KENYA
NATIONAL POLICY BRIEF

Bridging Barriers: Ensuring Quality Education and Well-being for Learners in Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Settings in Kenya.

Executive Summary

Purpose of the study

This policy brief presents insights from a study conducted by the Global Partnership for Education's Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE/KIX) Tuseme Project to **identify key barriers and enabling factors to effective implementation of an adapted Tuseme model in IDP and refugee settings in Kenya.**

The GPE KIX: Tuseme – A voice for internally displaced and refugee children project is a partnership between the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the Higher Education Resource Services – East Africa (HERS-EA), and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), UK.

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Brief overview of Tuseme

The Tuseme model is a participatory empowerment approach that helps young people "speak out" on challenges hindering their education (Khaitsa et al 2025). Adapted by FAWE, Tuseme has enhanced the agency and confidence of learners in traditional school settings across Sub-Saharan Africa. However, its effectiveness has not been tested in refugee and IDP settings, which present unique challenges, *including limited resources, transient populations, and the complexities of cultural integration.*

Summary of key findings on enabling/ disenabling factors

Enabling Factors in Refugee and IDP Settings

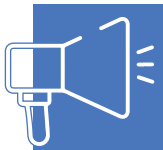
- Recognition of gender-specific challenges
- Teacher observations and leadership insight
- Community and school-level understanding of environmental challenges

Disenabling Factors in Refugee and IDP Settings

- Economic and logistical barriers
- Food insecurity
- Environmental disruptions
- Gendered barriers
- School policies

High-level implications for refugee/IDP settings/ government policy

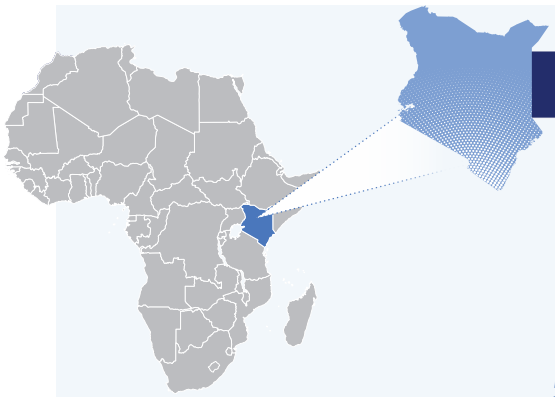
To ensure equitable and effective student participation in refugee and IDP settings, Tuseme implementation must be gender-sensitive, address basic needs such as food and learning materials, and remain adaptable to environmental disruptions. Inclusive school policies, combined with active engagement of teachers and community leaders, are essential to empower vulnerable children—particularly girls—enhancing learning outcomes and fostering sustainable, context-responsive education programs.



Call to Action for National Stakeholders

National stakeholders—including the Ministry of Education, county education offices, school leadership, and civil society partners—should institutionalise Tuseme Clubs within the Competence-Based Curriculum, adopt inclusive school policies that do not penalise vulnerable students, and coordinate interventions that address both environmental and socio-economic challenges. By leveraging teacher and community support, providing targeted gender-sensitive strategies, and ensuring continuity during disruptions, Tuseme can effectively empower students and enhance learning outcomes in refugee and IDP contexts.

In summary: Successful Tuseme implementation in Kenya requires multi-level coordination to address poverty, gender disparities, environmental disruptions, and restrictive school policies, while leveraging teacher and community support to foster consistent student participation.



Background and Context

Kenya hosts one of the largest refugee populations globally, with registered refugees and asylum seekers primarily from Somalia, South Sudan, Ethiopia, DRC, Eritrea, Burundi, and Uganda. The majority reside in the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps, established in 1991 and 1992, respectively (Figure 1).

569,453

Approximately **569,453 refugees and asylum seekers** were residing in Kenya as of July 1, 2014 *(UNHCR, 2014).*

843,165

By March 2025, the number had risen to **843,165** *(UNHCR, 2025).*

50,000

Additionally, over **50,000 refugees and asylum seekers** are estimated to live in urban areas.

