THE INTERNATIONAL PRIDE CENTRE

PROTECTION, RIGHTS, INCLUSION IN DISPLACEMENT & EMERGENCIES

KENYA

“I am not okay”

Experiences of LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya, in their own words

Acknowledgements

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About The PRIDE Centre: The PRIDE Centre (Protection, Rights, Inclusion in Displacement and Emergencies) provides legal and policy analysis, preparedness, and programming tools for aid workers, NGOs, and emergency response agencies to ensure inclusive programming for LGBTQIA+ persons in emergency, humanitarian, and development settings. The PRIDE Centre focuses on countries experiencing acute and protracted crises, in which the space for LGBTQIA+ rights and expression has become increasingly restricted.

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Introduction and background

This report is the final of three released by The PRIDE Centre summarising the findings of research conducted with LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya over 2025 and 2026. The first of these reports, released in November 2025, focused on the issues pertaining to refugee registration for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers in Kenya.[1] The second, released in April 2026, intended to give aid actors working in humanitarian and displacement settings in Kenya a clear understanding of the legal environment related to increasing their engagement with LGBTQIA+ populations.[2] This final report focuses on the experiences of LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya, **as told in their own voices**.

As part of the research process, The PRIDE Centre conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers and refugees and migrants living in and around Nairobi – mostly in Ongata Rongai, a suburb on the outskirts of the city in which a large number of LGBTQIA+ refugee shelters are congregated; as well as Limuru, Nakuru, and Mombasa. In total, **our team spoke to 229 LGBTQIA+ individuals from 21 organisations, including 138 refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers**.



In the interests of capturing the voices of interviewees as faithfully as possible, their quotes been included in this report exactly as they were transcribed by The PRIDE Centre researchers, without corrections to improve accuracy or grammar.[3] In this report, names and identifying information about all interviewees and participants have been excluded. All references to the names of the shelters and refugee-led organisations (RLOs) have been redacted. These precautions have been taken to protect the safety and security of the research participants. We have included the name of HAPA Kenya, an HIV and LGBTQIA+ focused organisation based in Mombasa. Hapa Kenya is the primary resource for the refugees and migrants we spoke to in Kenya's coastal region, and is a registered Kenyan organisation which does this work openly.

The report begins by examining the process of seeking refugee status for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers in Kenya, and the *de facto* freeze on their claims. This issue was examined in detail in The PRIDE Centre's report published in December 2025, but is important to summarise here, due to its significant impact on the lives and experiences of LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers trying to navigate this process. The report then describes conditions in Kakuma refugee camp, and examines **why so many LGBTQIA+ refugees leave the camp for urban areas**. The following sections look at life in the LGBTQIA+ shelters where many of them now live; their access to healthcare, education, and employment and livelihoods; the situation of refugee children of LGBTQIA+ parents; refugees' experiences of threats and violence; and the social perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community that drive this hostility. The next sections focus on the LGBTQIA+ RLOs themselves: their activities and programmes, how they coordinate, the operational and funding pressures they face, and their engagement with Kenyan and international human rights and humanitarian organisations, including the UN refugee response. Finally, the report sets out recommendations to the Kenyan and international aid community, drawn from the requests made by interviewees themselves.

"We are stuck here, not moving forward": [4] Systematic deferrals of refugee status for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers

The PRIDE Centre's December 2025 report described how **since 2018, Kenya's refugee status determination (RSD) system has effectively stopped processing claims for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers, with applicants from this community very rarely being granted refugee status.** Most new LGBTQIA+ arrivals are still being registered as asylum seekers, and granted a 'refugee manifest' – a document indicating that a person has been registered with the Department of Refugee Services (DRS) and is recognised as having a *prima facie* claim to asylum. References to having the refugee manifest is made by many of the interviewees

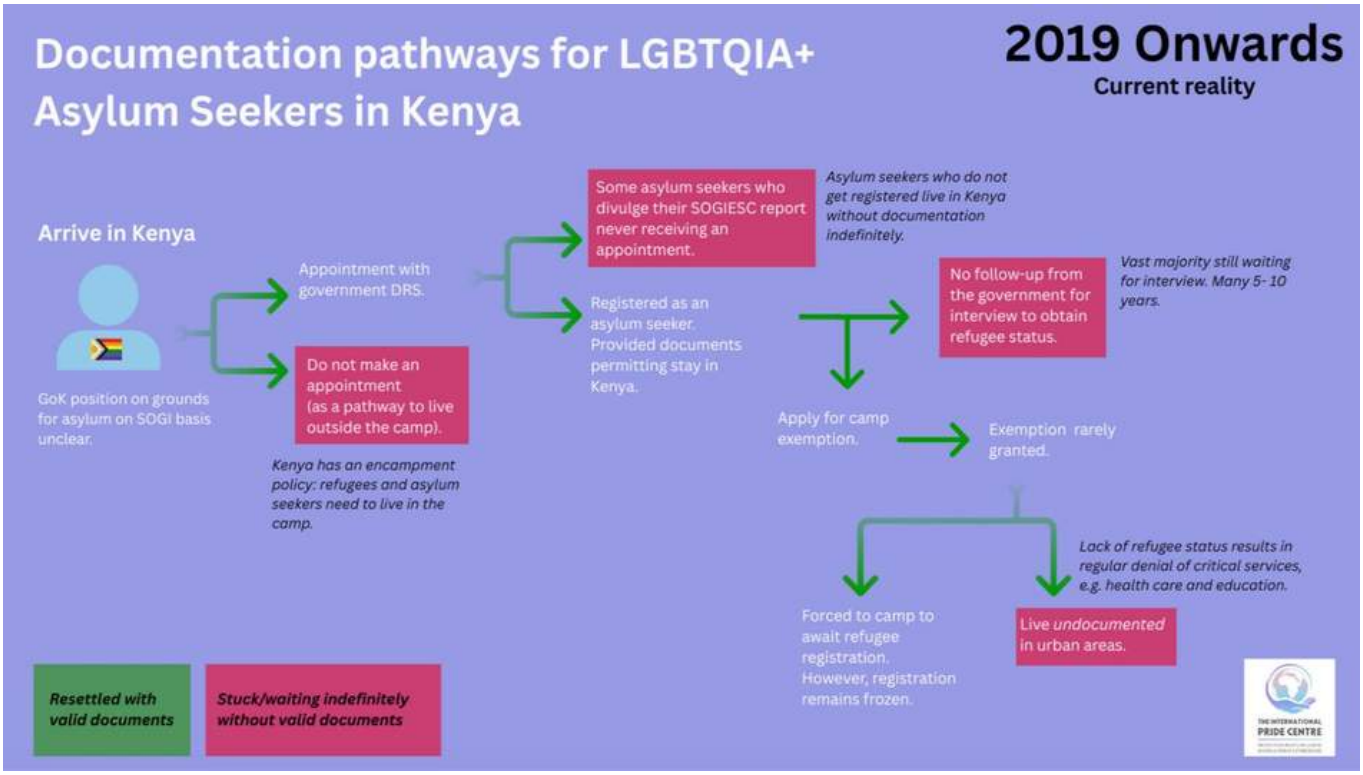
[1] The PRIDE Centre (2025) 'Kenya's Legal Framework and Its Impact on LGBTQIA+ Refugees and Asylum Seekers', available at https://pridecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Kenya_Legal-Analysis-2025_digital.pdf
[2] The PRIDE Centre (2026) 'Kenya: Legal Analysis and Recommendations for Aid Agencies', available at https://pridecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Kenya_Legal-Analysis-2026_Summary-digital-1.pdf
[3] These quotes were given during KIIs and FGDs and transcribed by a notetaker from PRIDE – usually in English or Swahili, languages spoken by PRIDE staff, though sometimes through a translator.
[4] KII with Director of LGBTQIA+ refugee organisation in Nairobi, 3 October 2026.

quoted in this report. Holding a manifest grants asylum seekers some rights, including the right not to be deported, but not the full suite of rights and protections available to recognised refugees. **Being granted refugee status is also a prerequisite for being put on a pathway to resettlement through UNHCR. Without this status, asylum seekers can not access third country resettlement via UNHCR pathways.**



Most interviewees had been given a refugee manifest, but then **never called for the RSD interview** to determine their refugee status. Many of those interviewed by The PRIDE Centre have waited more than five years for an RSD interview; **some more than ten**. The research also found that asylum seekers who disclosed their SOGIESC when booking the initial appointment were sometimes unable to get an appointment at all, forcing them to live without any documentation, **exposing them to elevated protection risks**. Those who revealed their SOGIESC during the interview frequently reported experiencing **homophobic and transphobic harassment, demeaning treatment, and mockery by DRS staff.**

The official explanation given by DRS is that delays in in the RSD process for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers are a result of the overburdening of the system generally, rather than reflecting its treatment of asylum claims based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC). **Our report concluded that the evidence instead points to an informal, unwritten policy to freeze SOGIESC-base asylum claims, or delay them for years. I**f the system is indeed plagued by a backlog spanning seven-plus years, best practice for addressing this would be either chronologically, or on the basis of vulnerability, either of which would apply to members of this community.



Visual representation of the process of trying to obtain refugee status for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers. From the December 2025 report.

Since the December 2025 report was released, The PRIDE Centre has received an audio recording captured during a meeting between LGBTQIA+ refugees and a representative from DRS in which the representative informs those present, *"As DRS, as the government, we don't we don't consider queer, or LGBTQ, or - I don't know the latest terminology - as grounds for asylum."* The PRIDE Centre has not been able to verify the recording; though the name of the representative was also provided by the person who sent the recording, and this matches the name of the relevant employee at the Department. While this report was being finalised, The PRIDE Centre was also informed that representatives of UNHCR repeated this message in late October at a community meeting in Kakuma camp. The PRIDE Centre has also been unable to verify this report.

"As DRS, as the government, we don't we don't consider queer, or LGBTQ, or - I don't know the latest terminology - as grounds for asylum."

