

# POLICY BRIEF

## Building Resilience: Addressing the Impacts of Climate-related Hazards on Livelihoods and Unpaid Household Labour in Kenya's Refugee-Hosting Counties.



*Dried-up water sources resulting from prolonged drought force pastoralists to travel long distances in search of water and pasture. This negatively impacts the region's primary source of income. Immediate action is needed to strengthen resilience, diversity, livelihoods, and protect vulnerable groups.*

### Executive Summary

IMPACT Initiatives conducted a qualitative assessment to explore how climate-related hazards affect livelihoods and unpaid household labour, among refugee and host communities in the host communities in Kenya's refugee-hosting areas, specifically in Dadaab (Garissa County), Kakuma (Turkana County), and Kibera informal settlement in Nairobi County. The study used Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Participatory Workshops (PWs) to examine how these hazards influence income generation, productivity, access to services, and unpaid care work across diverse population groups.

The assessment focused on four primary climate hazards, extreme heat, drought and water scarcity, heavy rainfalls and floods, and cold weather/dust storms. These hazards are growing in intensity and unpredictability, negatively impacting livelihoods, causing economic instability and forcing households to adopt negative coping mechanisms to survive.<sup>1</sup>

Climate shocks compound existing vulnerabilities like poverty, displacement, and gender inequality, worsening impacts on livelihoods and unpaid care work, especially for refugees, women, persons with disabilities, and children.<sup>2</sup> While the National government, county government, donors, and development actors provide support and interventions, including climate-smart agriculture, vocational training and infrastructure improvements, reported strategies were often temporary or insufficient in the face of repeated hazards. This brief summarizes key findings from the research and presents the recommended actions for policymakers, donors, and development partners.

### Key Messages

**Climate change-induced** hazards such as drought and floods are disrupting livelihoods and exacerbating the burden of unpaid care work. Vulnerable groups such as refugees, women, children, and persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected. For example, refugees face restricted mobility, and women and children spend more time on caregiving and other household tasks, which increases their reliance on risky coping strategies.

**Most of the coping mechanisms** employed are unsustainable and expose vulnerable groups such as refugees to exploitation, exhaustion, and health risks, highlighting the need for safer, long-term adaptation options.

**Concrete solutions** include policy amendment, smart agriculture, alternative livelihoods, water infrastructure, climate-smart shelter and cooking methods, better childcare support, and disease prevention.

**Government, donors, and implementing partners** need to invest more in infrastructure, inclusive planning, and programs that specifically address the impacts of climate change on different population groups.

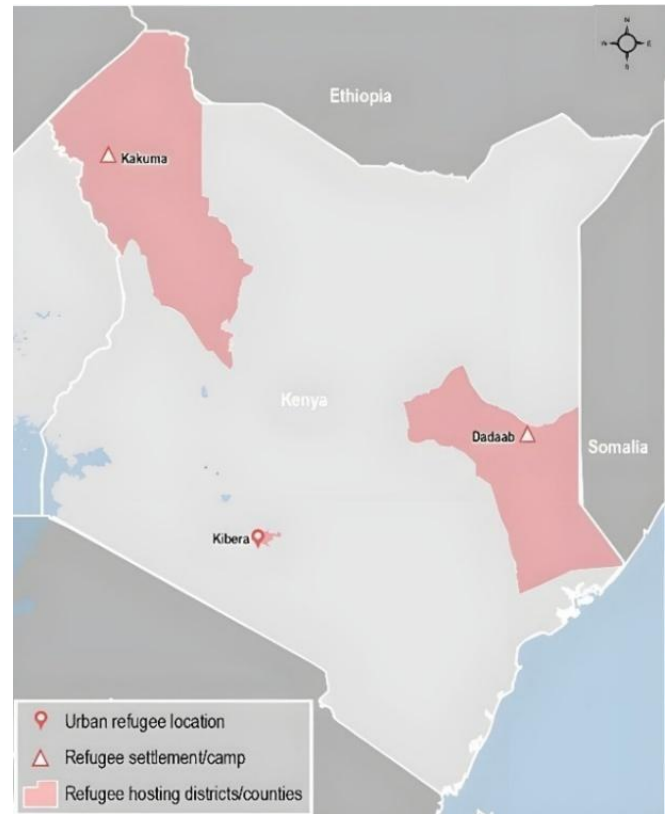
<sup>1</sup> The Climate Reality Project, [how the climate crisis is impacting Kenya](#), March 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Initiative on Foresight, From Climate Risk to Resilience: [Unpacking the Economic Impacts of Climate Change in Kenya](#), Nov 2023.