Causes of Displacement

171,000

As of the end of 2023, 171,000 people were internally displaced in Kenya, with

131,000

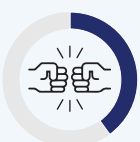
displaced by disasters (primarily floods)

40,000

and 40,000 by conflict and violence (IDMC, 2024). Kenya has seen a significant increase in disaster-induced internal displacements since 2021.

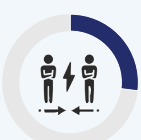
Access to Education

Access to education remains a significant concern, particularly for girls' secondary school enrolment. In the Kakuma refugee camp, while



40%

of girls in **primary school** take national exams, this figure drops to approximately



27%

in **secondary school** after Grade 5 *(Mendenhall & Falk, 2023).*

This highlights persistent educational barriers displaced populations face in Kenya *(Mendenhall et al., 2015).*

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Schools in Kenyan refugee camps must comply with Ministry of Education standards. However, as of 2018, pupil-teacher ratios were extremely high in Dadaab, particularly in pre-primary **(120:1)** and primary **(56:1)**, compared to **49:1** in mainstream primary schools *(KNBS, 2023).*

Only **8%** of primary teachers were nationally certified, and **6** out of **10** refugee teachers were untrained.

On average, **six students shared a desk, and four shared a textbook** across core subjects *(Women Educational Researchers of Kenya, 2017).*

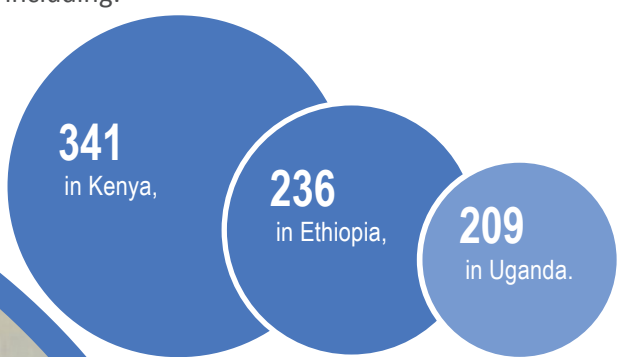
Study Overview:

Overarching objective

The study aimed at identifying and analysing key socio-cultural barriers that may hinder the effective implementation of an adapted Tuseme club model in IDP and refugee communities. This study was designed to answer three key questions: 1. Can Tuseme be adapted to refugee and IDP settings? 2. What enabling factors could support its adaptation? 3. What disenabling factors might hinder its effectiveness?

Methodology

The study methodology comprised a multi-country (Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) qualitative design that allowed country-specific context-sensitive insights. Data collection methods included Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students, teachers, and parents and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with government officials and education stakeholders. Specifically, the research **engaged over 784 participants across the three countries, with 4 schools per country (n=12),** including:



The four schools in Kenya comprised Runyu Primary School, Central Primary School - Hagadera, Malakal Secondary School, and Somali Bantu Mixed Secondary School *(Khaitsa et al, 2025; FAWE, HERS-EA & ACER, 2025 a; FAWE, HERS-EA & ACER, 2025 b).*

Below: Education Working Group meeting at Kyempango Primary School in Rwamwanja refugee settlement, Kamwenge district on 22nd

Key Findings: Enabling and Disenabling Factors

Key Enabling Factors in Refugee and IDP Settings in Kenya

- **Recognition of gender-specific challenges:** Awareness of girls' needs, such as menstrual health and domestic responsibilities, highlights opportunities for targeted support interventions.
- **Teacher observations and leadership insight:** School staff identifying links between hunger, poverty, and learning outcomes can inform policies and programs to improve attendance and engagement.
- **Community and school-level understanding of environmental challenges:** Acknowledgement of seasonal floods, heat, and water shortages can guide infrastructural or scheduling adaptations.

Key Disenabling Factors in Refugee and IDP Settings in Kenya

- **Economic and logistical barriers:** Poverty prevents students from affording exam fees, uniforms, or books, forcing dropouts or child labour.
- **Food insecurity:** Students arriving hungry or skipping school due to a lack of meals undermines learning and attendance.
- **Environmental disruptions:** Seasonal floods and extreme weather events interrupt schooling and shorten class hours.
- **Gendered barriers:** Girls face disproportionate challenges, including limited menstrual supplies, domestic duties, and early pregnancy.
- **School policies:** Practices such as sending pupils home for unpaid fees or scheduling extracurriculars during class time exacerbate participation barriers.

