or dominant	Rarely involved	Underrepresented; may be excluded due to gender norms	Not involved; voices rarely considered

3.3. Participation in Decision-Making and Governance

The analysis examined gender participation in governance and decision making processes within refugee camps across the IGAD region. While policies in most displacement camps mandate the inclusion of both men and women in camp committees, actual participation and influence remain highly unequal. The findings reveal that structural, cultural, and systemic barriers continue to marginalize women's voices. A protection officer interviewed during Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) noted,

“This is just by the law; however, women are not allowed to make even their own decisions in the house. They attend as a requirement but do not give a meaningful contribution.” (Comment by one man at Kakuma Refugee camp).

This reflects the gap between policy and practice, with women’s presence often being symbolic rather than impactful. From the KII and FGDs, several factors were identified that affect women’s participation in the governance structure within the camps as discussed below.

(a) Cultural and Religious Norms

Cultural norms and religious practices significantly restrict women’s participation in governance structures across refugee camps in the IGAD region. In camps like Dadaab (Kenya), Jijiga (Ethiopia), and Nakivale (Uganda), traditional gender roles relegate women to subordinate positions, limiting their ability to contribute meaningfully to decision-making.

“With my experience, cultural and religious norms really influence the practices around the camps, my experience in Jijiga Ethiopia and Dadaab in Kenya, the refugees move in camps with their cultures intact and this influences most of the practices be it education, women participation and normal gender roles in the household.” (KII interview with one of the partners).

For instance, women are often expected to adhere to customs that prioritize male authority, with one protection officer noting, “Women attend meetings as a requirement but do not give meaningful contributions”. Religious restrictions in some communities further prevent women from speaking publicly or engaging in mixed gender discussions, reinforcing their exclusion. These norms persist despite policies mandating gender-balanced committees, highlighting a gap between formal frameworks and lived realities. The entrenched belief that women’s primary roles are domestic undermines their visibility and influence in camp governance.

Additionally, promoting gender inclusion and ensuring active participation of women in deeply conservative communities was found as a complex challenge. Cultural and societal norms often discourage mixed-gender gatherings, making it difficult to hold joint meetings or training sessions for men and women. Moreover, some women feel reluctant or uncomfortable participating, especially when sessions are led by male facilitators. These barriers limit opportunities for women to engage meaningfully and benefit³³

(b) Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence exacerbates women’s marginalization in decision-making processes.

“In many camps within the IGAD region like Dadaab hosting Somalia refugees, Jijiga and Melkadida Camps in Ethiopia hosting mostly Somalia refugees, Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Uganda hosting refugees Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and South Sudan, cultural norms place women in subordinate roles, restricting their ability to participate in decision-making processes even in participating in meetings”. (KII with one of the IGAD partners.)

³³ UNHCR, East, Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region - Gender Equality, 2024 Annual Update

Refugee women in camps such as Kakuma (Kenya) and Melkadida (Ethiopia) face heightened risks of sexual violence, domestic abuse, and intimidation, which deter their active participation in community governance³⁴. Fear of retaliation and stigma often silences survivors, preventing them from advocating for their rights or engaging in public forums. GBV not only undermines physical safety but also erodes women's confidence and social standing, further entrenching power imbalances. For example, women who experience violence often avoid attending meetings altogether, reducing their representation in critical discussions about resource allocation or protection strategies. This systemic insecurity perpetuates cycles of exclusion, leaving women's perspectives underrepresented in decision making that directly affect their lives.

(c) Inadequate Empowerment and Structural Barriers

Most women in refugee camps have limited access to education and training, which hinders their ability to assume leadership roles within camp governance. In Nakivale and Kakuma, low literacy rates and language barriers, particularly among women from the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Somalia prevent meaningful participation in meetings conducted in official languages. Additionally, caregiving responsibilities and the lack of childcare support disproportionately affect women, restricting their availability for prolonged discussions or training sessions. Even when allowances are provided for participation, these are often insufficient to offset the opportunity costs of lost income or household duties.

(d) Inadequate Representation in Governance Structures

Despite policies requiring gender balance, refugee governance structures remain predominantly male-dominated. In camps across South Sudan and Ethiopia, women's voices are frequently sidelined due to entrenched patriarchal attitudes. For example, committees often prioritize men's opinions, with women's contributions dismissed or overlooked. Despite formal structures in some camps requiring gender-balanced committees, leadership roles are overwhelmingly held by men. Women who are selected often serve in subordinate or non-decision-making capacities, and their perspectives are rarely prioritized. The result is a governance landscape where decisions on critical issues fail to reflect women's needs and priorities.

3.4. Gender Roles and Power Dynamics in Refugee Camps

The analysis further revealed how cultural gender norms and displacement conditions reinforce traditional gender roles while simultaneously creating new challenges and opportunities for both men and women in refugee camps across the IGAD region. These dynamics significantly impact education, economic participation, leadership, and household decision-making, especially for women. The following factors show how gender roles affect gender-inclusivity dynamics in displacement camps. During FGD session, both men and women reportedly participate in decision-making, albeit through community leaders. Participation in decision-making among refugee populations is often superficial for women. While representation may exist, it is commonly male-dominated and rarely transformative³⁵ (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015).

³⁴ UNHCR. (2021). Gender-based violence in refugee settings: Overview and good practices. <https://www.unhcr.org/gender-based-violence.html>

³⁵ Cornwall, A., & Rivas, A. M. (2015). From Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment to Global Justice: Reclaiming a Transformative Agenda. *Third World Quarterly*.

Women's inclusion in governance structures in Gambella camps remains limited to informal consultation (WRC, 2021)³⁶.

"Women are overburdened with survival tasks (firewood, water), and face protection risks like sexual assault. Men engage more in leisure, constrained by cultural taboos on their labor". (One Man lamented during FGD in Gambela)

Refugee women often assume multiple roles (caregiver, provider), especially in female-headed households³⁷. Firewood collection is one of the most dangerous tasks, exposing women to sexual and physical violence (FAO & NRC, 2019). Cultural taboos around male domestic labour also entrench gendered inequalities³⁸.

(a) Education Access and Economic Participation

Cultural norms prioritizing boys' education over girls persist in most camps, particularly among Somali, South Sudanese and Congolese communities. Traditional expectations place men as providers and decision-makers, while women are expected to manage household duties. However, in displacement contexts, these roles are disrupted. As one FGD respondent noted,

"In Somali culture, men are traditionally responsible for providing for the family, but here, men are just sitting down waiting for food and at a time become violent." (One of the FGD respondents)

This disruption of traditional roles often creates tensions, with women increasingly engaging in income generation through small businesses and handicrafts while men struggle with unemployment and loss of status. In camps like Dadaab and Kakuma (Kenya), traditional gender roles remain strong, with men dominating transport and trade sectors while women focus on domestic duties and small-scale commerce.