## Introduction

Climate change is increasingly driving households in Kenya's refugee-hosting areas, particularly Kakuma, Dadaab, and Kibera, toward harmful coping strategies that threaten their livelihoods, health, and general well-being. Based on evidence from recent assessments that highlight how extreme heat, droughts, floods, and other climate-related hazards have intensified vulnerabilities for both refugee and host communities. These challenges are compounded by underlying social and economic inequalities, particularly affecting refugees, women, children, and persons with disabilities.

While some adaptation efforts are underway, such as the promotion of drought-tolerant crops, small business diversification, and improved water systems, these remain largely short-term, project-based, and limited in scope. Strengthening climate adaptation in this context therefore refers to changes in processes, practices and structures to moderate potential damage or benefit from the opportunities associated with climate change. This policy brief presents key findings from the assessment and provides actionable recommendations to strengthen inclusive and sustainable climate adaptation in Kenya's refugee-hosting counties and Kibera.



## Problem statement

Kenya continues to face increasingly frequent and severe climate-related hazards, particularly droughts, floods, extreme heat, and strong winds, which are intensified by the effects of climate change. Between 2021 and 2023, prolonged drought conditions were immediately followed by widespread flooding, compounding vulnerabilities and undermining recovery efforts in already fragile regions such as Garissa and Turkana Counties. During this period, more than half a million households were displaced, and over 13,000 livestock were lost, exacerbating vulnerabilities among populations in these regions.<sup>3</sup> Households in these regions often face recurring climate-related disasters, with their impacts compounded by declining livelihood opportunities, rapid population growth, and persistent socio-economic challenges. This pattern has had a disproportionate impact on populations in these counties, especially within refugee camps located within these climate-stressed areas.

## Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach to assess how climate hazards affect livelihoods and unpaid care work in Kenya's refugee-hosting areas. Data collection took place between 4 and 27 March 2025, including:

- **31 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)** with community leaders, county officials, persons with disabilities, refugee-led organizations, and representatives from health and education sectors.
- **16 Participatory Workshops (PWs)** held separately with men and women among refugee and host communities in Kakuma, Dadaab, and Kibera.

The discussions explored hazard patterns, livelihood impacts, coping and adaptation strategies, and community-driven recommendations for resilience.

<sup>3</sup> Impact Initiatives, [EL Niño floods worsen humanitarian needs in Kenya](#), Nov 2023.

## Key Findings

### Livelihoods

Key informants reported that livelihoods in host communities within Kakuma and Dadaab primarily revolve around pastoralism, small businesses, casual labour, and small-scale agriculture. Refugees, on the other hand, mainly relied on small businesses and casual labour. However, climate-related challenges, such as depressed pasture, water scarcity, and livestock diseases and mortality, were reported to have contributed to increased poverty levels, heightened food insecurity, and fuelled resource-based conflict. Similarly, small businesses and casual labour were reported to have suffered disruptions due to these hazards, which have damaged infrastructure and reduced income-generating opportunities. These disruptions also restricted access to basic services such as health care and education.<sup>4</sup>



*Damage to the Garissa-Modogashe during the 2023 flood. This disrupted access to goods, affecting livelihoods.*

As a result, households were actively adapting to climate-related hazards in various ways. One reported strategy was livelihood diversification. Apart from pastoralism, households were engaging in small businesses, poultry farming, charcoal sales, and tailoring to reduce reliance on single income sources. Farmers were reported to have practiced early harvesting, irrigation, and relied on hay for livestock. Infrastructure modifications were also highlighted, with marketplaces and traders constructing shaded stalls to minimize heat exposure, raising storage units, and installing improved drainage systems to protect goods from flooding during heavy rainfall. Despite these adaptation efforts, climate-related hazards have continued to push households toward harmful coping strategies with serious social, health, and environmental consequences. Cases of theft, drug use, and deforestation were reported. Other risky practices include unsafe sand harvesting, transactional sex, and illegal trade. Cases of youth radicalization and involvement in criminal gangs, potentially driven by unemployment and climate-related disruptions to education, were also reported in the Dadaab region.