In Nairobi, the inability to obtain refugee status is a major source of distress and anxiety for the community and was always one of the main points raised in KIIs and FGDs. **Our research with urban (non-camp-based) refugees indicates that the further outside Nairobi a community was based, the less likely they were to be focused on the refugee and resettlement process.**

Limuru	Nakuru	Mombasa
Participants were generally still very invested in resettlement, and would travel to the DRS offices in Nairobi in order to try to advance their case. Some of the people staying in the Limuru centre indicated preference for a shelter a greater distance from the city due to fear of harmful actors in Nairobi, such as the police or the proximity of hostile family members.	In Nakuru, the research team encountered more people who had given up on their refugee claim and were trying to find ways of living out their lives there: *"I came to Nakuru in 2022. When you leave the camp, you are cut off from that support. … I started doing my own things to survive here. There is no organisation that can support me. I am the only one that supports myself."*[5]	None of the 16 people we spoke to said they were pursuing RSD. Most had never applied for it in the first place. In one FGD, when asked if anyone there was registered with UNHCR, the group leader replied, *"None of us except for one. The ones who do that have to go all the way back to Nairobi for that. We would rather not – it's easy for us to disappear and blend in here, than to engage with UNHCR."*[6]

"I would rather not die in the camp":[7] Conditions in Kakuma and movement of LGBTQIA+ refugees to urban areas

The current policy of the Kenyan government is that asylum seekers should, by default, reside in one of Kenya's refugee camps unless they are granted an exception to live in another part of the country. Those seeking asylum on the basis of their SOGIESC appear to always be told by DRS representatives that they must live in Kakuma camp specifically. **Kakuma is an exceptionally dangerous place to be for this population, who describe daily experiences of intimidation, threats, and violence by both the host community and other camp residents.** Within Kakuma, most LGBTQIA+ refugees live in the same area – which gives them a sense of solidarity and protection in numbers, but also gives those who want to harm them a clear geographical target. In 2020, a number of shelters in the LGBTQIA+ area of the camp were set on fire, and a trans woman inside one of them burned to death.[8]

Due to the lack of safe housing and daily violence in Kakuma, most refugees who outwardly identify as LGBTQIA+ choose to live outside the camp. Many find their way to shelters set up by grassroots LGBTQIA+ refugee organisations in urban areas across the country. Many of these are based in Ongata Rongai, in Kajiado County in the outskirts of Nairobi. There are also CBO-run shelters in Limuru, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kisumu, and Mombasa. It is legally possible for asylum seekers to request a formal exemption from DRS from the requirement to live in the camp. This exemption was generally colloquially referred to by interviewees as an 'urban pass'. **The PRIDE Centre's research found that since 2018, applications for urban passes by LGBTQIA+ refugees have rarely been approved. This means that most refugees living in urban areas currently do so without documentation officially permitting them to do so.** Interviewees reported that police officers always asked them for this documentation. If they did not have it, police officers would threaten to send them back to the camp, using this as a tool for extortion. As described in more detail below, government service providers and most NGOs in urban areas also make access to their services conditional on beneficiaries having either refugee status or an urban pass.

[5] KII with trans Somali refugee in Nakuru, 12 February 2026
[6] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[7] KII with LGBTQIA+ refugee, 7 November 2025
[8] A. Zhou (2020) 'Kenya's LGBTQ Refugees Face Threats, Attacks at Kakuma Camp' VOA, available at www.voanews.com/a/africa_kenyas-lgbtq-refugees-face-threats-attacks-kakuma-camp/6194375.html

Urban pass	• An exemption issues by DRS allowing asyum seekers to live outside the refugee camps. • Living outside the camps without an urban pass is not a crime and the right to do so has been recognised by Kenya's constituitonal court. • Without an urban pass, refugees are threatened with being sent back to the camp and lack access to goveernment and NGO services.

Urban-based interviewees consistently described being told by UN agencies and NGOs that **in order to access aid and services, they must return to the camp.** *"Every time you try calling UNHCR, given the fact there is an encampment policy, they just tell you – you are supposed to be in the camp. If you need any services, you have to be in the camp. But I have been in the camp. Things are way worse there,"* said an LBQ woman from Uganda.[9] In another FGD, a gay man told us, *"The UN agencies and the INGOs, they will say that they cannot help us if we don't live in the camp. But the camp is not safe."*[10]

Interviewees also stated that even when in Kakuma, accessing aid was often difficult. First, they said, **being from an LGBTQIA+ community was not taken into account as a vulnerability factor by UNHCR and WFP in determining who should be prioritised for receiving food aid**. The result was that *"surviving has become hard,"* one former camp resident explained.[11] Second, even when food aid was available to the community, people described being prevented from getting it, or having it taken from them. *"Food was distributed once a month, and we LGBTQIA+ people were always pushed to last in the food queues, which meant we got the worst food, whatever was leftover,"* one interviewee recalled. *"I became a thief, stealing casava."*[12] Another said, *"When I lived in the camp, people would come with a panga* [a machete-like heavy-bladed knife] *and take our food from us. I feel unsafe there, but apparently that's where we have to be."*[13]

"In South Sudan, the process is working":[14] Movement to South Sudan

Since 2024, the lack of movement on queer refugees' RSD applicants, the difficulties of life in Kenya, and information and rumours circulating within LGBTQIA+ communities within the region **has led hundreds of people to travel to South Sudan in the hope of accessing alternative resettlement pathways**. One refugee who was considering taking this route told us, *"In Kenya, the number of refugees keeps increasing every day. We are given only asylum status. In South Sudan, they are given refugee status. Once you are granted refugee status, they have a decision – will they integrate you or resettle you. The longer you are an asylum seeker, you are … constantly living under the cloud of deportation."*[15] Rumours that refugee registration and resettlement to Canada is being fast-tracked specifically for LGBTQIA+ refugees in South Sudan have persuaded many to travel toward Juba and Gorom refugee camp, often via high-risk transit routes. This movement has reportedly continued throughout 2026. A trans woman living in Gorom camp told The PRIDE Centre in March 2026, *"My estimate is that there are over 400 LGBTQIA+ people here. This includes around 40 trans people. In Juba, there is also a large number of people – something like 80. Those who had support, money, or people to reach out to, moved to Juba and found safe houses there."*[16]

Interviewees in Nairobi said they knew of people who, after travelling to South Sudan, had been resettled in Canada.[17] *"My partner went to South Sudan last year in 2024. He got resettled to Canada,"* one man told us; though he added, *"But the friends who went with him, they're still there."*[18] Another person said, *"I know two that are in South Sudan right now, and they say the process is moving. And I know two that are in Canada now."*[19] The people we spoke to in Gorom camp said they also felt cautiously optimistic about the process. *"Canadian authorities came here and were on the ground, doing interviews. So some people are going to be resettled there. Some of us have had interviews. Some of us are in the process of resettlement. We are seeing some hope."*[20] Information received by The PRIDE Centre confirms that representatives from the Canadian

[9] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025
[10] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[11] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Ongata Rongai on 11 November 2025
[12] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[13] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[14] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Ongata Rongai, 4 November 2025
[15] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025
[16] Online FGD with trans women in Gorom camp, South Sudan, 26 January 2026
[17] Quotes below from: Positive Initiative FGD, 4 November 2025; Online FGD with trans women in Gorom camp, South Sudan, 26 January 2026
[18] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugee group, 4 November 2025
[19] Positive Initiative FGD, 4 November 2025
[20] Online FGD with trans women in Gorom camp, South Sudan, 26 January 2026

government did conduct RSD interviews and resettle individuals from Gorom camp, but that these numbers were limited and that this is not an ongoing resettlement route.

The PRIDE Centre is aware of WhatsApp audio messages which have been circulated widely among queer refugee networks in the region, encouraging people to go to South Sudan. In one such message, received by The PRIDE Centre in March 2026, a man speaking in Lugana says that Canada has opened resettlement for 4,000 queer refugees from South Sudan, and that a UN official is facilitating the process from Gorom camp. This kind of message, though inaccurate, is treated as highly credible by the community.

Once these individuals get to South Sudan, life is reportedly extremely difficult. Gorom camp was built to accommodate around 2,500 people, but currently hosts more than 22,000.[21] Self-identifying members of the LGBTQIA+ community appear to be living in one area on the outskirts of the camp, clustered together for their own safety. A trans woman there told us, *"We are in a bad situation. Feeding ourselves is a problem. Accessing water is really hard. Clean drinking water is hard to access."*[22] Another added, *"The UNHCR distributed food to us once last year. We have to struggle for ourselves. The UNHCR gave some of us tents. But South Sudan is so hot. You become a beggar to try to find somewhere to stay. You can construct yourself a small house with grass on top. But if you have no fence, you are not safe."*[23]

Although counter-messaging meant to discourage movement has been sent by UNHCR, the Canadian High Commission and other partners, this messaging has not been effective in discouraging community members from making this dangerous journey. Community members report that they do not see these messages as credible and believe they are only trying to discourage people from movement. The PRIDE Centre has advocated for resourcing for a communications campaign that is community-based, translated into the main languages of refugees (Luganda, Kiswahili, and the other dominate languages of Uganda) that is led by and for community members and based on sharing the real experience of those in Gorom camp and the risks encountered on the journey to South Sudan.

"We are overdue paying bills, and we don't have enough food":[24] Life in the LGBTQIA+ shelters

In urban areas LGBTQIA+ refugees face a suite of new challenges. The first of these is finding a place to sleep. *"For LGBTQIA+ refugees, their main issue is unsafe housing or homelessness, and finding a safe space to stay where they won't be sexually abused,"* the Director of one shelter explained.[25] Most of the stories of homelessness we heard through the research were from trans women. One recounted that after she left Kakuma and came to Nairobi, *"The only safe place to sleep was in the water gutters in the roads."*[26] Another recalled, *"I stayed on the streets for three months. I would find some men to sleep with to help me get some money. I started smelling badly. Then at Christmas, I met someone who told me I could stay at his shelter."*[27]

The shelters that have been established around the country offer these refugees a relatively safe place to go. These facilities are generally houses rented by LGBTQIA+ refugees who both live in the house themselves and run it as a shelter for those in need of a safe place to stay. Though they house all members of the community, the majority of residents in these shelters are trans women. **The shelters are over-burdened, over capacity, and chronically under-funded.** Many are several months in arrears with their rent, and evictions are common and frequent. The PRIDE Centre visited 14 shelters over the course of this research and spoke to both residents and shelter coordinators (who are generally referred to as 'house mothers' by members of the community). Most were either behind on their rent or did not know when the next month of rent would come from, and none had enough food for those living there**. Many house mothers – perhaps the majority – engaged in sex work in order to cover the costs of keeping them open.** All were desperate for funding and support, and none could be certain what the future of their shelter would be.

[21] All Africa (2026) 'Sudanese Refugees in Gorom Camp, South Sudan, Struggle for Water, Medicines, Security', available at https://allafrica.com/stories/202610210010.html
[22] Online FGD with trans women in Gorom camp, South Sudan, 26 January 2026
[23] Online FGD with trans women in Gorom camp, South Sudan, 26 January 2026
[24] FGD MTC, 29 September
[25] KII with a leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 15 October 2025
[26] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[27] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025



Residents in a shelter in Ongata Rongai

House mothers

- The person running each shelter, usually a trans woman, is often described as a 'house mother' by its residents.
- This name reflects the idea of 'chosen family' and is drawn from queer ballroom culture.