Implications for Scaling to Refugee and IDP Settings in Kenya / Government Policy

The implementation of Tuseme in Kenyan refugee and IDP settings must address both structural and gendered barriers to student participation. Poverty, food insecurity, and environmental disruptions such as floods and extreme heat limit consistent engagement, while girls face additional challenges related to menstrual hygiene, domestic duties, and early pregnancy. To ensure effective participation, Tuseme programming should integrate flexible schedules, life-skills education, psychosocial support, and material assistance such as uniforms and menstrual supplies.

Key Points:

01 **Address Structural Barriers:** Integrate support for poverty and food insecurity (e.g., school feeding, uniforms, learning materials) and adapt to environmental disruptions (floods, extreme heat).

02 **Gender-Sensitive Programming:** Provide menstrual hygiene supplies, life-skills education, and flexible schedules to reduce barriers for girls, while addressing early pregnancy and domestic workload challenges.

03 **Policy and Institutional Support:** Institutionalise Tuseme Clubs within the Competence-Based Curriculum, adopt inclusive school policies, and coordinate with teachers and school leaders to ensure participation.

04 **Multi-Stakeholder Coordination:** Engage the Ministry of Education, county offices, civil society, and community leaders to provide psychosocial support, mentorship, and continuity of programs during crises.

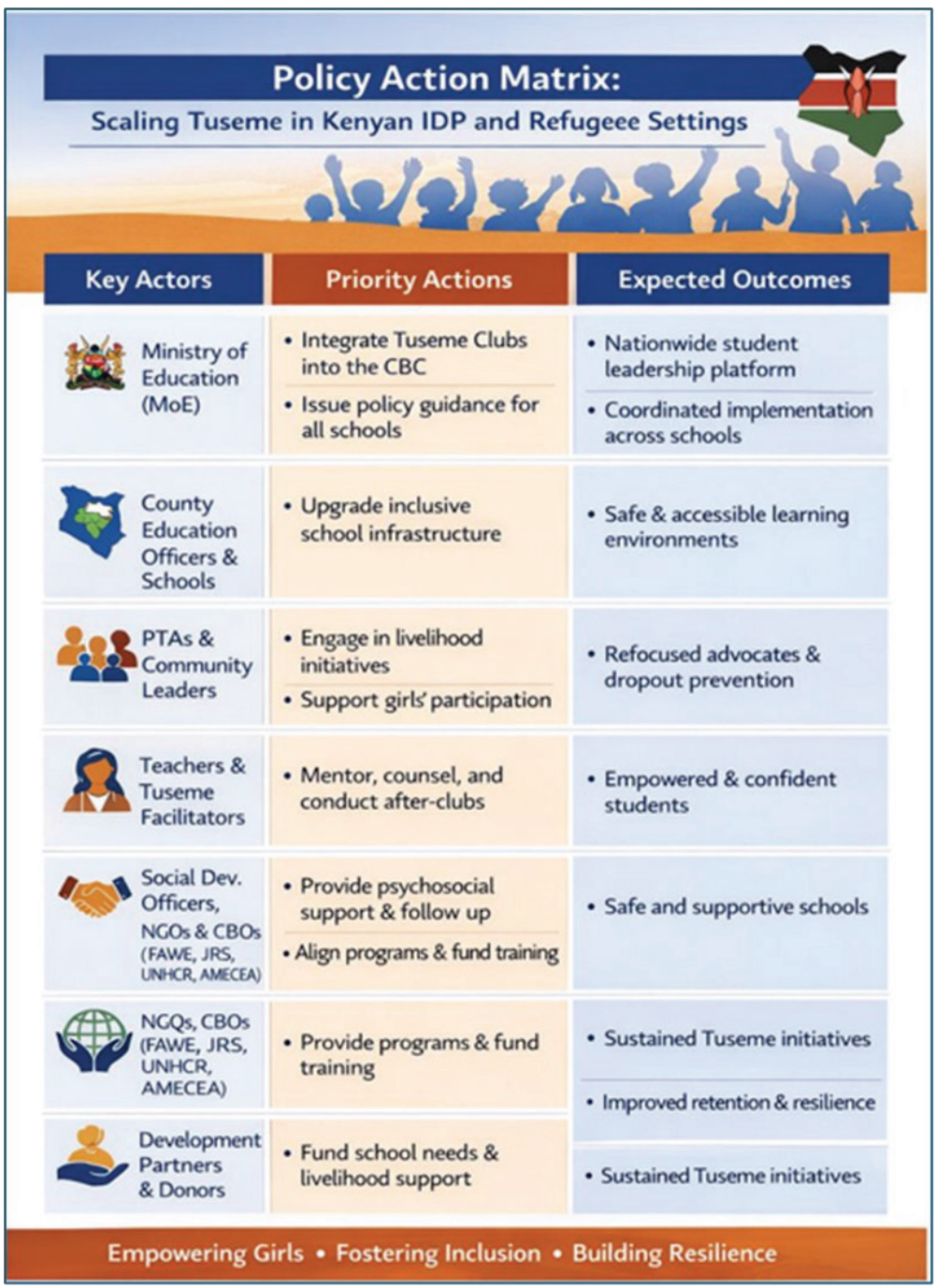
Policy Recommendations for Operationalising Tuseme in Kenyan IDP and Refugee Settings