(b) Household Roles and Responsibilities.

"Gender roles have been redefined in the camp, with women increasingly taking up roles previously held by men, including in income generation. The process has not been without hitches, especially in relation to increased exposure to GBV". (Comment during KII by a protection officer).

Displacement has compounded existing inequalities, making it even harder for women and gender minorities to access protection, work, and services. In many refugee communities, men struggle to retain primary control over financial resources, limiting women's economic empowerment which in most cases result to violent conduct at the household level³⁹. Women

³⁶ Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) (2021). Advancing Gender Equality in Humanitarian Response: Ethiopia Case Study.

³⁷ FAO & Norwegian Refugee Council (2019). Safe Access to Fuel and Energy (SAFE) in Humanitarian Settings

- ³⁸ Oxfam (2018). Women's Work in Crisis Response: Gender Analysis in Humanitarian Settings.

³⁹ Freedman, J. (2016). Gendering the International Asylum and Refugee Debate Palgrave Macmillan.

universally shoulder domestic burdens across all studied camps. For instance, Nakivale, one of the largest and oldest refugee settlements in Uganda, hosts refugees from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Somalia, Ethiopia, and South Sudan. Gender roles in the settlement are shaped by social and cultural norms from these countries, as well as the camp's livelihood opportunities, humanitarian programs, and security conditions. Men maintain their role as nominal household heads but often lack meaningful economic opportunities, leading to frustration and domestic violence. In Dadaab and Kakuma in Kenya, Melkadida Refugee Camp in Ethiopia and South Sudan, gender roles are largely shaped by social and cultural norms from the refugees' countries of origin, as well as the conditions in the camps⁴⁰. The table below summarizes key gender-specific roles observed and mentioned during FGDs.

Women face hardships as widows or separated spouses, while men report economic loss and emotional toll from asset depletion. Displacement affects genders differently: women may bear psychological, social, and protection burdens, while men often grapple with identity crises from lost roles as providers (El-Bushra & Gardner, 2016). In Gambella, it is estimated 60% of female refugees are single mothers or widows, increasing vulnerability (IRC Ethiopia, 2020).

“There are some households led by women here in our camp, children suffer since those women are not readily accepted . There is need to sensitise people in the camp here so that they can be friendly to women and girls. (A woman in Gambela lamented during FGD”.

Table 3. 7 Key Gender-Specific Roles

	Women and Girls	Men and Boys
Within household roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primary caregivers: child-rearing, cooking, and domestic chores ▪ Collecting firewood and water ▪ Small-scale home-based economic activities like handicrafts or selling food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Household heads and primary decision-makers. ▪ Income-generating activities; casual labour, small businesses, agriculture, transport services ▪ Ensuring family security and interactions with authorities or external actors.
Community Roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Informal support networks for childcare, psychosocial support, and GBV awareness. ▪ Engaging in vocational training and education programs ▪ Some take leadership roles in women's committees advocating for their rights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dominating leadership positions in refugee camp governance structures; committees on security, resource allocation, and conflict resolution. ▪ Representing households in negotiations with humanitarian agencies. ▪ Engaging in community security roles, sometimes forming vigilante groups to protect against threats.

⁴⁰ Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) (2021). Advancing Gender Equality in Humanitarian Response: Ethiopia Case Study

(c) Emerging Challenges and Shifting Dynamics

Displacement has forced some changes in gender roles, with women increasingly taking up economic responsibilities traditionally reserved for men, including running small businesses and participating in income generating activities. However, this shift often leads to conflict within households, as men struggle with the erosion of traditional authority, sometimes responding with violence and abuse. The inability of men to secure employment and provide for their families often leads them to join gangs or form informal power groups, especially in camps like Nakivale, where ethnic and political tensions heighten the stakes of control. In South Sudan and Somalia, tribal or clan affiliations often influence who controls resources and information. This power imbalance creates a hierarchical structure in camp life, where those with external connections or economic influence dominate governance, reinforcing inequality and limiting inclusive development.



Figure 3. 5: FGD discussion with women group from Kakuma Camp poses for a photo

3.5. Protection and Refugee Rights

In all the camps, the respondents showed that GBV is a big issue in refugee camps and common also in IDPs which need serious attention from all stakeholders. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical issue, with sexual violence, harassment, and early forced marriages being prevalent, particularly in IDP camps and refugee camps.

"My marriage was arranged without my knowledge, bride price exchanged, and I had to settle with someone older than my own parents." (South Sudan Refugee lead organization leader taking part in FGD)



Figure 3.6: Women Participating in FGD in Juba Camp Kismayo

An analysis reported by the Joint Data Centre on Forced Displacement shows that in IDP camps located in Mogadishu's Deynile District, approximately 19% of women reported experiencing GBV in 12 months. The most prevalent forms were physical assault (44%), psychological abuse (25%), and forced marriage (19%). Perpetrators were often intimate partners, parents, or other family members. Barriers to reporting such incidents include a lack of trust in public institutions, stigma, and fear of further violence⁴¹. These findings were supported by FGD conducted in Juba IDP camp in Kismayo where women and girls indicated rampant occurrence of GBV. Furthermore, a analysis by the Refugee Law Project highlighted that refugee camps often serve as hostile environments, making women and girls particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)⁴².

⁴¹ Joint Data Center. (2022). Prevalence, patterns, and determinants of gender-based violence among women and girls in IDP camps, Mogadishu, Somalia. Retrieved from https://www.jointdatacenter.org/literature_review/prevalence-patterns-and-determinants-of-gender-based-violence-among-women-and-girls-in-idp-camps-mogadishu-somalia

⁴² Refugee Law Project. (n.d.) Psychosocial challenges among refugee women and girls in Nakivale. Refugee Law Project. Retrieved from https://www.refugeelawproject.org/files/others/psychosocial_challenges_among_refugee_women_and_girls_nakivale.pdf



Figure 3.7: Nakivale Refugee camp women taking part in FGD

Women refugee leaders in Nakivale camp in Uganda further reiterated the same happening painting the increasing hostile environment for women and young girls. Figure 3.0 shows a photo of women in Nakivale taking part in FGD.



Figure 3. 8: Nakivale Refugee camp women taking part in FGD.

Figure 3.8 above shows women in Nakivale taking part in FGD where they indicated that SGBV are mostly caused by men who are supposed to protect them. They indicated that they are not only molested but also denied access to vital healthcare after such incidences due to cultural practices. A analysis by the Refugee Law Project highlighted that refugee camps often serve as hostile environments, making women and girls particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)⁴³.

*"We are being molested by our own husbands, brothers and our cousins yet nothing you can do to them since they collude with our leaders in the camp."
(Female participant in FGD in Nakivale)*

These conditions are fuelled by overcrowding, inadequate housing, and a lack of privacy, all of which contribute to the heightened risk of violence.