Lack of food

Lack of access to food was one of the most persistent challenges reported by shelter residents. A shelter resident told us, *"These shelters provide only what they can provide – just a place to sleep. Even food is a big issue. There is limited food. Sometimes we sleep without eating. Sometimes we don't eat for days and days."*

In one shelter visited by our team, there were three pictures on the wall of people who had died either during or after their time staying there. One of them, a 20-year-old man, had died because there was no food to eat, which had caused a complication with his HIV medicine. *"He was sitting here on the steps on a Saturday afternoon, crying because he was in so much pain,"* the shelter's house mother told us. *"There was no food to give him. By that night, he was dead."*[28]

Police raids and arrests

Shelter residents also spend money either on paying the police during raids on the shelters, or maintaining cordial relationships with local actors to avoid such raids happening in the first place. *"Police raided our shelter… they arrested people, and bribes had to be paid for those people to be released. Our organisation cannot afford to pay bribes,"* lamented one house mother. [29]

Most residents said that though police raids had been relentlessly common in the past, they had reduced since the CBOs running the shelters had learned to more effectively navigate their environment. One house mother reflected, *"Having the awareness of the chief makes it easier for us to deal with the police. If the police comes to the shelter, they ask for your documents. They ask you a lot of questions. If you have a paralegal around, you can call the paralegal, and the paralegal will tell you what to do. Then you can also call the chief."* [30] Another explained, *"When we were starting out, we got all these raids. But we got registered. We pay all of our taxes and everything else. … Being registered and having Kenyans on the Board really provides us with protection."*[31] The Director of one organisation said that they had *"noticed an improvement in our relationship with the police over time",* which they had achieved by *"trying to educate them one-on-one. We invite them to an open day meeting. We take them around…. They ask crazy questions. But at the end of*

[28] KII, LGBTQIA+ shelter in Limuru, 11 February 2026
[29] KII with a leader of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 26 September 2025
[30] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 3 October 2025
[31] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO in Nairobi on 29 September 2025

the day, they see we are doing something positive for the community."[32] Maintaining positive relationships with police and community leaders costs the organisations money, however. The last-quoted Director added that the process of engaging with the police was *"so expensive. You train them today, and in three months, they will all have been transferred somewhere else."*[33]



Police sensitisation and clean-up organised by HAPA Kenya.
Photo credit: HAPA Kenya.

Forming these relationships also does not guarantee that the shelters will not still experience raids. *"There are less arrests occurring now in Rongai. But it happens, and police tend to target people when they are drunk, looking for bribes,"* one shelter resident told us.[34] Another described a situation where a neighbour had written to the police on Facebook and accused their shelter of trafficking people. *"We went to the chief. We had a good relationship with him. When we went to our local police, the boss was not there, so they told us to come back later. Then seven police showed up at the house. They came in with a lot of force. We were taken to a police station, told to bend over, dehumanised."*[35] **Interviewees described trying all methods available to them to avoid being taken to the police station, where they expected to face abuse.**

These arrests rarely result in formal charges being laid. **Most instances of police harassing or threatening to arrest the community are for the purposes of extortion, rather than an intention to prosecute.** Those who are unable to pay what the police are asking for may be detained and kept in the police station for some time but are still unlikely to end up in court. For those officially registered as asylum seekers with DRS, UNHCR sends a lawyer to assist in getting them released. One gay man living in Nairobi explained, *"Even those of us who have the refugee manifest, if we get taken to the prison, it is very difficult for us to come out of the prison. But for people without a manifest, it is even harder. I was arrested and taken to prison. They called me a terrorist. But at least I had the manifest. Without it, I would probably still be there."* [36]

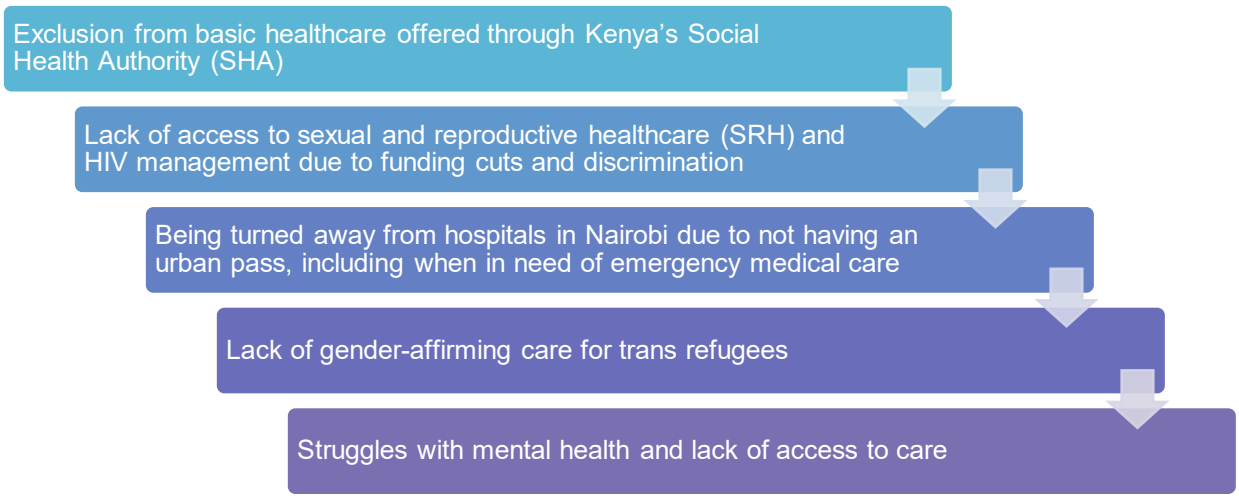
Solidarity and acceptance

Despite the challenges of living in the shelters, residents described **the relief of finding community, being accepted, and feeling some semblance of safety,** at least within the shelters' walls. *"I was welcomed at [redacted] and the family here, where I can be myself,"* said a resident of one shelter in Ongata Rongai.[37] In another, a resident volunteered, *"I appreciate what [redacted] does. We have a shelter together. We all have connections here in Rongai. We live here more comfortably, we are here for each other. In a camp, people are refugees for different reasons. We are not a community in a camp, like the community we have here in Rongai."*[38]

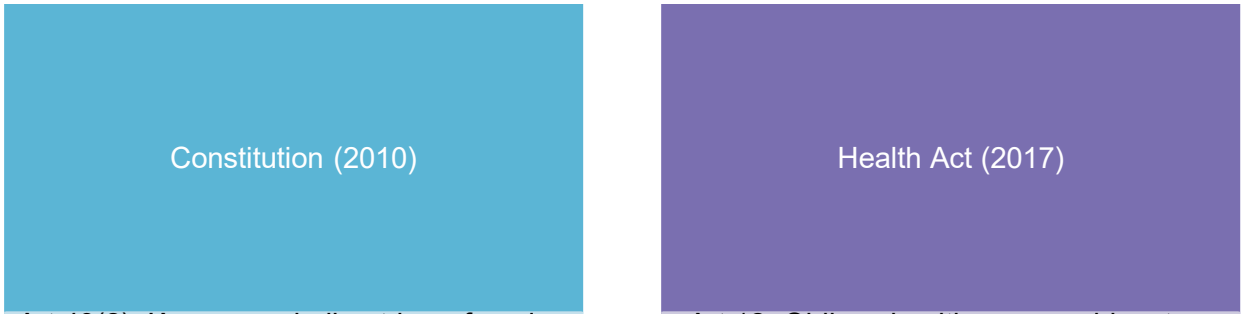
"People are dying":[39] Denial of medical care

LGBTQIA+ refugees and migrants living in Kenya invariably named l**ack of access to healthcare as one of their most pressing challenges.** This overall challenged comprised of several components, including:

[32] KII with HAPA Kenya, HIV organization in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[33] KII with HAPA Kenya, HIV organization in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[34] KII with a leader of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 26 September 2025
[35] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 3 October 2025
[36] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[37] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[38] FGD with trans refugees at a shelter in Ongata Rongai, 29 September 2025.
[39] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025



To access public healthcare in Kenya, individuals need to be registered with the Social Health Authority (SHA). Theoretically, SHA registrants should receive basic healthcare free of charge and may receive higher levels of care depending on how much they contribute to the scheme. HIV treatment and emergency medical interventions fall outside of the SHA scheme, and should be offered to everyone in Kenya, regardless of their legal or insurance status. HIV care is offered through the donor-subsidised National AIDS and STI Control Programme (NASCOP). Emergency medical care is guaranteed under both Kenya's Health Act (2017)[40] and its Constitution.[41]

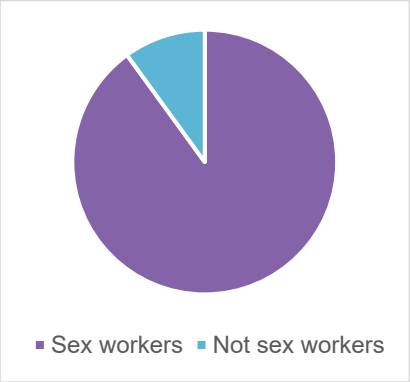


Exclusion from basic healthcare

Interviewees reported that they were unable to access basic healthcare because they were not registered with the SHA. Though the Ministry of Health's guidance indicates that any Kenyan resident can and should register for the SHA, interviewees reported that they had been unable to. One gay man, who has a refugee manifest but has not been granted refugee status, said, *"We don't have access to SHA… If you don't have SHA, you are asked to go to Kakuma to treat you from there."* [42] A lesbian woman in the same position agreed, *"When we go to the hospital, if you don't have a job, you cannot pay the hospital bills. Getting access to healthcare and medicine is a problem, and SHA is not working for us – we cannot get it."* [43] One of the few people we interviewed who had been granted refugee status said, *"I have refugee status, but I still can't get health insurance [the SHA]. … So few people have refugee cards, and yet even with the card, I am still excluded from so many services."* [44]

[40] Health Act, No. 21 of 2017
[41] Constitution of Kenya (2010), https://kenyalaw.org/akn/ke/act/2010/constitution/eng@2010-09-03
[42] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 3 October 2025
[43] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[44] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 3 October 2025

Lack of access to SRH and HIV management



When discussing their challenges in accessing healthcare, a majority of interviewees cited resources, materials, and services within the umbrella of sexual and reproductive health as their most pressing need. This is particularly common amongst sex workers. Sex work is extremely widespread amongst LGBTQIA+ refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya. **When asked during FGDs how many of the community relied on this for survival, participants consistently estimated around 85 – 90%.** The PRIDE Centre does not ask participants their HIV status, but it was common for people to tell our researchers that they were HIV positive, and to attest that HIV rates amongst the community, and especially amongst those engaging sex work, are high.