Aligned with Kenya's national education priorities - the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), gender equity, school infrastructure standards, nutrition and health policies, and social protection programs.

The Policy Action Matrix shows:

1. Links key actors, actionable steps, and outcomes directly to Kenya's education policy, CBC framework, gender equality, and social protection priorities.
2. Collaboration across several sectors, including education, social development, NGOs, and communities, which is critical for refugee and IDP contexts, and
3. A policy Implementation guide to the government and to potential donors

Figure 1: The Policy Action Matrix



Next Steps in the Research

The next steps in the research will comprise

1) development of a Tuseme Adapted Model that can be implemented in refugee and IDP settings
2) Deployment of the adapted Tuseme model in target refugee and IDP schools with ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities
3) Evaluation of validity of findings and impact of the Adapted Tuseme Model and
4) Learning and dissemination of findings.

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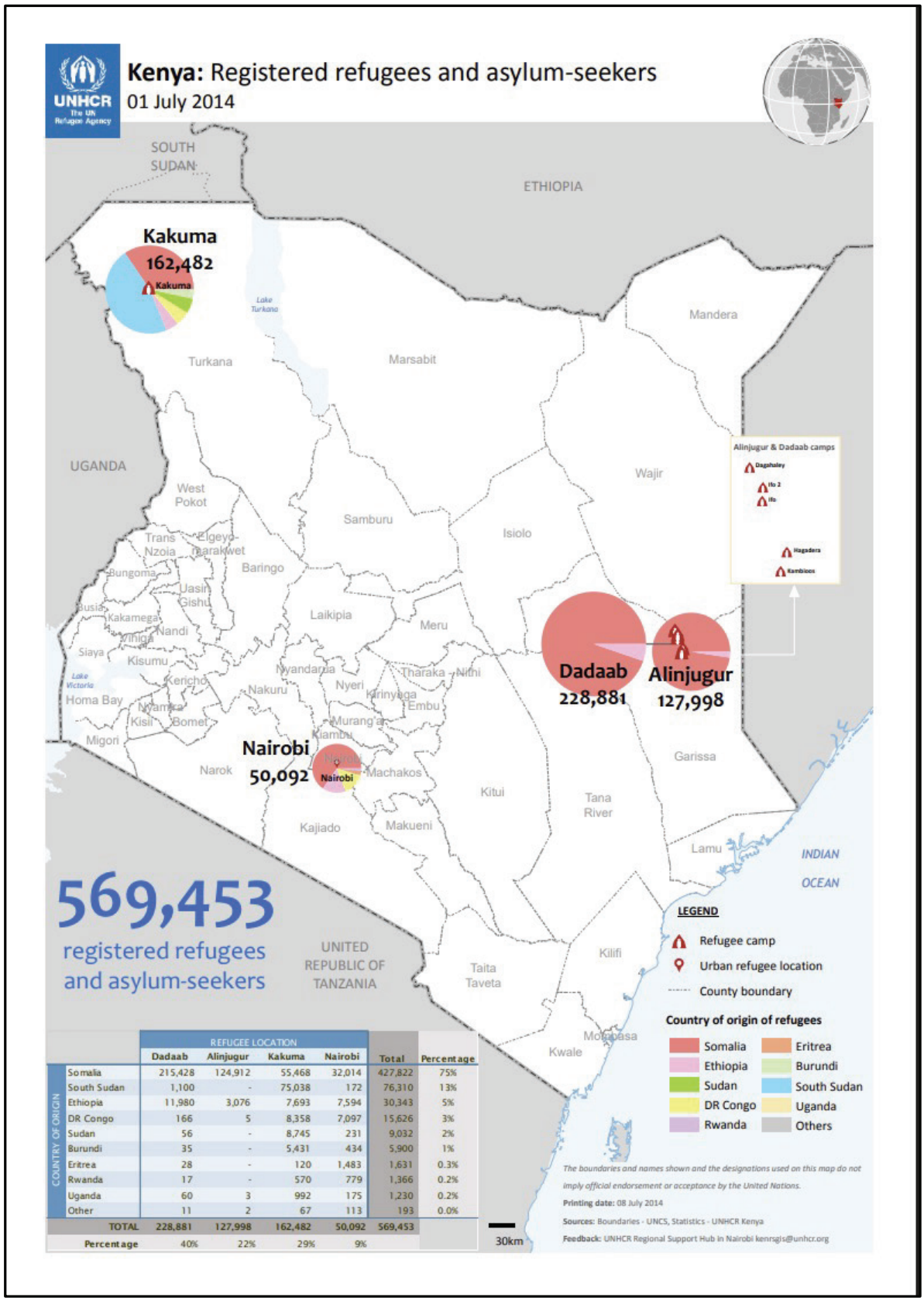
Table 1: Kenya Study Participants by Category, School, and Gender.

Participant category	Runyu primary		Central Primary Hagadera		Malakal		Somali Bantu mixed		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
School Governance and Management	2	7	2	10	3	9	4	8	45
School teachers	5	7	1	7	4	8	5	7	44
Schoolchildren - Girls	12	0	12	0	12	0	12	0	48
Schoolchildren - Boys	0	12	0	12	0	12	0	12	48
PTAs	6	6	3	9	5	7	4	8	48
Parents	7	5	2	10	3	9	3	9	48
National government officials	1	1	0	2	0	2	0	2	8
Local Government officials	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Camp leaders and governance	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	4
Para-social workers	7	5	4	8	4	8	5	7	48
Total	**40**	**44**	**24**	**59**	**31**	**56**	**33**	**54**	**341**