### Household labour

Climate shocks were reported to significantly intensify unpaid household labour in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps and their surrounding host communities. Key informants reported that, driven by patriarchal norms and prevailing social and economic inequalities in these regions, women bore the brunt of unpaid labour, caregiving responsibilities. Household chores such as cooking were reported to become more exhausting and riskier due to unsafe cooking spaces, lack of water, and damaged kitchens. Water and firewood collection was reported to become more burdensome, requiring longer, riskier trips under harsh conditions. Childcare was also reported to become more demanding as children face dehydration, malnutrition, and waterborne diseases, increasing the emotional and physical strain on caregivers during climate crises. The situation was reported to be dire for women living with disabilities or those caring for persons with disabilities. The intersection of gender and disability exacerbated the challenges faced, leading to multiple layers of exclusion and discrimination and limiting their ability to fully engage in livelihood activities or access basic services due to their compounded caregiving responsibilities.

Respondents reported that, in refugees and host communities, households coped with climate shocks by adjusting their daily routines and a reallocation of labour roles. Participants reported that households shifted activities like cooking, water collection, and laundry to cooler hours and made use of alternative fuels and transport options. They prioritized water harvesting and reuse and preserved food through raised storage facilities and early cooking. Caregivers were reported to adapt by limiting children's exposure to harsh weather, extending breastfeeding, and encouraging school attendance for meals. Households also redistributed labour among family members, with communal support helping ease burdens during

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<sup>4</sup> Kenya News, [Floods destroy Garissa-Modogashe Road](#), Nov 2023.

extreme events. Respondents also reported harmful coping strategies, noting that cases of sexual exploitation, child labour, and school dropout, particularly among girls, were increasing. Women and girls faced heightened risks of fatigue, illness, and abuse due to intensified unpaid care responsibilities during climate crises.

## Recommendations

To address the challenges pointed out, it is recommended that Garissa and Turkana County Governments, donors, and implementing partners consider the following policy actions: These recommendations were provided by the participants during the assessment, which examined the impacts of climate-related hazards on livelihoods and unpaid care work in refugee-hosting areas. This involved incorporating insights from KIIs and PWs, which highlighted the experiences and priorities of refugee and host communities. Additional recommendations were generated during the dissemination of the findings. Stakeholders, including community representatives, county government officials, humanitarian agencies, and development partners, reviewed the assessment findings and provided more recommendations aligned with ongoing interventions.

### National and County Governments

- **Consider integrating refugees and vulnerable population-specific needs into county climate change action planning (CCCAP),<sup>5a, b</sup>** ensuring that livelihood adaptation measures reflect contextual realities. Develop targeted action plans for each population group rather than treating them as a single vulnerable group, as their needs and vulnerabilities vary significantly. This will improve the monitoring and evaluation process during the implementation.
- **Explore aligning the Kenya Refugee Act,<sup>6</sup> Shirika Plan,<sup>7</sup> and County Integrated Development Plans (CIDPs)<sup>8 a, b</sup>** to better support socio-economic inclusion and resilience for refugees. This includes reviewing and updating the legal and policy provisions to address access to land, freedom of movement, and other factors that influence livelihood security and climate adaptation<sup>9</sup> in refugee-hosting regions.
- **Expand opportunities for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs** within refugee hosting regions of Kakuma and Dadaab, with a focus on digital skills, entrepreneurship, and climate-resilient livelihoods, and drought-resistant agriculture.
- **Strengthening agricultural extension services promoting drought-tolerant crops and climate-smart techniques (e.g. mulching and irrigation)** and supporting value chains like *Prosopis juliflora* (Mathenge), which are already part of local coping strategies.
- **Incorporate inclusive measures for Persons with Disabilities**, including accessible infrastructure and assistive technologies, to ensure equitable participation in climate adaptation and livelihood activities. As highlighted during the assessment, persons with disabilities are not fully participating in income generation due to mobility challenges.
- **Strengthen clean energy adoption and waste management systems in refugee camps and surrounding host communities** to reduce environmental degradation, health risks, and the time burden on women and girls. Firewood collection was reported to have become more burdensome, requiring longer, riskier trips under harsh conditions.