Anti-retroviral (ARVs), which effectively treat HIV, are available for free in Kenya. However, since the USAID funding cuts of 2025, many clinics that undertake outreach to 'Key Populations' (those at disproportionate risk of HIV, including sex workers, intravenous drug users, men who have sex with men, and trans women) have been closed, forcing those in need of treatment to get it through public hospitals. Allegations of discrimination against all of these populations at public hospitals are common. These facilities are also inaccessible to those who do not live within walking distance; something the now-defunct outreach programmes overcame by bringing the medication to where the communities lived. Recent investigative journalism by the Agence France-Presse (AFP) confirmed the deaths of at least 24 sex workers as a result of the USAID cuts, due to a combination of fear of entering the public hospitals, and lack of ability to get there.[45]

The LGBTQIA+ shelters and RLOs in and around Nairobi have worked hard to find ways of continuing to procure HIV treatment and prevention medication for their residents, but say this has become increasingly difficult. *"Most health clinics that are still open that will accept us are far away from where we [can safely] live. Some pharmacies won't even sell medication or products to us,"*[46] said one HIV+ trans woman. *"I need health medication, and when I called a clinic they said they had no more stock of medication. For people who have HIV, they cannot access medication,"*[47] explained another. People reported facing discrimination at public hospitals, both due to their SOGIESC and their refugee or asylum seeker status, by either the staff or other patients at the facility. *"A big problem for me is medical healthcare. When you go to the hospital, the doctors ask you why you are sleeping with other men. It's hard to get treatment,"* a gay man reported.[48] A trans woman added, *"HIV disturbs our community a lot. We used to go to [a nearby clinic]. But the person who knew us there was transferred. And there is another place we can go, but you have to wait outside, and everyone will know who you are. And they will say, "that Ugandan is HIV positive." So there is nowhere for us to go."*[49]

In Mombasa, an organisation providing SRH and HIV healthcare to LGBTQIA+ populations, HAPA Kenya, is still functioning, providing both drop-in services and outreach to three counties along the Kenyan coast. A staff member there told our team that following the USAID funding cuts, *"We are now being told that our own clinics are too expensive, so we are being pushed to offer our services through the public facilities. But those facilities don't want to accept our community. Our community don't even want to go there to pick ARVs. We lose many of our members because of this stigma. When people go to get treatments there, they are called slurs. We are advocating wherever we can to push back on this suggestion."*

Being turned away from hospitals in Nairobi, including when in need of emergency care

For other forms of medical treatment, including emergency medical care, the most commonly described challenge was being **turned away before even entering the facility, and told that they could only receive medical treatment in Kakuma**. "*The refugee manifests don't work here in Nairobi",* one interviewee explained. *"So if you go to a hospital, they would turn you away, saying you need to be in Kakuma. If I get sick, I am the one who is supposed to pay all the bills, which is really hard to cover."* Another recalled, *"We had a sister who had epilepsy. We took her to a heath facility, and they told her she had to go to Kakuma."*[50] One woman told us

[45] AFP (2026) 'US aid cuts are killing Kenyan sex workers' France 24, available at www.france24.com/en/live-news/20260918-us-aid-cuts-are-killing-kenyan-sex-workers
[46] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[47] FGD with members of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[48] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[49] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[50] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025

that in 2024, *"I was forced to do something I was not okay with. I was raped. I got an ectopic pregnancy, and when I got to hospital, the doctors told me, we can't provide support, to you as you need to be at the camps."*[51]

Our researchers were also told multiple stories of hospitals and healthcare workers denying people emergency and life-saving medical care, in contravention of Kenyan law:

"We received a trans woman who was very sick. She lost consciousness, and I called [an INGO that works with refugees in Kenya]. They said she needed to go to Kakuma for treatment. But she needed urgent help. I rushed her to a government hospital. She was not conscious. They said they could not treat her unless I could pay. I had to raise the money. It was 70,000." (approximately $540)[52]

"We had an issue a while back where a boy had an ulcer, and needed to be urgently treated. … We rushed him to five different hospitals, and they all say they couldn't do anything for him. We took him to a specific hospital for refugees. They treated him. After treating him, as soon as he got out, they told him, he needed to go to the camp. They said that's where his follow up treatment and medicine would be."[53]

"I got TB. It was really challenging for me to get services for it. They said they needed documentation for me to go see the doctor, and I didn't have any."*[54]

*Tuberculosis is the leading cause of death for people with HIV.

"There is someone who got into a car accident and broke some bones. They needed medical help. When the hospital checked the documents, and saw the person was registered in Kakuma, they did not help. So we had to fundraise to get the medical treatment he needed."[55]

Lack of access to gender-affirming care

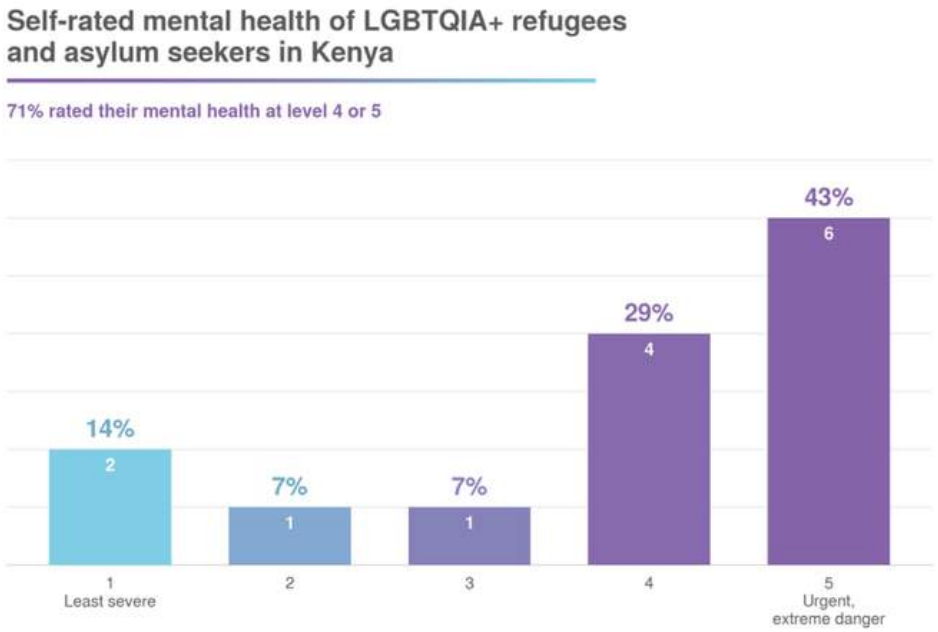
Transgender interviewees explained that access to gender-affirming healthcare was entirely dependent on a person's ability to pay for it. Some private clinics offered this service, but, one person reported, *"The hormones cost KES 8,000 [*approximately $55*] per month."*[56] For the vast majority of refugees and asylum seekers – and even the majority of Kenyans – this is out of reach. One trans woman, describing her experience of asking about gender affirming care at the clinics she had access to, said, *"They tell us we are men, that we should not take hormones, and that we should die."*[57] Many trans people interviewed by The PRIDE Centre described feelings of body dysphoria, distress, and trauma at their inability to medically transition.

Struggles with mental health and lack of access to care

Mental health struggles were pervasive within the community. One component of these struggles is related to the experiences people went through in their home countries that caused them to need to seek asylum in Kenya in the first place. One trans woman, recounting what she had experienced Uganda, had to stop to compose herself: *"Remembering all this gives me trauma."* [58] Once people get to the shelters, one of their primary strategies for keeping safe and avoiding arrest is to stay inside – an approach which was described by many as taking its toll on them emotionally. *"Mainly, we stay indoors. It affects us psychologically, big time. We cannot move around. We are not safe. You end up being really affected mentally,"*[59] one shelter resident explained. A resident of another shelter added, *"The shelters that exist are already full of people. It becomes too much. There's no food. There's no privacy. And there's no mental health support."* Some people also said that the constant police harassment when they left the shelter and the fear of arrests and raids had added to their trauma. *"My mental health has really deteriorated, out of fear of being arrested,"* one shelter resident informed us.[60] House mothers often take on the task of looking after residents who are struggling psychologically. *"I have one who is not doing well right now,"* one told our team. *"I just control his environment. If he needs something, I tell him, come to my room and we will just sit here. If he wants juice, I will go to the shop and get him juice. And then he will just go to the bed and sleep."*[61]

[51] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Ongata Rongai on 11 November 2025
[52] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[53] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[54] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 10 February 2026
[55] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[56] KII with the leader of a trans organisation on 3 October 2025
[57] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[58] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 2 October 2025
[59] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[60] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[61] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 3 October 2025

The long waiting times for progressing through the refugee status determination process was also described as contributing to negative mental health outcomes: *"The longer refugee and resettlement applications take, the more likely that queer refugees mental health deteriorates."*[62] An older lesbian described the psychological impact of the US ending its resettlement programme, saying, *"I was going to be resettled in the US. But it is now the second time that the process has just been ended like that. It has been 15 years that I have stayed in Kenya. They have been trying to get me resettled to Canada. But there is no news of what is happening. I don't know what's next. … I am not okay because of the process. I feel like committing suicide."*[63] In a survey conducted by the PRIDE Centre, when asked to rank their mental health state from a 1 (good) to 5 (urgent and extreme danger), 74% of refugee respondents based in Kenya ranked themselves as a 4 or 5.



There are few sources of support available. Some refugees said they had approached certain refugee-focused NGOs who run psycho-social support (PSS) programmes for assistance, but were told they needed to be in Kakuma to be able to access these. Others said they had approached LGBTQIA+ organisations in Nairobi for PSS, but had encountered barriers. In FGDs where refugees were brought together with representatives from LGBTQIA+ civil society in Kenya, the civil society representatives said that these services should be available to refugees. *"If you need PSS services, we usually refer people to [a Kenyan LGBTQIA+ organisation]. And we know they offer it for free. So this is concerning. I have done the therapy myself. I am shocked to hear about this and I'm sorry for that,"* one person told a refugee who said they had been asked for money when they tried to access the counselling through the organisation. In Mombasa, non-Kenyans who fled persecution in their own countries, but who have mostly not formally sought asylum in Kenya said they had been able to access support through HAPA Kenya.[64]

"My kids cannot go to school":[65] Exclusion from education

LGBTQIA+ refugee parents living in Nairobi generally said they had been unable to enrol their children in school due to their lack of documentation. *"When it comes to school for our children, most refugees give birth at home. When the child needs to go to school, they ask you for the birth certificate. When you ask for a birth certificate from the hospital, they tell you that you have to go back to Uganda to get it. Even if you do have the birth certificate from your home country, you have to pay more money, because you have a foreign birth certificate,"*[66] one parent explained. Another said, *"My kids need education, clothes, basic things. But they can't get documentation as children of queer refugee parents, and then cannot access schools."*[67]

[62] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 2 October 2025
[63] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[64] The PRIDE team also conducted outreach to the community through HAPA Kenya, and conducted the FGD at their offices, which is likely to have influenced these findings. However, the fact that HAPA Kenya was able to easily organise these FGDs attests to their strong relationship with the immigrant and refugee community in their county. We have confirmed that HAPA Kenya runs psychosocial support workshops for LGBTQIA+ people, both Kenyan and non-Kenyan.
[65] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Ongata Rongai, 2 October 2025
[66] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[67] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 2 October 2025

LGBTQIA+ refugees who fled to Kenya as older teenagers or young adults said they had been unable to access higher education. However, some organisations provide this community with trainings and livelihoods assistance.[68] A resident of one of the shelters outside Nairobi explained, *"We can't work. We can't continue with our studies. But at least there are some educational programmes at the shelter, like on music, law. When donors send money to our organisations, the Director starts a specific educational programme."*[69]

Kenyan civil society groups said that discrimination and bullying against LGBTQIA+ students in high-school and university was common – and that due to the sensitives around working with minors, this was a difficult topic for organisations to focus on. *"There was a case of a boy who was beaten up at school, and our organisation took up the case – but it's a very hard situation to navigate,"*[70] a civil society representative reflected.