Figure 3. 9: Women in Nakivale taking part in FGD

In the small analysis of Gorom Refugee camp in South Sunda, the findings indicate that

- *About 50% of respondents depends on Community networks like family members, local leaders, and neighbors to protect and resolve conflicts. About 35% depends on NGO and other humanitarian organizations that offer legal aid, GBV care, and psychosocial intervention. Only 25% of respondents trust security staff, pointing to delayed responses and lack of accountability. Lastly a substantial number 20% indicated they have no protection support, exposing them to harm.*

⁴³ Refugee Law Project. (n.d.). Psychosocial challenges among refugee women and girls in Nakivale. Refugee Law Project. Retrieved from https://www.refugeelawproject.org/files/others/psychosocial_challenges_among_refugee_women_and_girls_nakivale.pdf

3.5.1. *Forms and Prevalence of Violence Noted*

1. *Sexual Violence:* Women and girls face heightened risks of rape and sexual assault, often perpetrated by intimate partners, family members, or people in authority.
2. *Domestic Violence:* Displacement-related stress, economic hardship, and inefficient social structures exacerbate domestic violence within households. In Gorom Camp, several GBV cases were linked to domestic violence, often fuelled by trauma and resource scarcity.
3. *Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA):* Women and girls are sometimes coerced into transactional sex for basic needs like food or protection. Humanitarian actors and security personnel were cited as perpetrators in some cases, undermining trust in aid systems.
4. *Harmful Traditional Practices:* Female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriages persist, even in displacement. Families in Nakivale and Deynile reported marrying off daughters to alleviate financial burdens, perpetuating cycles of vulnerability.
5. *Physical Assault and Robbery:* Isolated cases of attack, particularly at night. A few respondents indicated that they had not been subjected to any direct violence or harassment, but they did report feeling insecure in certain areas of the camp.
6. *Harassment and Intimidation:* Verbal intimidation, in particular against women and gender minorities. There were reports of exclusion from certain opportunities or services based on gender or ethnicity.

Major causes and risk factors on gender-based violence in refugee camps are: -

- Lack of Security and Weak Law Enforcement: Poorly policed camps allow perpetrators to act with impunity.
- Overcrowding and Poor Infrastructure: Limited privacy in shelters and shared latrines increases the risk of sexual violence.
- Economic Hardship: Displaced women often lack employment opportunities, making them vulnerable to exploitation.
- Breakdown of Social Networks: Traditional protection systems collapse during displacement, leaving women and girls exposed.
- Cultural Norms and Gender Inequality: Pre-existing discrimination against women and girls worsens in crisis situations, making it difficult for survivors to report abuse or seek justice

In conclusion, gender-based violence is mostly committed at the family level with either a parent, spouse, close family member or relatives as reported in all FGD conducted. Most GBV cases are going unreported due to lack of trust among the security agencies, lack of reporting mechanisms within the camps, cultural barriers, and social.

3.6. **Control Over Resources and Economic Livelihood**

In most refugee camps, socio-economic exclusion remains a significant concern, particularly for marginalized groups such as women, girls, and persons with disabilities. These populations

often lack equal access to economic opportunities, essential services, and decision making spaces within camp leadership structures. Refugees, particularly women, face systemic barriers that hinder their economic participation. Analysis by UN Women (2020) highlights that restrictive legal frameworks, limited access to financial resources, and the non-recognition of foreign qualifications are among the primary challenges refugee women encounter⁴⁴. These factors significantly impact their ability to secure sustainable livelihoods, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.

Men control family assets, and women lose custody and resources after divorce or death of husband. Patriarchal inheritance systems persist in displacement. Women's economic exclusion post-divorce or widowhood is common in South Sudanese traditions, carried into the camps (NRC, 2018). These practices continue in exile unless targeted gender-sensitive legal aid and empowerment programs are introduced

While many refugees engage in small-scale businesses, farming, and casual labour, their ability to scale these efforts is often obstructed by movement restrictions imposed by host communities. These restrictions confine refugees to specific camps or settlements, preventing access to broader job markets, education, and essential services. This isolation severely limits their integration and contribution to local economies. Focus group participants noted that, despite having proper documentation from the Chamber of Commerce, they are frequently harassed or arrested by police while transporting goods, underscoring the gap between policy and practice.

" Travelling to get goods is not easy. Many times, we are arrested, our goods confiscated. Even though the Chamber of Commerce has given us the necessary documentation, police still arrest us demanding small payments."
(FGD participant).

Economic empowerment programs, primarily targeting women and girls, have had both positive and adverse effects. While they help reduce the economic vulnerability of women and increase household resilience, they have inadvertently excluded men in some contexts, leading to family conflicts and perceptions of inequality. In male focus group discussions, participants expressed frustration over being overlooked.

"All economic empowerment programs are focusing on women and the girl child; we are the head of the family, yet we are not being empowered. The programs should first focus on men before women if we are to achieve equality." (Men's FGD in Kakuma).

⁴⁴ UN Women. (2020). Economic Empowerment of Refugee Women. [UN Women Report](#)



Figure 3.10: Men taking part in FGD at Kakuma Refugee Camp

This change in gender roles has altered traditional family dynamics. Women have taken on greater responsibilities as breadwinners, while men grapple with the loss of livelihoods and perceived societal prestige. Both male and female respondents emphasized the importance of income-generating opportunities that foster economic independence. Women called for increased access to entrepreneurship training and microfinance, while both groups preferred grants or direct support over loans, which often carry restrictive repayment conditions.

The informal economy dominates refugee livelihoods, with most relying on unstable small enterprises, casual labour, or NGO support. Such dependence is not sustainable and fosters a culture of dependency. Refugees also face legal and structural barriers to formal employment, including the absence of work permits, lack of identification documents, and discrimination based on refugee status. Even when permitted to work, many are confined to low-paying, informal jobs due to skill mismatches, language barriers, and the non-recognition of prior qualifications. A World Bank (2020) report emphasizes that removing legal barriers and promoting labour market integration is vital to creating long-term solutions for displaced populations.

Power dynamics within refugee camps further complicate economic inclusion. Camp authorities and refugee leaders are sometimes accused of favouritism, corruption, and mismanagement, resulting in unequal access to services and opportunities. Additionally, limited access to basic resources, particularly water, exacerbates tensions among refugee and host communities. Host community members often express resentment, perceiving that refugees receive preferential treatment in services such as education and healthcare.

"You can look for yourselves; all the best schools, and hospitals are for refugees. For us here, even our leaders are not serious. We are not considered as people here... morning refugees, evening refugees. There should be equal treatment for us all." (Host community member, Kakuma).

Despite these challenges, there are positive examples of integration. In countries like Kenya and Uganda, refugees can access business licenses and movement passes, facilitating economic activities. These efforts show that when legal frameworks and host governments support inclusion, economic integration becomes more achievable. However, disparities in resource allocation, leadership opportunities, and service access between host and refugee communities persist and must be addressed.