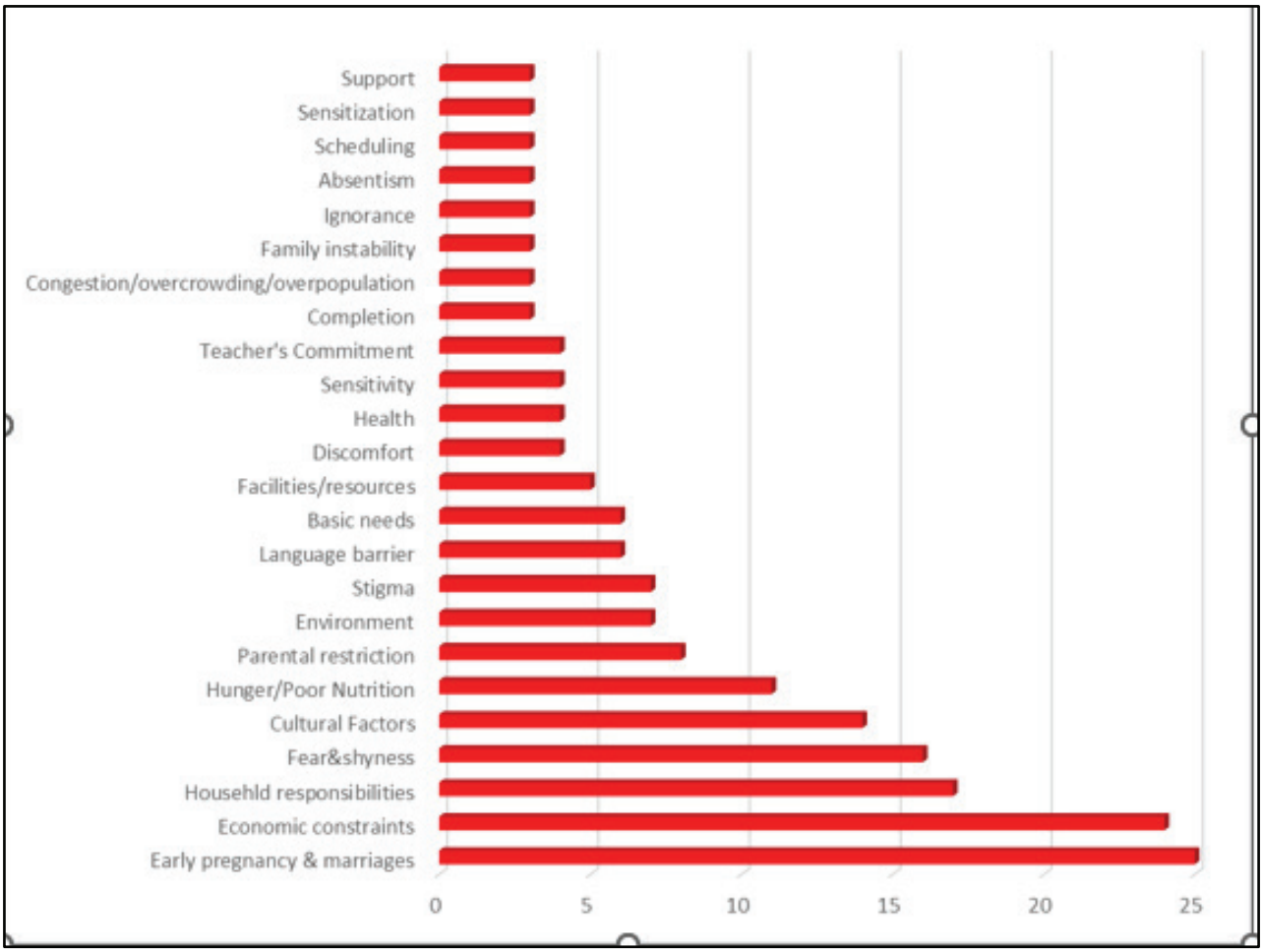
Source: FAWE, HERS-EA, and ACER UK, (2025). GPE KIX Tuseme Phase 2 Research Report

Figure 2: Refugees and asylum seekers residing in Kenya as of July 1, 2014



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	REFUGEE LOCATION				Total	Percentage
	Dadaab	Alinjugur	Kakuma	Nairobi		
Somalia	215,428	124,912	55,468	32,014	427,822	75%
South Sudan	1,100	-	75,038	172	76,310	13%
Ethiopia	11,980	3,076	7,693	7,594	30,343	5%
DR Congo	166	5	8,358	7,097	15,626	3%
Sudan	56	-	8,745	231	9,032	2%
Burundi	35	-	5,431	434	5,900	1%
Eritrea	28	-	120	1,483	1,631	0.3%
Rwanda	17	-	570	779	1,366	0.2%
Uganda	60	3	992	175	1,230	0.2%
Other	11	2	67	113	193	0.0%
TOTAL	228,881	127,998	162,482	50,092	569,453	
Percentage	40%	22%	29%	9%		

Figure 3: Barriers to Student Participation in Tuseme Clubs in Kenya: 2025



Source: FAWE, HERS-EA, and ACER UK, (2025). GPE KIX Tuseme Phase 2 Research Report

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