"They realised we were gay, and they fired us":[71] Lack of access to employment and livelihoods

Section 28(5) of Kenya's Refugees Act (2021) guarantees refugees and asylum seekers the right to work. This right should be read in conjunction with the Citizenship and Immigration Act (2011)[72] and Citizens and Foreign Nationals Management Service Act (2011),[73] which stipulates that refugees should be subject to the same restrictive conditions as other foreigners. The consequence of this is that refugees, like other foreign nationals, must obtain a work permit or a business licence. **In practice, being granted a work permit or business is contingent on receiving refugee status – something most LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers are not being granted.** Additionally, research by the *Refugee-led Research Hub* has found that even when refugees are granted official status, they face multiple hurdles, hidden charges, and a slow, opaque, and discriminatory process when trying to obtain the documentation that would allow them to work.[74] *"To work, you need a work permit. Even then, you need to have an introduction letter from your boss to the government to get a document to be able to work,"*[75] a trans woman (who said she presented as a man when trying to find work) explained.

Many of the interviewees stated that they had tried to find jobs and been unable to due to lack of documentation. *"Kenyans always want an ID. They don't understand the documentation that I got from UNHCR. This makes it extremely difficult to get employment,"*[76] a gay man from Tanzania told us. This was also the case for those who had tried to start up their own businesses. One person described how she had come up with a proposal to start a small business and submitted it to a seed funding programme run by one of the NGOs. *"I had written a proposal. It was for a craft shop. They accepted me, and invited me to start the business. On the day they were supposed to give me the grant, I was denied because I didn't have my documents."*[77]

Some have overcome these issues to find ways to work informally. One gay man reported, *"I have a source of livelihood now that I do, but I am not able to do it legally. But because it's Africa, there are so many people doing businesses without documentation and licenses. … But we don't have the legal right."*[78] Another said, *"We don't have KRA PINs [person identification numbers]. All businesses that don't pay taxes are not legal."*[79] In these informal working arrangements, it is impossible for people to assert their employment rights. *"I once got a job, and I used to work. But the bosses used to give their fellow Kenyans more money, and me much less money. I would get one quarter of what they got,"* one interviewee recounted.[80] A gay man informed us that, *"There was only one place that would give us a job, not caring that we are refugees – Jiji [a Nigerian owned, Gibraltar-registered online retail company]. We even used to get the same pay as Kenyans. But then they realised we were gay, and they fired us."*[81]

Employment discrimination based on SOGIESC status effects people across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum and is generally correlated to how visibly identifiable a person is as a member of the community.[82] The discrimination was described by some Kenyan interviewees as being less extreme for people in higher socio-

[68] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 3 October 2025
[69] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[70] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025
[71] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[72] Available at https://new.kenyalaw.org/akn/ke/act/2011/12/eng@2022-12-31
[73] Available at https://new.kenyalaw.org/akn/ke/act/2011/31/eng@2022-12-31
[74] Refugee-Led Research Hub (2023) 'Refugees Access to Work Permits and Business Licences in Kenya', avilable at https://refugeeledresearch.org/refugees-access-to-work-permits-and-business-licences-in-kenya/
[75] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 3 October 2025
[76] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[77] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[78] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[79] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[80] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[81] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[82] Quotes from: FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 2 October 2025; KII with the leader of a trans organisation on 3 October 2025; FGD with LBQ women from the host community on 6 November 2025

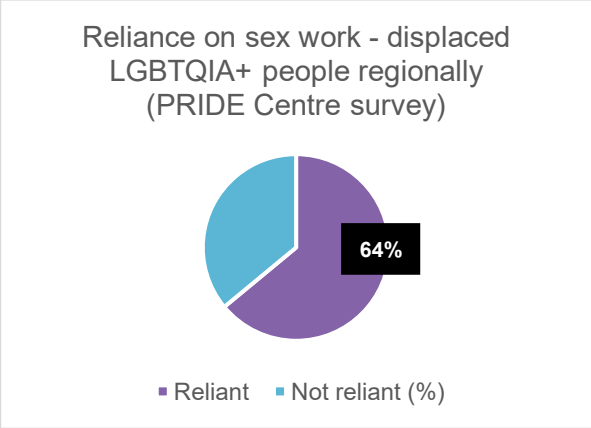
economic positions, who worked for civil society organisations, and who knew their rights. These differentiations were less relevant for asylum seekers and refugees, however, who are already a socially and economically marginalised population.

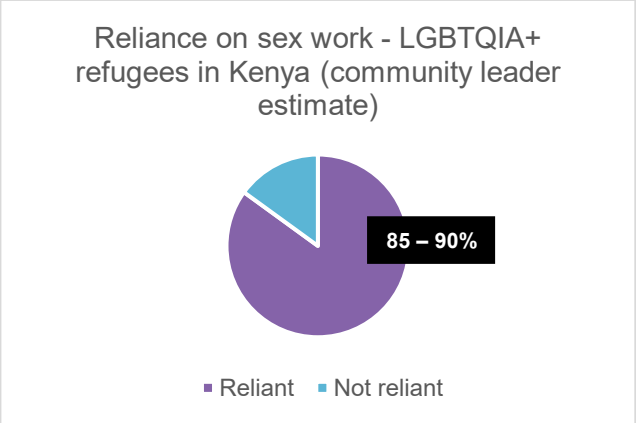
Effects on mental health

The negative mental health consequences of the inability to work and support themselves was described by many interviewees as one of their biggest challenges. *"People need to have a sense of independence, which is all based on having finances,"* one house mother explained.[83] A resident of one of the shelters agreed, *"You may think, I'm tired of relying on NGOs to help me out – but when you go and look for a job, it is impossible."*[84] One interviewee summed up the situation, saying, *"We are not entitled to work. Earning money is the biggest challenge. We have no jobs, no food, no shelter. They tell you that you can get all the services in Kakuma. But we know we can't go there. …That's when the mental issues come in. People can even commit suicide."*[85]

Sex work

It is the inability to work and earn money to cover their basic needs that turns so many in the community to sex work. *"Many queer refugees engage in survival sex work not because they want to, but because this is the only option that is available for them,"* one non-binary refugee explained.[86] A trans woman told us, "*Earning money is the biggest challenge. We could do sex work, but we are afraid of this. This is dangerous. I do this sometimes, for just Ksh 100" [approximately 75 cents]."*[87] Sex work is particularly high amongst gay men and trans women, but other members of the community also report resorting to it in order to survive. *"I don't have any documentation here. I end up relying on sex work. This is the only way I can earn a living, and also helps me hide my identity, because people don't expect sex workers to be lesbians,"* one woman told us.[88]





Being members of such a marginalised community and being so desperately in need of money means that those engaging in sex work have very little power, bargaining ability, or means of protecting themselves. ***"Our form of survival is sex work. After you've done it, a lot of the clients will attack you, not pay you, and even extort money out of you,"***[89] a trans woman told us. A gay man explained that it was impossible to insist on using protection with clients. *"This puts me at risk of STIs and HIV,"* he said, adding that he had only learned about these risks since engaging with a local LGBTQIA+ RLO. Another gay man told us he had been working in a nightclub that *"sold me to a white person. I asked him for money after we were done. But he said he already paid the people who sold me to him."*[90] Sexual violence against LGBTQIA+ sex workers is common. HAPA Kenya, which provides post-rape medical services to the community in Mombasa, told us that, ***"Most of them are reliant on sex work. We get two to three who have been raped in a day. On a Monday it will be like seven."***[91]

In addition to being hard, dangerous, and underpaid, some interviewees pointed out that sex work was unsustainable as they aged. One gay man described his experience of getting cancer and having to get a colostomy bag – which community members had crowdsourced to cover the costs of – saying that this meant

[83] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 2 October 2025
[84] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[85] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[86] KII with a leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 15 October 2025
[87] FGD with members of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[88] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[89] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[90] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[91] KII with HAPA Kenya, HIV organization in Mombasa, 9 February 2026

he was no longer able to engage in sex work to over his living expenses. Another questioned, *"How long can I continue being a sex worker? How long can it sustain me? We need a proper plan for our future."*[92]

"I want to stay with my kid":[93] Refugee children of LGBTQIA+ parents

It was not uncommon for LBQ women who spoke to our team to have previously been in heterosexual marriages or relationships, and to have had children in these relationships. Some had also become pregnant as a result of rape. A smaller number of men who have sex with men (MSM) and trans women were also biological parents, though their children were less likely to be living with them. In at least one instance, an interviewee – a trans woman – was looking after a child that was not biologically hers, but whom she had become the guardian of. ***"We have so many queer parents in our community. We are not looked at most of the time,"*** attested one interviewee.[94]

For community members with children, finding a place to stay can be extremely difficult. *"Queer parents are not allowed in shelters. It will cause chaos for the others. But then there won't be anywhere that we can go,"* one parent explained. A Kenyan civil society organisation explained that, *"Queer work in Kenya tends to exclude minors. To work with children and protect children, you have to work with the government. And to work with the government as a queer organisation, it's very tricky. The government is not receptive to that."* [95] One house mother said that in her shelter, *"We do take in minors – but only in cases where they have been trafficked."* [96]

Queer parents living in Nairobi described the difficulties in registering their children for asylum status and for receiving any kind of government or humanitarian services. *"Children of queer parents are not registered. We can't get documentation for our children, and then we cannot access schools or healthcare for them,"* an LBQ mother told us.[97] Some parents were afraid to register their children with UNHCR for fear of how it would affect their asylum claim. *"If they see us with children, people might even report us, saying we're not gay, because we have children,"* one person worried.[98] Another said that she had tried to register both her and her child as a refugee, but that her application had not been accepted. She explained the consequences of this: *"I don't have ID. And the kid doesn't have ID. I am a single mother, with a stateless kid. I am wondering how to get the documents. The government won't give a reason about why they won't register me. … Right now it is a dangerous situation with the kid. They could even allege that I stole the child.* ***There are no organisations providing me with any kind of legal assistance or legal advice****."*[99] Others said that they had been able to add their children to their refugee manifest, but that this did not help them access services. *"They always say, if you want to add your kid to your file, you can – but in terms of taking care of your child, that is on you. You won't get assistance for that,"* an LBQ mother explained. [100]

"They tell you, you need to be killed or even raped":[101] Experiences of threats and violence

Community threats and violence

Interviewees across all cities in which this research was conducted described daily experiences of threats and harassment. These were correlated with both the extent to which a person was identifiable as queer, and the area that they lived in. *"As long as they see something is different about you. People will ask you, why do you look like a woman? Why are you talking like a woman?,"* a gay refugee explained.[102] *"It's also lot of classism,"* volunteered another interviewee. *"Then there is the fact we are foreigners. …. From our sexuality and gender identity; to our foreignness; to our poverty, other people look down on us."*[103] The violence was described as being the highest in Kakuma. *"Nairobi is better than Kakuma – but not by much,"* asserted one interviewee.