Refugees strongly voiced the need for capacity-building initiatives, including vocational training, financial literacy, and language courses. These programs can equip them with the skills necessary for economic development and greater autonomy. Moreover, integration with host communities through shared business initiatives and equal access to services was seen as a critical strategy for reducing tensions and promoting social cohesion.

Key findings

- Men generally have greater access to economic opportunities but face declining social status due to displacement.
- Women increasingly shoulder household financial burdens through informal work yet remain excluded from stable employment.
- Both men and women prioritize income-generating activities as essential for self-reliance.
- Women have taken on greater economic responsibilities, while men struggle with unemployment and loss of prestige, leading to household tensions.
- Most refugees depend on casual labour, small businesses, or NGO aid—all of which are precarious and reinforce long-term dependency.
- Legal restrictions (lack of work permits, ID cards) prevent formal sector access.
- Skills gaps, language barriers, and discrimination based on refugee status further limit opportunities.

3.7. Community Engagement and Refugee Inclusiveness

(a) Exclusion from Decision Making and Policy Formulation

Refugees across various IGAD host countries consistently express concerns about their exclusion from key decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. Despite international frameworks advocating for refugee participation, displaced communities across IGAD member states remain largely excluded from decisions that directly impact their lives.

“Refugees are often excluded from key decision-making processes that directly affect their lives, despite international legal frameworks advocating for their participation”. (Protection Officer comments During KII).

Since consultations on policy formulation typically focus on community or camp leaders and representatives, many refugees reported that they are seldom directly involved in the development of national or regional policies.

“We have heard about IGAD so many times, training women and building markets, however, this is the first time I am getting one on one with someone doing research for IGAD and asking us our problems” (A participant from FGD).

(b) Barriers to Participation in IGAD Summits and Policy Dialogues

Refugee-led organizations face significant obstacles in accessing regional policy forums. While IGAD summits, such as those advancing the Nairobi Declaration, aim to address displacement challenges, direct refugee participation remains minimal. Financial constraints, travel restrictions, and documentation barriers limit refugee leaders' ability to attend high-level meetings. As a result, policies are designed without adequate input from affected communities, undermining their relevance and effectiveness. For example, resettlement, integration, and repatriation decisions are often finalized by host countries and UNHCR without refugee consultation, perpetuating top-down approaches.

The establishment of the Regional Refugee Engagement Forum (RREF) is a positive and much-needed step toward making refugee voices heard in the decisions that affect their lives. In the past, policy discussions whether at the national or regional level often involved only a few selected leaders or representatives, leaving many refugees feeling excluded and unheard. This Forum provides a space where refugees from different backgrounds, including women and young people, can speak directly to policymakers and humanitarian actors through thematic representation.

It allows them to share their experiences, raise concerns, and help shape policies on key issues like education, safety, livelihoods, and long-term solutions. It also builds trust and accountability, and helps make policies more relevant, inclusive and effective.

(c) Limited Representation in Governance Structures

Refugees lack structured platforms to advocate for their rights within IGAD member states. Decision-making bodies, such as national governing councils, rarely include refugee representatives. Instead, refugee affairs are managed by host government agencies and NGOs, with minimal refugee input. A participant explained, *“We only interact with security or protection officers... our voices are not part of the system.”* This lack of representation exacerbates power imbalances, leaving refugees dependent on external actors to address their needs. Even when refugee led organizations exist, their influence is constrained by limited funding, legal recognition, and access to decision-making spaces.

In Uganda, the District Engagement Forum (DEF) and the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF) offer important platforms for meaningful refugee participation. These forums were set up to make sure that refugees have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. They have been especially valuable in creating space for open dialogue—both within refugee communities and between refugees and host communities. Through these forums, refugees can raise concerns, share ideas, and work with local authorities and partners to find practical solutions to the challenges they face.

4 Policy gaps, legal frameworks and best practices

Gender-sensitive refugee protection is crucial in addressing the specific vulnerabilities faced by displaced individuals, particularly women and girls, who are at heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), economic exclusion, and barriers to basic services. When policy implementors, development partners and IGAD secretariate were asked about the gaps in the policy on refugee protection across the IGAD Member States, the following themes emerged.

4.1. Integration of a harmonized Gender-Responsive Approach Among Member State

Despite efforts by IGAD to promote regional cooperation on refugee protection, there is no adequate integration of gender responsive approach adopted across all member states. This gap leads to inconsistent approaches to the protection and empowerment of refugee women, girls, and other vulnerable groups, such as persons with disabilities. This significantly hampers collective progress on gender equality, inclusive development, and peacebuilding. This absence of harmonization means that policies, laws, and practices vary widely across countries, leading to inconsistencies in implementation status across member States. While some states have included gender-sensitive provisions, others either lack them entirely or offer general statements without actionable implementation frameworks. Some IGAD member states have implemented noteworthy practices that could inform the development of a harmonized, gender-responsive regional framework:

Table 3.8 Best practices on harmonizing gender responsiveness Framework

COUNTRY	BEST PRACTICES
Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Refugee Act (2021) includes provisions for gender-sensitive protection, legal aid, and safeguards against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). - Establishment of safe spaces for women and girls in urban refugee contexts (e.g., Nairobi and Kakuma) - The Nairobi County Refugee Inclusion Strategy – Promotes affirmative action for refugees with consideration on matters of gender mainstreaming and topics around SGBV and cultural limitations
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethiopia's Refugee Proclamation (No. 1110/2019) aligns with international protection standards and allows refugee women to seek employment and education. - The government, with UNHCR and partners, runs livelihood and vocational training programs for women, especially survivors of GBV. - Ethiopia's Charter of Rights of Women and Girls provides a basis for cross-sectoral gender mainstreaming in refugee services.
Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uganda's Refugee Act (2006) and Refugee Regulations (2010) are widely praised for their inclusivity. - Refugees, including women, have the right to work, access land, and move freely.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uganda integrates refugee women into national gender policies and district-level planning, promoting ownership and inclusiveness. - Settlement-based approach allows NGOs to provide targeted gender-responsive services like GBV prevention, maternal health, and girl-child education
South Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - South Sudan utilizes community-based protection committees that include refugee women leaders in decision-making. - Implementation of GBV response centres in refugee settlements with strong referral pathways.
Djibouti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Law No. 159/AN/16/7th L 05 January 2017 - Legal framework aligned with the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1969 OAU Protocol - Master Plan for Education and Training 2021-2035 Women and girls seek firewood and leave school first it promoted education by giving more food to the girls
Somalia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refugee Act (2024): Provides the legal framework for the protection of refugees and asylum seekers in Somalia, outlining their rights and the procedures for recognition and documentation. - National Commission for Refugees and IDPs (NCRI): The key government body responsible for implementing refugee protection policies, managing asylum procedures, and overseeing the welfare of internally displaced persons. - International Framework: Somalia is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which guides national legislation and affirms the country's commitment to international refugee protection standards.