### Donors & UN Agencies

- **Provide technical and financial support to strengthen policy alignment, livelihood resilience, and inclusive climate action.** County government officials highlighted the need for further engagement with the UN agencies, especially with the implementation of *shirika plan*.
- **Incorporate climate-related disaster risk reduction components into humanitarian programming.** This includes designing interventions that address emergency needs as well as reducing long-term climate vulnerability, for instance, including flood risk mapping in the choice of shelter material, construction site, or climate-smart agriculture.

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<sup>5 a</sup>, KIPPRA, [Garissa County Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2028](#).

<sup>b</sup>, KIPPRA, [Turkana County Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2027](#).

<sup>6</sup> [The Refugee Act, 2021](#).

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, [Shirika plan](#), April 2025.

<sup>8 a</sup>, [Garissa County Integrated Development Plan 2023-2027](#).

<sup>b</sup>, [Turkana County Integrated Development Plan 2023-2027](#).

Respondents from the camp setting noted that the shelters provided are not adequate in protecting their families, leaving them vulnerable, especially during the rainy season.

- **Invest in long-term innovative livelihood programs and assistive technologies targeting vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, women, and youth.** Disaster risk reduction and recovery programs should include gender and disability sensitive approaches to make sure that everyone's needs are considered and addressed. This will cater to the needs of women with disabilities and those who care for children with disability, allowing them to make a living.
- **Support research and targeted interventions addressing climate-linked vulnerabilities such as gender-based violence, family instability, and school dropouts.** Key informants reported that scientific evidence highlighting the correlation between climate change and increased cases of gender-based violence or school dropout rates in these regions will be crucial in designing interventions.
- **Develop and fund gender-responsive programs in Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps and surrounding host communities** to reduce unpaid household labour and promote gender equality. Key informants highlighted that patriarchal norms and entrenched socio-economic inequalities place a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work and caregiving responsibilities on women. Programs focusing on providing time-saving technologies, access to clean energy, community childcare support, and targeted skills development to reduce workloads and empower women economically and socially are essential.

## Development Partners and NGOs

- **Collaborate with government and local actors to implement integrated climate and socio-economic inclusion programs** for both refugee and host communities. This includes multi-year programs that diversify livelihoods, reducing dependence on sectors affected by climate-related hazards, like pastoralism, provide skills training, support small business startups, and build the capacity of local NGOs and refugee-led organisations to deliver inclusive, climate-smart programs.
- **Lead knowledge-sharing, innovation, and scaling of successful adaptation practices across refugee-hosting areas.** Pilot projects that have proven effective should be documented, adapted, and replicated across different refugee and host settings. As highlighted, such an approach would ensure interventions are effective, resources are used efficiently, and resilience is achieved. Integrating local and traditional knowledge and actively involving communities in planning and implementation should be encouraged to enhance cultural relevance, ownership, and sustainability.
- **Facilitate protection and education programs** such as safe shelters, cash transfers, flexible schooling, and school feeding programmes to enhance resilience and well-being. As reported, climate-related hazards increase the risks of school dropout, child labour, and exposure to violence, particularly among girls. Strengthening protection systems and ensuring access to education can reduce harmful coping strategies.
- **Promote the adoption of alternative cooking solutions** such as energy-efficient stoves, briquettes, and solar cookers to reduce deforestation, indoor pollution, and the time burden on women and girls.
- **Strengthen community-based waste management systems in refugee camps and urban informal areas.** Poor waste management, worsened by climate shocks, contributes to environmental degradation, blocked drainage systems, and heightened public health risks. Establishing community-driven waste collection and disposal initiatives can reduce these hazards while creating income-generating opportunities.
- **Running programs in early warning systems** to ensure communities are prepared and respond to extreme weather events before they occur. As reported, this will enhance timely response.

This policy brief presents findings, lessons and recommendations identified through a research study conducted by IMPACT Initiatives on the [Impacts of Climate-Related Hazards on Livelihoods and Unpaid Household Labour](#) in Kenya's refugee-hosting counties. The brief was produced by IMPACT-REACH Kenya.



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