[92] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 10 February 2026
[93] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[94] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[95] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025
[96] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025
[97] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 2 October 2025
[98] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[99] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[100] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[101] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Ongata Rongai on 11 November 2025
[102] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025
[103] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 9 February 2026



The top of the fence around one of the shelters –
protecting residents from attacks or intruders from outside.

In some areas in Nairobi, the levels of discrimination and attacks from the community were said to be significantly lower – but interviewees explained that these areas were unaffordable to live in. In Ongata Rongai, where the majority of the LGBTQIA+ refugee shelters are congregated, harassment was common. "*The people who we live amongst, the community, they discriminate against us. When you go to the market and they see how you're dressed or how you talk, even sometimes they won't sell you what you want,"* said a trans woman from one of the shelters.[104] Another shelter resident recounted that, *"One time, a [trans] woman was outside the house, coming back home. They pulled off her acrylic nails and beat her up."* [105] Violence as also reported in other parts of the country. A gay man living in Mombasa recalled, *"One day, when I was doing my sex work, a Muslim man came and beat us up, saying we should not line up on that road, because the road had religious energy – because people used the road to go to their religious activities. So we were brutally beaten and violated."* [106]

Some people described how dating apps were being increasingly used to extort people, or to lure them into violent encounters. *"On Grindr, it is rampant,"* explained one gay man. *"People will talk to you very nicely on Grinder, and then when you go to their house, or they come to your house, they ambush you. I even know a trans woman who was raped."*[107] Several people said that police officers were using these apps to find targets for the purpose of extorting them.

Sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual violence, as described above, is disproportionately committed against members of the sex worker community. **Gender-based violence (GBV) was also reported to be perpetrated against community members by employers, family members of employers, people at the houses they were staying in, and intimate partners**. "*When you date people, there is a lot of GBV – controlling food, controlling income, controlling how we move – it makes it hard to have a proper community here,"* one woman explained.[108] A trans woman recalled that, *"I met my boyfriend and started staying with him. Unfortunately, he died. But before that, there was a lot of violence. He didn't want to see me talking to anyone. He would beat me any time he saw me talking to anyone."*[109] Perpetrators of violence were described as including both men and women. *"I was working at this lady's house. The daughter of the employer would come in and have sex with me,"* one woman recalled. [110] Another said that when she was looking for a place to live, *"I found an older woman. I was very young. She*

[104] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[105] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 3 October 2025
[106] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 10 February 2026
[107] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025
[108] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 10 February 2026
[109] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[110] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 10 February 2026

started being violent to me, and threatening to go to the police and tell them I was not Kenyan. She was so controlling."[111]

Police abuse

Many interviewees said they lived with the constant fear of police harassment, arrest, extortion, and at worst, deportation. *"Our biggest problem is police harassment of people that are not Kenyan,"* a gay man in Mombasa asserted.[112] A trans woman in Nairobi asserted that, *"Now, we have to stay inside. The police is always looking for us, asking for our work permits. I have been arrested four times."*[113] Another trans woman, who said she presented as a man when she left the shelter, said, "*The police know how to find you. You need to try to speak English, so they don't know you're from Uganda. If you are walking and they hear you speaking in Luganda, they will stop you and harass you. Even if you have the UN asylum pass, they will still take you. That UNHCR pass doesn't work in Nairobi. It doesn't help you at all."* [114] Refugees who were not able to pay the bribes asked for by the police risked being taken to the station, where abuse was described as being common:

> *"I was arrested by police, and beaten badly".*

> *"The police officers embarrassed me. They told me to remove all my clothes, even my pants. They were checking why I looked like a man, and what kind of genitals I had."*

> *"I was arrested and beaten because I failed to provide the bribe they asked for. I have scars on my back from those beatings. I have those wounds."*

Access to justice

Interviewees conveyed that it was not possible for them to access justice for these kinds of violations. ***"When you report, they tell you, you need to be killed or even raped so that you can learn,"***[115] said one trans woman. People across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum reported similar experiences. A gay man described how after being beaten, *"I reported the issue to the police station and even with that, they didn't take the case."*[116] A lesbian woman explained that, *"Even if you go to the police station to file a report, they will never take you seriously. They will tell you are behaving like a man, and you are supposed to be behaving like a lady."*[117] A trans woman said that her community struggled disproportionately to access legal aid: *"There are organisations who say they are doing legal support, but when a trans woman is arrested, there is no one."*[118]

It was also explained that being involved in any kind of legal proceedings could have a delaying effect on a person's asylum claim. *"You cannot report a case because they will tell you that will make your refugee case be stagnant,"* a gay man told us. Another person explained how having an unsubstantiated case filed against him and a group of his friends had delayed their asylum applications. *"This person was also accusing people of gang rape and grooming … Most of us were in the resettlement stage – so they [UNHCR] alerted the Embassies of the resettlement countries that they would need to stop processing our cases. … The accuser never showed up in court. But our resettlement applications were stopped for over a year. You need a certificate of good conduct to be able to exit the country – meaning there is no criminal record against you. There are a lot of cases like this – where refugees get into trouble for something, and get stuck in court proceedings, and their application can't move forward."*[119]

"You people are demons":[120] Social perceptions of the LGBTQIA+ community

When asked why they thought the community had such hostility towards them, one interviewee answered, ***"The belief that Africans cannot be LGBTQIA+ and it's a white people thing, and that it's white people paying to depopulate Africa."*** [121] The perception that LGBTQIA+ people are receiving funds from foreigners, and are well-off, is pervasive. A house mother informed us, *"When the landlord gets to know that we are a CBO, they*

[111] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 10 February 2026
[112] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 10 February 2026
[113] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[114] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[115] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Ongata Rongai on 11 November 2025
[116] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Ongata Rongai on 11 November 2025
[117] FGD with various LGBTQIA+ organisations in Nairobi, 7 November 2025
[118] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[119] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 3 October 2025
[120] Quoting a group of religious leaders: FGD RTI with a LGBTQIA+ RLO, 29 September 2025
[121] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 2 October 2025

will raise the price of the rent. People have the mindset that people who are LGBTQIA+ have a lot of money." [122]

Interviewees attested that this belief has grown with the influence of the anti-gender/ anti-rights movement. *"The anti-rights movement and the police are our two biggest security challenges,"* one person told us.[123] A lesbian member of Kenyan civil society asserted, *"You see how we do advocacy? The anti-gender people are also doing advocacy. They are leading those clubs and out-of-school conversations that people have – doing things like preaching, spreading their word. Those groups are heavily funded."*[124] The Director of HAPA Kenya told us, *"Recently at the coast, we have had the rise of the anti-rights movement. There were bigger protests in Mombasa than anywhere else. We've been really affected. They have come here to protest at our clinic, chanting that our centre needs to be closed. That we are recruiting young people into homosexuality."* [125] An LBQ activist in Nairobi alleged, *"The opposition is also amongst us. The Church is funding different organisations who might be focused on reproductive rights for the youth. So we will think we are allied organisations, but they have infiltrated."*[126]

Interviewees said this messaging **crescendoed around certain events, including elections**; the introduction of Kenya's draft anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation, the Family Protection Bill, to Parliament; and the result of a 2023 constitutional petition in which the Supreme Court upheld the right of an LGBTQIA+ organisation to be registered as an NGO. *"When we won that freedom of association case, there was a lot of misinformation where people were saying that gay people now have the right to get married. But it's just to allow us to sit down together, like we're doing now,"* one FGD participant explained.[127] A man who was originally from Uganda, reflecting on how easy it had become to *"scapegoat minorities"* there, added, *"There is a risk that with upcoming elections in Kenya, LBGTQIA+ issues are politicised and instrumentalised*."[128]

'We see ourselves as one whole community': LGBTQIA+ Refugee-led Organisations

In the midst of this challenging and complex environment, LGBTQIA+ RLOs do their best to offer services, support, and shelter to members of their community. This section provides an overview of their activities and programmes, as well as their challenges, which are significant and existential.



A shelter resident holds a chicken; part of that shelter's livelihood programming.

[122] KII with the leader of a trans organisation on 3 October 2025
[123] KII with HAPA Kenya, HIV organization in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[124] FGD with LBQ women from the host community on 6 November 2025
[125] KII with HAPA Kenya, HIV organization in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[126] FGD with LBQ women from the host community on 6 November 2025
[127] FGD with LBQ women from the host community on 6 November 2025
128 KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 2 October 2025

Activities and programmes

Many of the RLOs in and around Nairobi began as shelters, as the result of a single refugee or a group of people deciding to open a house for at-risk members of their community to live in. Some houses remain just this – a shelter. *"My work is that I have put a structure there. Safe housing only. We are baby organisation. When I get funds, I will provide other services. But for now, for the other services, we refer to other organisations,"* one house mother told us.[129] **Other organisations have been able to raise funds to offer other programmes – whether through donors or their own means.** These include livelihoods projects, such as raising chickens, growing and selling vegetables, running catering businesses, and doing hairdressing and other beauty services. Livelihoods activities also help raise additional funds, which can be put back into the shelter. Some organisations have formed referral relationships with Kenyan LGBTQIA+ organisations, who they send their residents to for livelihoods programming and other services.

Though RLOs said that access to HIV prevention and treatment had become more difficult since the USAID funding cuts, many had found ways to help their residents access this kind of care. One house mother told us, *"We refer anyone at the shelter to medical services. When they first come in, we get them tested for HIV. If they are positive, we start them on ARVs. If they are negative, we start them on PrEP."*[130] Some shelters offered therapeutic and psychosocial support activities. *"We do this through sports, such as netball for trans people,"* one house mother told us.[131] Another organisation had organised art therapy sessions and was selling the art painted by participants as a way of raising funds for the organisation.