4.2. Gender-Specific Measures in Camps and Host Communities

A major concern among stakeholders is the weak incorporation of gender-specific protection mechanisms within the refugee frameworks of IGAD member states, particularly in refugee camps and host communities. Although many countries have adopted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), the presence of dedicated gender officers within refugee settings remains rare, leaving protection officers without sufficient support for addressing gender-based issues. Additionally, programs such as skill development and entrepreneurship centres are not systematically embedded in policy. While IGAD and its member states have made commendable strides in promoting refugee protection, gender-specific vulnerabilities particularly affecting women, girls, and other marginalized gender groups remain insufficiently addressed both in refugee camps and host communities.

Table 3. 9: Best practices in gender specific measures in camps and host communities

COUNTRY	BEST PRACTICES
Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kenya has established GBV Recovery Centres in some refugee-hosting areas like Kakuma and Dadaab, offering legal aid, medical care, and counselling. - The National Gender and Equality Commission (NGEC) collaborates with UNHCR and NGOs to improve gender-responsive services.
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Ethiopian government and ARRA (Agency for Refugees and Returnees Affairs) have worked with UN agencies to mainstream gender in camp management and protection services.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethiopia also piloted alternative fuel and energy programs (e.g., fuel-efficient stoves) to reduce exposure to GBV during firewood collection
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Uganda's Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHoPE) strategy integrates gender-sensitive approaches in education, livelihoods, and health services. - The country promotes gender parity in refugee leadership structures and supports women-led livelihood groups.
Uganda	
South Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through the IGAD Women and Peace Forum, South Sudanese refugee women have been engaged in dialogues on peace and reintegration, linking gender protection with broader peacebuilding
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decree No. 2017-409/PR/MI establishing the rules of procedure, the organizational arrangements and operation of the bodies responsible for management of the status of refugees in the Republic of Djibouti. CNE/CNR/ADMINISTRATIVE COURTS - Master Plan for Education and Training 2021-2035 - Women and girls seek firewood and leave school first - He promoted education by giving more food to the girls
Djibouti	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The national gender policy in 2016 - The Somalia national action plan of UNSC 1325- empowers women's role in the peace initiation, de-escalation of disputes, and humanitarian issues - the rape and indecency bill (former sexual offence bill). - The national GBV strategy was established- focuses on the fight against GBV and harmful social norms - The standard operating procedure was launched just several days ago, whose main aim is to respond to GBV early - Anti-FGM bill is also in process
Somalia	

IGAD's refugee protection framework provides a strong foundation through Priority Area Four, which calls for a favourable protection environment and access to essential services. To enhance its impact, the framework could benefit from greater alignment with IGAD's practical efforts by incorporating a clear implementation mechanism across member states, along with more specific guidance on addressing gender-related barriers.

4.3. Implementation Structures and IGAD's Enforcement Mandate

IGAD plays a vital coordinating and policy development role in advancing refugee protection across the region. While its mandate does not include enforcement authority or direct operational presence, its strength lies in facilitating regional dialogue and promoting shared standards. The success of policy implementation ultimately rests with member states, whose commitment and capacity to integrate regional frameworks into national systems are crucial. Strengthening collaboration and structured feedback mechanisms between IGAD and national actors could further enhance coherence and consistency in implementation. Encouragingly, there is significant potential to build on existing efforts to close the gap between policy and practice through more inclusive engagement and mutual learning.

The best practices among IGAD member states that they have demonstrated efforts to bridge the gap between regional refugee protection policies and national implementation, despite IGAD's limited enforcement mandate.

Table 3.10 : Best practices in implementation structures of refugee reforms

COUNTRY	BEST PRACTICES
Kenya	Institutionalized Refugee Reforms- Refugees Act 2021 & Shirika Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kenya's legal reform institutionalizes protection standards and introduces the Shirika Plan, aiming to transition refugee camps into integrated settlements. The Department of Refugee Services (DRS) has created working groups to engage counties and stakeholders, facilitating localized implementation. Kenya has also included refugees as beneficiaries in the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) and national primary and secondary school exams.
Ethiopia	Inclusion of Refugees in National Services- Refugee Proclamation No. 1110/2019 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This legal reform allows refugees to access education, work permits, and documentation. Ethiopia has developed the Jobs Compact and Education Sector Development Programme, integrating refugees in national programs.
Uganda	Progressive Refugee Hosting Policies- Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) Implementation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uganda integrates refugees into national development plans (e.g., Education Sector Strategic Plan, National Development Plan III). It grants refugees the right to work, freedom of movement, and access to services such as education and health. Strong coordination exists between the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), UNHCR, and development partners, with clear feedback mechanisms
South Sudan	Returnee and Reintegration Planning: Cross-border Coordination with IGAD and UNHCR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> South Sudan engages in cross-border coordination to support returnees and reintegration, particularly in border regions with Uganda and Ethiopia. The government collaborates with IGAD and humanitarian agencies for joint planning and information sharing
Sudan	Local Integration Initiatives (Pre-2023 Conflict): Naturalization and Settlement in Eastern Sudan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prior to the 2023 conflict, Sudan had relatively open policies for long-term refugees from Eritrea and South Sudan. Partnerships with local authorities and international agencies led to integration programs in Kassala and Gedaref. Some regions enabled access to land and basic services under local agreements.
Djibouti	Inclusion in National Education Plans: Refugee Education Integration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Djibouti incorporated refugee children into the national education system via the Education Sector Plan (2017–2020). IGAD supported Djibouti's efforts through the Regional Qualifications Framework.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Ministry of Education leads implementation in partnership with UNHCR and development actors
Somalia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refugee and IDPs Acts ▪ Refugee and Asylum Seekers Law – Approved 2024. ▪ Draft Bill on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) – Domestication of the Kampala Convention – In second reading. ▪ National Procedure for the Eviction of People from Their Homes or Land – Endorsed. ▪ Special Protocol for the Allocation of Land to Returning Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons – Endorsed. ▪ National Policy on Returning Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) – Endorsed

4.4. Levels of Displacement Across the IGAD Region

The IGAD region faces recurring waves of displacement, largely driven by unending political instability, intercommunal violence, and environmental shocks such as droughts and floods. Countries such as South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, and parts of Ethiopia have experienced prolonged conflict and instability, forcing millions to flee across borders in search of safety. Climate change has further intensified displacement patterns, disrupting livelihoods and placing immense pressure on host communities. This constant influx of displaced populations creates a significant burden on national systems, which are often under-resourced and ill-equipped to deliver adequate services. The frequency and scale of new displacements often force host governments to focus on emergency responses rather than long term ones. As a result, gender-responsive frameworks, already underdeveloped, are further sidelined.

4.5. Cultural Dynamics in the Region

Cultural norms and traditional gender roles deeply influence the formulation and implementation of refugee protection policies across the IGAD region. In many communities, patriarchal practices continue to dominate, often limiting women's participation in leadership and decision-making at both the household and community levels. These dynamics are frequently replicated within refugee and settlement camps, where refugee women and girls face social expectations that restrict their access to education, economic opportunities, and healthcare. In some cases, efforts to promote gender equality may be met with resistance due to cultural sensitivities or religious beliefs, which can undermine policy implementation even when frameworks are in place. Moreover, host community attitudes toward refugees especially women who break traditional norms by taking leadership roles, can create additional social barriers to effective implementation of this policy.

4.6. Political Will and National Policy Priorities

The effectiveness of IGAD's regional refugee protection framework largely depends on the political will of its Member States, as IGAD does not have the authority to enforce national refugee policies. Diverging national priorities, shifting political dynamics, and electoral considerations often take precedence over regional agreements, resulting in inconsistent policy implementation. In some cases, national refugee policies conflict with IGAD's regional commitments, leading to fragmented protection systems and uneven standards across the region.

Refugee issues are sometimes politicized, viewed more through the lens of national security or political strategy than through humanitarian principles or international protection obligations. This undermines the implementation of key IGAD frameworks such as the Nairobi Declaration and its accompanying Plan of Action. Political instability and changes in government can also stall or reverse progress on refugee policy reforms.

Sustained political commitment and stronger alignment between national laws and IGAD's regional goals are essential to ensure consistent and reliable protection for refugees across the region.

Recommendations for gender-inclusive implementation

5.1. Specific Country Barriers and Recommendations on Policy Implementation

The gender analysis revealed critical gender-based challenges in refugee protection and gaps in the implementation of regional refugee frameworks, particularly in addressing the unique needs of women, girls, men, boys, and marginalized groups. Below are recommendations to ensure gender-responsiveness refugee protection across the IGAD region.

Table 3. 11: Specific Country Barriers and Recommendations

	Barriers	Recommendations
Djibouti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dependence on humanitarian aid: In the absence of sustainable economic solutions, many remain dependent on aid from UNHCR and NGOs. ▪ Limited access to economic opportunities: Although legally permitted to work, refugee women face barriers such as lack of capital, training, or access to professional networks. ▪ Institutional capacity constraints in refugee management. ▪ Lack of Funding for Tertiary Care: Not enough budget for level 3 healthcare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase access to credit and economic empowerment of refugee women. ▪ Increase institutional capacity through technical support and training. ▪ Improve coordination between national and international agencies.
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy-level commitments vs. challenges in enforcement. ▪ Recent conflicts affecting refugee-hosting capacity. ▪ Bureaucratic delays in implementing refugee self-reliance programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhance implementation of Ethiopia's progressive refugee laws. ▪ Address bureaucratic barriers in refugee work and residence permits. ▪ Improve security frameworks to protect refugees from conflict spillover.

Kenya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Restrictive encampment policies limiting refugee integration. ▪ Periodic policy shifts causing uncertainty in refugee protection. ▪ Security concerns leading to restrictive legal amendments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fully implement the Refugee Act 2021 to support local integration. ▪ Strengthen urban refugee policies for sustainable livelihoods. ▪ Improve inter-agency coordination between government and refugee organizations.
Somalia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ "Weak implementation of the legal framework due to limited institutional capacity and financial constraints." ▪ Limited state capacity in managing refugee returns. ▪ Security challenges affecting humanitarian operations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a national refugee law aligned with IGAD's framework. ▪ Strengthen institutions managing returnee reintegration. ▪ Enhance cross-border security cooperation for refugee safety
South Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Political instability affecting refugee policies. ▪ Weak governance structures for refugee and returnee programs. ▪ Dependence on humanitarian aid without long-term solutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stabilize governance to ensure consistent refugee policies. ▪ Build national refugee management institutions. ▪ Promote durable solutions such as local integration and livelihoods programs.
Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ongoing political crisis disrupting refugee management. ▪ Legal inconsistencies in refugee protection laws. ▪ Capacity constraints in processing asylum claims. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengthen national refugee law enforcement. ▪ Improve asylum procedures to align with international standards. ▪ Increase institutional funding for refugee protection services.
Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resource constraints despite progressive refugee policies. ▪ Growing pressure on host communities. ▪ Inconsistent donor support affecting service delivery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhance refugee-host community development programs. ▪ Expand refugee livelihood opportunities. ▪ Advocate for sustained international funding.

5.2. Policy and Legal Frameworks

The primary gaps identified include weak alignment of national policies with regional, inconsistent implementation of IGAD commitments across member states, and IGAD's lack of enforcement power leading to ad hoc implementation. The key recommendations include:

- (a) *The IGAD should work on strengthening and supporting technical working groups on refugee protection in member countries e.g. The GRF Kenya Technical Working Group (TWG), Ethiopia TWG among other countries:*
The IGAD should leverage and supports existing Technical Working Group

on Refugees to include gender specialists and focal points from each Member State. This group can:

- Coordinate voluntary alignment of policies through technical assistance, dialogues and peer exchange.
 - Develop regional guidelines on gender-sensitive refugee protection, and GBV prevention.
 - Support capacity-building workshops and cross country learning visits using IGAD's convening power
- (b) *Develop a Voluntary Legal Harmonization Toolkit*: IGAD can create a model toolkit to support Member States in aligning their national refugee laws with the IGAD Refugee Policy Framework and gender equality standards. The toolkit would include:
- A self-assessment checklist to help Member States evaluate the alignment of their laws with regional standards;
 - Templates for drafting gender-responsive legal provisions;
 - Guidelines for organizing regional legal roundtables, where Member States can share progress, challenges, and best practices in domestic legal reform.
- (c) *Establish a Gender Monitoring Function within Existing IGAD Structures*. This can be done through: -
- Integrate a gender and protection module into the existing Regional Forced Displacement Data Collection and Analysis System.
 - Partner with national statistical offices and humanitarian actors to collect and analyze sex- and age-disaggregated data.
 - Produce an annual Gender Inclusion analysis that synthesizes regional trends and Member State progress, supported by regular virtual reporting sessions
- (d) *Embed Gender-Responsive M&E in Existing IGAD Programmes*: IGAD should mainstream gender-responsive M&E indicators into its existing regional refugee and resilience programmes. This could include:
- Supporting Member States to integrate harmonized gender indicators in their national refugee M&E frameworks.
 - Promoting the use of tools like gender scorecards or community feedback systems.
 - Convening annual regional review meetings to assess progress on gender outcomes, with space for civil society input.