Referrals and Coordination

The shelters across the country are well connected to each other, and to the situation in Kakuma. House mothers described receiving daily phone calls from people considering coming to Nairobi from the camp, and even from Uganda. **Organisations in Ongata Rongai described coordinating amongst themselves to determine who had space for new arrivals, and to organise referrals between them.** *"We don't offer all kinds of services. But I know other organisations might provide other services they need. So if people need things that we don't provide, I ring them and ask them if the people in my shelter can come and access their services,"* one house mother explained. Another told us, *"Most refugee queer organisations in Rongai are like sisters. … We work together as organisations to make sure our sisters are getting what they need. We see ourselves as one whole community."*[132] Despite these descriptions, the experience of The PRIDE Centre has also been that disagreements and distrust between the organisations is a regular occurrence. This is a common and expected situation for small, severely under-funded and under-supported organisations competing for vastly inadequate resources.

Operational and funding challenges

Shelters and CBOs said they have been devastated by the funding cuts to the aid sector. *"The Trump cuts are having a serious impact. Some organisations have collapsed with lack of funding,"* explained the Director of one organisation.[133] Interviewees frequently explained that they had completely run out of money for food, WiFi, and to pay the rent. *"Our funding is very low, and running out. In fact, our landlord has given me until tomorrow vacate the shelter, because we cannot pay our rent. I am rationing food for everyone in the shelter,"* one house mother told us.[134] Since conducting the research, the PRIDE Centre has received messages from most of the shelters we visited, asking for assistance in paying the rent or buying staple food items for residents.

Interviewees also explained that **registering their organisations had been a challenge**. Some of them had managed to do this by appointing Kenyan board members. Others worked through a Kenyan fiscal host. One person said they had been able to register their organisation using their refugee ID. *"People registered as a refugee can start an RLO, but no-one else who just has the manifest can do it,"* he explained.[135] A constitutional court case decided in 2023 confirmed that LGBTQIA+ organisations have the legal right to register in Kenya.[136] However, interviewees said that in practice, this continued to be difficult. Those who had been successfully registered had avoided including references to their LGBTQIA+ mandate in their name and registration documents. Most of the shelters remain unregistered, due to the barriers posed by not having refugee status and inability to cover the costs involved. This limited the organisations in terms of who they could look to for

[129] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 3 October 2025
[130] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 3 October 2025
[131] KII with a leader of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 26 September 2025
[132] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025
[133] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 2 October 2025
[134] KII with a leader of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 26 September 2025
[135] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 3 October 2025
[136] Eric Gitari v. Non-Governmental Organizations Co-Ordination Board & 4 Others. [2015] eKLR, Petition No. 440 of 2013

possible funding sources: *"Donors always have criteria that insist that the organisation is registered, and this is a big limitation. It means we cannot apply for funds."*[137]

Finally, many of the RLOs struggle with general business management and governance. Most organisational Directors have little experience in running an organisation. *"There are challenges in governance and leadership within the RLOs due to lack of experience or know-how,"* explained one Director, who had taken up the position after growing their shelter from a place to sleep to a community-based organisation (CBO) offering multiple programmes.[138] *"When you train people and equip them, they stop being a burden."*[139]

Risks and insecurity within the shelters

Despite the sense of community and degree of safety offered by the shelters, the chronic lack of food, inability to work, reliance on sex work, over-crowding, and constant stress of being unable to pay rent and bills takes a heavy toll on shelter residents. *"The shelters that exist are already full of people. It becomes too much. You are all piled in just one shelter. You don't have privacy, you don't have mental health support,"* one resident told us. A resident of a different shelter reflected, *"The situation inside the shelter house is getting worse recently, but there is no other alternative; nowhere else to go."*[140]

The PRIDE Centre interviewed most shelter residents within their shelters, which made it less likely that they would openly talk about more serious concerns about safety or abuse in these environments. One trans woman did speak about her experience in a shelter she had been in previously, saying, *"Most people who were living there were gay men. Someone wanted to have sex with me. I refused. He raped me anyway. In the morning, I said no, I can't be in this place. I had to go back to the street."* The PRIDE Centre's experience in other countries suggests that **such experiences may not be uncommon, due to the unequal power dynamic inherent in such settings, high levels of trauma, and a lack of accountability** – caused both by the inability of the community to go to the police, and the absence of formalised funding and donor oversight.

"They need to listen to us to understand us":[141] Engagement with Kenyan and international human rights and humanitarian NGOs

Engagement with different actors in the LGBTQIA+ refugee civil society ecosystem

The ecosystem of civil society organisations working on the intersection of crisis and displacement and LGBTQIA+ rights in Kenya includes:



The engagement of the RLOs with each other type of organisation is summarised in the table below.

Type of organisation	Description of engagement	Illustrative quotes
Kenyan LGBTQIA+ organisations	RLOs usually had some level of engagement with Kenyan LGBTQIA+ organisations, including using them as fiscal sponsors, referring their members to the Kenyan organisations for services, and receiving referrals	*"When we started, we did not have a way of getting funds straight to us. So we started with being fiscally hosted by Kenyan organisations: Jinsi Yangu,*

[137] KII with a leader of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 26 September 2025
[138] KII with a leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 15 October 2025
[139] KII with a leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 15 October 2025
[140] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[141] FGD KNESWO 29 September 2025

Type of organisation	Description of engagement	Illustrative quotes
	from the Kenyan organisations for safe shelter. Some interviewees noted that queer Kenyans could not fully understand their experiences, and that since the funding cuts, the services provided to the refugee community by these organisations had significantly reduced.	*GALCK, HOYMAS, ISHTAR, etc, would do this for us."*[142] *"We have a sister organisation called Jinsi Yangu who we can refer to."* [143] *"We have worked with different Kenyan based organisations who give us referrals, especially in the aspect of safe housing."*[144] *"We used to work a lot with the Kenyan led LGBTQIA+ organisations. We used to collaborate more, but lately, there is gap caused by the funding issue. They don't have any resources."* [145]
Kenyan refugee-focused organisations	Refugees were often reliant on Kenyan refugee focused organisations for certain services; and particularly for legal aid and representation. Though these organisations are institutionally LGBTQIA+-friendly, and take on many LGBTQIA+ cases, interviewees described experiencing homophobic or transphobic attitudes from some staff.	*"We work with those organisations on our cases. But those organisations are straight people. They don't want to help you when they know you are from the community."* [146] *"One of their lawyers told our trans people, I wish you would just reform. … they don't understand us, and will be doing things like misgendering people all the time."*[147]
International LGBTQIA+ refugee focused organisations	Aside from The PRIDE Centre, there are essentially two organisations in this category: Oram and Rainbow Railroad. Rainbow Railroad does not have staff or an office in Kenya, and people described interacting with them only when applying for resettlement. Oram was mentioned frequently by many interviewees as providing them with essential services and supporting then on pursuing their asylum and resettlement applications – though they also noted that funding cuts appear to have reduced the amount of support it has been able to give.	*"Ever since I have been here, I have seen that ORAM is trying to support us. They are supportive with resettlement and documentation. They are also helpful when it comes to hygiene and supplies."*[148] *"ORAM came in a little bit after we started the shelters, to help us manage them, in 2021."* [149] *"Oram sometimes pays for shelters like ours. But there are not enough funds to pay all the bills. So we are always at risk of getting kicked out."* [150] *"The way Rainbow Railroad is running is that you have to wait a long time. You have to be patient. Right now, we have 25 members whose cases are going through them. From the time they verified the cases, it's been one year. Some members have received decisions that their case is verified. And some people have been resettled."*[151]

[142] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[143] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[144] KII with a leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 15 October 2025
[145] FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025
[146] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[147] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 3 October 2025
[148] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[149] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[150] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[151] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025

Type of organisation	Description of engagement	Illustrative quotes
International LGBTQIA+ organisations	Interviewees did not mention any international LGBTQIA+ organisations that were based in Kenya or offering them in-country support. However, these organisations were mentioned as being donors to the shelters.	*"The donors that we get support from are LGBTQIA+-led organisations. The LGBTQIA+ organisations accept us for what we are."*[152]
International refugee-focused organisations	This category includes HIAS – a medium sized international NGO with a significant presence in Kenya – and traditional refugee-focused INGOs such as the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), etc. Many people mentioned HIAS as providing them with support, including in terms of building the capacity of their RLOs. HIAS had also previously given 12,000 KES (around 90 USD) a month to urban-based refugees; which was subsequently reduced to 6,000 (45 USD), and the project has now finished. Interviewees spoke about how helpful this cash injection had been, and wished the programme had been able to continue. Some interviewees said that HIAS required them to have an urban pass in order to access services, which had effectively cut them off from being able to access their support. Most interviewees said other refugee-focused INGOs only provided services to refugees in the camp or holding an urban pass. Within Kakuma, interviewees said DRC had offered them assistance and support.	*"HIAS has been one of the organizations that has really sensitized us and given us capacity building in terms of how to manage these organisations."* [153] *"HIAS has been helping us with medical supplies."*[154] *"HIAS and ORAM have tried to push and be against what the Refugee Commissioner says. And I think this is the reason the Commissioner was changed. So they have been really pushing."* [155] *"We rely so much on the likes of HIAS to get access services like education."*[156] *"HIAS only works with people who have refugee status, and are given an urban document. There is like two of these people..."* [157] *"DRC has a GBV Desk. That's the only office that makes us feel safe in the camp. It's the only place where we go where we feel safe to make a complaint."* [158]
Humanitarian INGOs and UN agencies	Interviewees said support from UN agencies and most INGOs was limited to people living in Kakuma. Their primary contact since leaving the camp was with UNHCR, through trying to call them on their hotline. Their	*"Every time I call the UN for the interview, they just tell me that I have to wait. Otherwise, I have never had any interactions with UN agencies or INGOs."*[159] *"It's really hard to get access to the big INGOs or UN agencies. I just recently*

[152] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[153] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[154] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[155] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[156] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 3 October 2025
[157] FGD with a trans refugee group in Ongata Rongai on 5 November 2025
[158] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[159] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025

Type of organisation	Description of engagement	Illustrative quotes
	experiences of this are extrapolated in more detail below. In Mombasa, interviewees reported having positive experiences engaging with MSF.	*moved from the camp. I am still struggling to transfer my data to here. … They don't respond when we try to call them on the hotline."* [160] *"I never spoke to UNICEF about my child. It's really hard to reach those organisations. We want to talk to them, but they are hard to reach."* [161] *[In Mombasa] "All of us here [8 FGD participants] have had interactions with MSF. They provide us with medical services."*[162]
Human rights INGOs	Some refugees had been in contact with human rights INGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International as participants in their research, or to coordinate on advocacy campaigns.	*"We currently engaged in a four-year partnership project with Amnesty International. They are particularly interested in conducting an analysis of how media reports on LGBTQIA+ issues, with the goal of using these insights to publish advocacy briefs."*[163]

Engagement with UNHCR

The organisations who participated in this research were not involved in established refugee response coordination structures such as the Protection Cluster, or are even given representation at the LGBTQIA+ Refugee Technical Working Group, co-chaired by HIAS and UNHCR. Most were not aware of the existence of these coordination bodies. Interviewees were generally familiar with UNHCR only from the experience of engaging with them through the resettlement application process, and/or during their time in Kakuma. Since living outside of the camp, their engagement with the agency was generally limited to calling its 24/7 hotline, 1517. Most people were calling the hotline to ask when they would be scheduled for an RSD interview or to follow up on their case; some were calling to try to obtain the papers that would allow them to live in the urban areas; and others were calling for protection and access to services. Illustrative quotes describing their experience of calling the hotline for each type of request are included below. These are direct quotes from the interviewees, and have been included here for the purpose of giving them a voice.