5.3. Access to Resources and Services

The primary gaps identified include inequitable access to essential services (education, health, water, sanitation), digital exclusion, and barriers to documentation for women, girls, and marginalized groups. The following recommendations would help address the gaps.

- (a) *Support Member States to ensure Gender-Responsive Service Delivery in Refugee Settings*: IGAD to liaise with all stakeholders in refugee protection to develop and enforce Minimum Standards for Gender-Responsive Service Provision across health, education, WASH, and shelter. However, it should allow for tailoring across IGAD

member states. Further, services should be tailored to the diverse needs of women, girls, boys, and men. The responsible actors should include respective government ministries, UNHCR, and NGOs working with refugee protection.

- (b) ***Support and champion for expansion and access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Services within refugee camps among member State:*** Collaborating with member states and other actors, IGAD should develop and champion a mechanism for guaranteeing the availability of SRH services, including family planning, maternal care, menstrual hygiene, and GBV response services in all refugee camps and settlements within the member States. Advocate for countries to integrate SRH services into their national health systems for refugees, including maternal care, contraception, and post-GBV support. This is aimed at improving health outcomes and autonomy for women and girls.
- (c) ***Advocate for Member States to Streamline Access to Civil Documentation:*** Collaborating with member states, IGAD should develop strategies to help simplify and subsidize access to birth certificates, ID cards, and refugee status documents for displacement communities. This should be done in liaison with respective civil registration authorities, UNHCR, legal aid providers etc. This should be aimed at enhancing legal identity and service access by displacement communities.

5.4. Leadership and Participation

Gaps identified include the underrepresentation of women, youth, and marginalized groups in leadership roles within refugee communities and decision-making structures.

- (a) ***Support Institutionalization of Gender Parity in Refugee Governance:*** IGAD to support member States to mandate gender parity in refugee leadership structures and camp committees, with monitoring mechanisms to track and report participation levels. This should help promote inclusive decision making and representation. Responsible actors may include the IGAD secretariat, refugee affairs directorates, and NGOs and individual countries.
- (b) ***Support Establishment of Women's Leadership and Civic Engagement Programs:*** IGAD to initiate and implement capacity-building initiatives for refugee women and girls in leadership, advocacy, public speaking, and governance within its member States. This is to empower female leaders in refugee and host communities. Possible actors may include UN Women, National Women's Councils, and CBOs.

5.5. General Protection and Rights

The primary gaps identified include the high prevalence of GBV (sexual violence, forced marriages, domestic abuse), limited access to protection for vulnerable groups (women, children, and marginalized groups), and weak accountability mechanisms. Weak legal enforcement and impunity for perpetrators as well as a lack of safe reporting mechanisms. The following are the recommendations.

- (a) ***Support the Institutionalization of a Comprehensive GBV Prevention and Response Protocols among Member States.***
IGAD should support Member States to adopt a regional GBV response protocol for

refugees, including minimum standards on prevention, reporting, referral, and survivor-centred services. Establish specialized GBV Protection units in various refugee camps. This is aimed at harmonizing refugee protection standards across the region.

(b) ***Support the establishment of Gender-Sensitive Safe Reporting Mechanisms in Refugee Camps***

IGAD should create confidential, multilingual, and trauma-informed reporting systems within refugee camps and settlements that are integrated with health and legal services. The Reporting Mechanisms should be adopted by member countries.

5.6. Gender Roles and Control Over Resources

The gaps identified include entrenched gender norms that place disproportionate burdens on women and girls, especially in caregiving, domestic labour, and unpaid community work, leading to limited opportunities for self-advancement. Also, limited access to livelihoods, credit, skills training, and men's loss of livelihood leads to frustration and domestic violence. The following are the recommended actions.

(a) ***Advocate for Integration of Gender Norm Transformation in Camp-Based Programs among member States***

IGAD can initiate and champion for the rollout of community-led gender dialogue and norm-shifting programs that engage men and boys in promoting equitable roles and challenge harmful practices like early marriage and domestic violence. These programs should be designed to reduce gender inequalities at the household and community level.

(b) ***Promote Shared Domestic and Economic Roles among member States***

IGAD should support and facilitate the development of mentorship initiatives led by member states, targeting male community and religious leaders. These programs should promote positive role modelling around shared domestic responsibilities such as childcare and household financial management—to challenge patriarchal norms and foster more equitable family dynamics, thereby reducing household conflict and enhancing social cohesion.

(c) ***Support the Expansion of Refugee Women's Access to Livelihoods and Financial Services among member State.***

IGAD, in collaboration with member states and development partners, should champion and support efforts to scale up access to vocational training, business grants, and microfinance services for refugee women—particularly those from vulnerable groups including widows, single mothers, and youth-headed households. These efforts may include designing joint loan or grant schemes for male-female household partnerships, alongside tailored financial literacy programs to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of such interventions.

Table 3. 12: Policy Areas

Policy Area	Recommended Action (IGAD's Role)	Description	Expected Outcome
1. Gender Norm Transformation in Refugee Camps	Champion and support the integration of community-led gender norm-shifting programs through Member State	IGAD should support member states to implement structured gender inclusive dialogues that engage men and boys to promote equitable roles and challenge harmful practices such as early marriage and domestic violence. These programs should target reduce gender inequalities at household and community levels.	Increased community awareness and acceptance of gender equality; reduced gender-based violence; improved well-being for women and girls.
2. Shared Domestic and Economic Roles	Facilitate and support mentorship programs targeting male leaders through Member State	IGAD should work with member states to design mentorship initiatives for male community and religious leaders that promote positive role modelling in household tasks (e.g., childcare, income-sharing) and challenge patriarchal norms.	Enhanced gender-equitable household dynamics; reduced household tensions; stronger male allyship in gender equality.
3. Livelihoods and Financial Access for Refugee Women	Champion and coordinate with partners and member States to scale up women-focused economic empowerment programs	In collaboration with donors and NGOs, IGAD should advocate for the expansion of vocational training, business grants, and microfinance tailored to vulnerable women and men (e.g., single-headed households). Programs should include joint male-female household business grants and financial literacy training.	Greater economic independence among refugee women and men; enhanced household resilience; growth of inclusive refugee economies.

5.7. Community Engagement and Refugee Inclusiveness

The primary gaps identified include a lack of inclusive consultation mechanisms, underrepresentation of women and minority groups in decision-making, and weak accountability to affected populations. There are also host-refugee tensions over resource allocation. Key recommendations to consider include.

- (a) ***Strengthen the Refugee Advisory Councils with Gender and Diversity Representation:*** IGAD to Strengthen and support the refugee councils and forums at camp, district, and national levels in each Member State, that include diverse voices such as women, youth, and marginalized groups. This is to help promote community ownership and legitimacy in decision-making.