Type of request	Illustrative quotes
Case follow up	*"When you are trying to follow up on your case, it takes a long time. Some of us have been waiting for like two years. We call to try to understand what is happening with our cases. We call to ask them if our file is even still in existence. I've had two years of waiting for an interview. They will tell you six months, six months, every time you ask them. They tell us to be patient."*[164]
	"If you call 1517, they will just tell you that they will give you a booking and will call you back. But you never get that booking."[165]
	"They have a system where they have to call you personally, or send you a message. You call 1517. You tell them your identity. They tell you they will call you back, or message. They never do."[166]
	"UNHCR keep saying they will call us back when we contact them... but they never call back."[167]

[160] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[161] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[162] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 9 February 2026
[163] KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 2 October 2025
[164] FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025
[165] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[166] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[167] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025

Type of request	Illustrative quotes
	"I have called 1517 so many times. They just keep telling me that I need to call back. I call every single day. They tell me to be patient, and that it will take one or two years."[168]
	"It's been seven years. I don't call 1517 anymore. They'll just tell you: hold. And when you talk about yourself, and say you're an LGBTQIA asylum seeker, they just take your information and tell you they'll call you back. They always say they'll call you back. And nothing will ever move."[169]
Requesting permits allowing residing in urban areas	*"I went back to change my documents to be an urban refugee in January 2024. … You have to work and work and work to get those documents. You keep calling the helpline all the time. You need to keep doing this for months and months, or even years. … The people will just tell you to call back again. Call back again. Call back again. Again and again and again. And now people are even not getting those documents at all."*[170]
	"It's really hard to get papers through the UNHCR. Every time I tried to contact them, they would not respond. … So I just gave up."[171]
Protection or service requests	*"UNHCR keep saying they will call us back when we contact them to report a security incident, but they never call back and they never send any text messages to us. We contact UNHCR for support and try calling their helpline, but they don't answer or follow-up our calls."*[172]
	"I called 1517 in March 2024. I told them I needed protection. They never called me back."[173]
	"If you call 1517, they will tell you that for medical care, we can contact NCCK – which is the hospital that does health services for LGBTQIA+ refugees. But right now, they offer very little services."[174]

Accessing services from UN agencies and INGOs

In terms of access to other services by INGOs and UN agencies, interviewees generally said they had been told that these were not available to them if they did not hold urban pass documents. *"These organisations have stopped people without documentation,"* one RLO Director told us. *"Most of the refugees we have now are asylum seekers, without refugee status. So they are not accessing services. These stakeholders are going through the CBOs. When refugees realise they have been left without support, they realise they are able to build their own organisations and projects."*[175] Another interviewee agreed, *"We are living in a country where we don't have documentation, we don't have access to services from stakeholders. There are so many stakeholders that don't cater for asylum seekers and other people who are holding camp documents. [Lists four INGOs]… if you go to them for services, they require you to have the correct documentation."* [176]

[168] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[169] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[170] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[171] FGD with refugees in Mombasa, 10 February 2026
[172] FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[173] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation in Ongata Rongai on 4 November 2025
[174] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[175] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025
[176] FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 29 September 2025

Recommendations from refugees and asylum seekers

The PRIDE Centre's reports released in November 2025 and April 2026 included recommendations to international humanitarian and refugee aid agencies on how to ensure access to essential aid and services for LGBTQIA+ refugees, as well as recommendations relating to breaking the *de facto* freeze on LGBTQIA+ RSDs. In this report, we summarise the **key requests to the Kenyan and international aid community made by interviewees**.

Addressing the delays in RSD and applications for urban passes

Interviewees called for **increased advocacy with the Kenya Department of Refugee Services around the issue of the '*pause*' in RSD processing for LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers, and the recent trend of their applications for urban passes being refused or endlessly delayed**. They also made allegations of mistreatment and degrading treatment by DRS staff, and requested UNHCR to play a more robust role in holding them to account for such violations.[177]

> *"**International organisations need to do advocacy for documentation**. We are completely reliant on humanitarian organisations for food rations and everything else, but they require us to have documents, and we are not being given these."*

> *"**UNHCR should hold the government accountable** to ensure that the process is not slowed down and that it improves and reduces delays in the process."*

> *"UNHCR needs to review whether DRS is **acting according to the agreed policies**."*

Providing services to urban refugees

There were consistent requests amongst interviewees for Kenyan and international INGOs to **provide services to LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers living in urban settings, even if they did not have the urban pass.** As was described in our previous reports, providing such services is not only legal under Kenyan law, but constitutionally protected.[178] The most pressing need described by interviewees was access to healthcare – a basic right which is also protected under Kenyan statutory and constitutional law, including for refugees.[179]

> *"We request that they **acknowledge that LGBTQIA+ refugees cannot live in Kakuma** and that access to services should be made available regardless of documentation."*

> *"**If we cannot be resettled, then let us feel at home** in our own safe space. Healthcare. Mental health support. Assistance for children of queer parents. If you have refugee status and access to medical care, there is hope."*

> *"We really need access to healthcare, both trans and general LGBTQIA+ health."*

Funds, resources, and organisational capacity development to the shelters and RLOs

This was The PRIDE Centre's key recommendation from its previous two reports, and was one consistently emphasised by interviewees. The majority of LGBTQIA+ refugees in Kenya are living outside the camp, cut off from access to services offered by mainstream humanitarian and refugee-focused organisations. This population is reliant on refugee-run shelters and RLOs for their support and survival. As is described in this report, these organisations operate with extremely limited and constantly decreasing sources of funding, to the extent that residents frequently go without food, and **house mothers are forced to rely on sex work to pay the rent**. **The need for sustainable forms of support for these shelters is urgent and obvious.** Interviewees also emphasised that rigid funding models and requirements prevented them from being eligible for many

[177] Quotes below from KII with the leader of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 3 October 2025 and FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 2 October 2025.
[178] *Attorney General v Kituo Cha Sheria & 7 others* [2017] KECA 773 (KLR)
[179] Quotes below from FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 2 October 2025; FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ organisation on 2 October 2025; FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025

grants, and called for a more flexible approach, coupled with organisational and financial capacity building for recipients.[180]

*"They need to acknowledge that **organisations who deal with these issues already exist**. They're not starting from scratch."*

"Grassroots organisations need to get access to funding."

"There is a disconnect between what we are asking for, and what we are seeing on the ground. That's why I started my own organisation. Most of us, we need a donor to come in and support us directly."

*"Donors always have criteria that insist that the organisation is registered, and this is a big limitation. **It means we cannot apply for funds.**"*

*"Something we really struggle with is getting funding. ... There should be **flexible funding models, with probation periods, and capacity building**, so that we can get funding directly."*

Advocating for the right to work and facilitating documentation

The desire to be able to engage in meaningful employment was frequently expressed by interviewees. Legally, refugees in Kenya have the right to work. In practice, this is frustrated by lack of political will, bureaucracy, and extortion by those involved in the process. For LGBTQIA+ refugees, this is further complicated by the fact that they are not being granted refugee status. These barriers are not a result of Kenyan law, but of unwritten policy, practice, individual opportunism, and institutional discrimination. These barriers could therefore be navigated through a legal documentation programme run by a UN agency or INGO with this type of legal protection.[181]

*"**Our biggest challenge is proper documentation to be able to work**."*

*"**We are motivated to work**. But we don't have the legal right. That thing of documentation puts you at a certain level that you cannot pass."*

*"We need economic empowerment. **Empower someone, you can prevent a lot of challenges**."*

Meaningful consultations with LGBTQIA+ refugees

Some interviewees expressed a desire for international organisations to speak to them directly about their needs.[182]

*"We want agencies to give us feedback and communicate with us. **They extract information and then we never see them again**."*

"We need improved communication between the organisations and LGBTQIA+ refugees."

*"Let's give the community the space to organise based on their own priorities. We know our own challenges. **These organisations are planning for us. But they don't listen to our problems**."*

Exceptions for LGBTQIA+ refugees within the Shirika Plan

The Shirika Plan was covered in our November 2025 report, which found that many **LGBTQIA+ refugees harbour deep fears about its implementation**. First, they are concerned about being required to live in the areas around the refugee camps, amongst Kenyan host community members who have previously subjected them to discrimination, persecution, and violence. Second, they fear that being integrated into Kenyan society

[180] Quotes below from: FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 2 October 2025; FGD with various LGBTQIA+ organisations in Nairobi, 7 November 2025; KII with a leader of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 26 September 2025.
[181] Quotes below from: FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025; FGD with a mix of refugees and Kenyans on 7 November 2025; FGD with members of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025
[182] Quotes below from: FGD with trans refugees in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025; KII with the leader of a trans organisation on 3 October 2025; FGD with LGBTQIA+ refugees in Nairobi on 29 September 2025

will mean that their applications for resettlement outside the country, which many see as the only real durable solution for them, will never be processed. Finally, there is significant confusion about whether the benefits conferred by the Shirika Plan will be bestowed even on those who have not been granted refugee status – which accounts for the majority of LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers. **Interviewees stressed that they wanted to be consulted in discussions about the Shirika Plan, and that there needed to be explicit carve-outs made for their community** – including exemptions from living in the areas around the camps, and assurances that their resettlement applications would still be processed.[183]

"Refugees were not consulted when setting up the Shirika Plan. We don't understand it or what is in it. ***We have been asking the UNHCR for the Shirika Plan****. …* ***We want to sit with them to understand what is in the plan, and advise how we can be included****."*

"The Shirika Plan is a concern – the resettlement part of it is not included. But ***queer people cannot integrate****. We need to resettle."*

"The Shirika Plan says that every refugee has to live around the camp. … The Turkana people don't know about us. They don't understand us. They beat us. The South Sudanese also come in fighting. That puts the trans women at a lot of risk. ***The question is, where does it leave the LGBTQIA+ refugees? What happens to us?****"*

"I oppose the Shirika plan. … ***The services will only be provided to those with refugee status****. Most LGBTQIA+ people are asylum seekers, not refugees."*

[183] Quotes below from: FGD with members of a trans organisation in Ongata Rongai on 29 September 2025; KII with the leader of a trans organisation on 3 October 2025; FGD with members of an LGBTQIA+ RLO on 2 October 2025