(b) Advocate for Member State to Invest in Community Mobilizers and Peer Educators:

IGAD to train and deploy refugee peer mobilizers, with gender balance, to support awareness of rights, health, protection, and participation of displacement communities. This is aimed at promoting sustained behavioural change and knowledge uptake.

Table 3.13 : Summarized Recommendation

Thematic Areas	Strategic Action	How
Policy and Legal Frameworks	Strengthen the IGAD Technical Working Group (TWG) on Refugees and Forced Displacement by including gender focal points from each Member State.	IGAD already convenes a TWG on refugee issues. Adding gender focalpoints would enhance its inclusivity and expertise without significant cost. These focal points can guide gender integration in refugee policy dialogues and share best practices.
	Develop a Voluntary Legal Harmonization Toolkit to support alignment of national refugee laws with IGAD's Policy Framework and gender standards.	A toolkit can be developed with technical support from partners like UNHCR or UN Women. IGAD can provide a convening platform for legal experts to co-create practical tools such as templates, checklists, and case studies.
	Institutionalize Comprehensive GBV Prevention and Response Protocols, including minimum standards and specialized GBV units.	IGAD can work with Member States and humanitarian actors to endorse a common GBV framework. Implementation can be championed by national partners, with IGAD serving as a facilitator and standard-setter.
	Mandate gender parity in refugee governance structures (e.g., camp committees, advisory councils).	IGAD can include this requirement in its policy guidance and encourage implementation through advocacy, linked to donor reporting and accountability. Pilot programs can be established in select refugee-hosting countries.
	Establish Refugee Advisory Councils with inclusive representation of women, youth, and marginalized groups.	These forums can be developed in collaboration with NGOs and refugee-led organizations. IGAD's role is to provide policy endorsement and convene regional learning exchanges.

Social Norms and Participation	Promote shared domestic and economic roles through mentorship by respected male leaders (e.g., religious/community elders).	This can be implemented through IGAD-supported community dialogue programs and partnerships with local CSOs. IGAD can provide region-wide communication toolkits and peer-learning models.
Service Delivery and Inclusion	<p>Institutionalize gender-responsive service minimum standards in health, education, WASH, and shelter.</p> <p>Expand access to livelihoods and financial services for women, including joint grants and financial literacy programs.</p>	<p>IGAD can support technical guidelines development in partnership with UNHCR, UNICEF, and relevant Ministries, reinforcing commitments through existing policy platforms like the Nairobi Declaration.</p> <p>IGAD can collaborate with donors and regional development banks to advocate for refugee inclusion in economic empowerment programs, especially targeting women-headed households and vulnerable youth.</p>

Conclusion and Call for Action

Refugee protection in the IGAD region cannot be fully realized without confronting and addressing the deeply entrenched gender inequalities that continue to shape the lived experiences, vulnerabilities, and opportunities of displaced populations. Women, girls, and other marginalized gender groups often face disproportionate risks during displacement ranging from gender-based violence and limited access to essential services, to exclusion from decision making spaces and livelihood opportunities. These inequalities are not incidental but are rooted in broader social, economic, and political structures that systematically disadvantage certain groups.

While IGAD has laid a solid policy foundation through its Refugee Policy Framework, Gender Strategy and related regional instruments, the critical next step lies in translating these frameworks into concrete, measurable actions that dismantle discriminatory systems, norms, and practices. This requires moving beyond policy rhetoric to real, sustained investments in gender equality and protection mechanisms across the region.

IGAD member State must lead by example by institutionalizing gender-responsive and inclusive approaches within their own structures and operations. At the same time, the IGAD Secretariat should continue efforts through provision of technical support and advocacy for resources to Member States to ensure that regional commitments are effectively localized. This includes embedding gender considerations across all aspects of refugee protection from data collection and analysis, budgeting, program design and implementation, to monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and frameworks.

Moreover, special attention must be paid to empowering displaced women, girls, men and boys and minority groups as agents of change. This involves not only protecting them from harm but also creating pathways for their active participation and leadership in humanitarian governance, peacebuilding, and community development efforts. Ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, justice, and economic opportunities is essential to breaking cycles of dependency and marginalization.

Ultimately, achieving transformative refugee protection in the IGAD region demands a collective commitment to gender justice. Governments, humanitarian actors, civil society organizations, and refugees themselves all have critical roles to play in building inclusive, resilient, and equitable protection systems for all.

7.1. Key Informant Interview Guides

1. **General Understanding of the Policy**
 - How familiar are you with the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection?
 - In your view, what are the key strengths of this framework regarding gender inclusivity?
 - Do you think the framework adequately addresses the specific needs of refugee women, men, girls, and boys? Why or why not?
2. **Gender-Responsive Provisions**
 - Does the framework explicitly incorporate gender equality principles? If so, how are they implemented.
 - How does the framework address the unique challenges faced by refugee women and girls (e.g., gender-based violence, access to education, livelihoods, and healthcare)?
 - Are there any provisions for the participation of women in decision-making and leadership in refugee governance?
3. **Implementation and Gaps**
 - How effectively has the IGAD Policy Framework been implemented in refugee - hosting countries? Are there gender-related challenges in its implementation?
 - What gender-related gaps have you observed in the framework's approach to protection, integration, and durable solutions for refugees?
 - How does the framework address the needs of marginalized refugee groups, including LGBTQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, and older women?
 - What barriers prevent refugee women from accessing services such as legal aid, healthcare, or economic opportunities under this framework?
4. **Institutional Capacity and Monitoring**
 - Is there gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place to track the framework's impact?
 - Do IGAD member states have adequate institutional capacity and funding to implement gender-responsive refugee protection policies?
 - How do different actors (government, civil society, UNHCR, donors) collaborate to ensure gender inclusiveness in refugee protection?
5. **Recommendations for Improvement**
 - What are your recommendations for strengthening gender inclusiveness in the IGAD Policy Framework on Refugee Protection?

7.2. Focus Group Discussion Guides

A. Access to Resources and Services: Are there Gender-specific barriers and inequalities in accessing resources, services, and opportunities like healthcare, education, livelihoods, legal assistance etc within refugee camps?

B. Participation in Decision-Making: How are women, men, and other gender groups included in decision-making processes related to refugee protection and integration?

C. Gender Roles and Responsibilities

1. How do cultural and societal norms in your community affect gender roles for refugees and host community members?
2. Are there any noticeable differences in how men, women, boys, and girls experience displacement and resettlement?

D. Protection and Rights: What are the main safety and protection challenges faced by women and girls in refugee settings?

E. Control over Resources: What are some of the Power dynamics and control over assets, income, and entitlements.

F. Community Engagement: Are there inclusive consultations and involvement in refugee program planning in the camps?

G. Policy Implementation and Gaps: From your perspective, how well is the IGAD Policy Framework addressing gender-specific issues and what are the gaps you may recommend?



GENDER ANALYSIS ON THE DYNAMICS OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN THE IGAD REGION