

A vibrant outdoor market scene in Mombasa, Kenya. The foreground shows a woman in a floral shirt and a man in a yellow shirt and cap. In the background, several men in white shirts are engaged in conversation. The market is filled with colorful fabrics, including a large stack of multi-colored textiles on a table. A red and white cooler is visible in the lower left. The background shows buildings with blue and white walls and a corrugated metal roof.

How Refugees Take Control of Who “Belongs”

A Case Study of Refugees in Towns
Mombasa, Kenya

Aisha Adan and Ella Duncan

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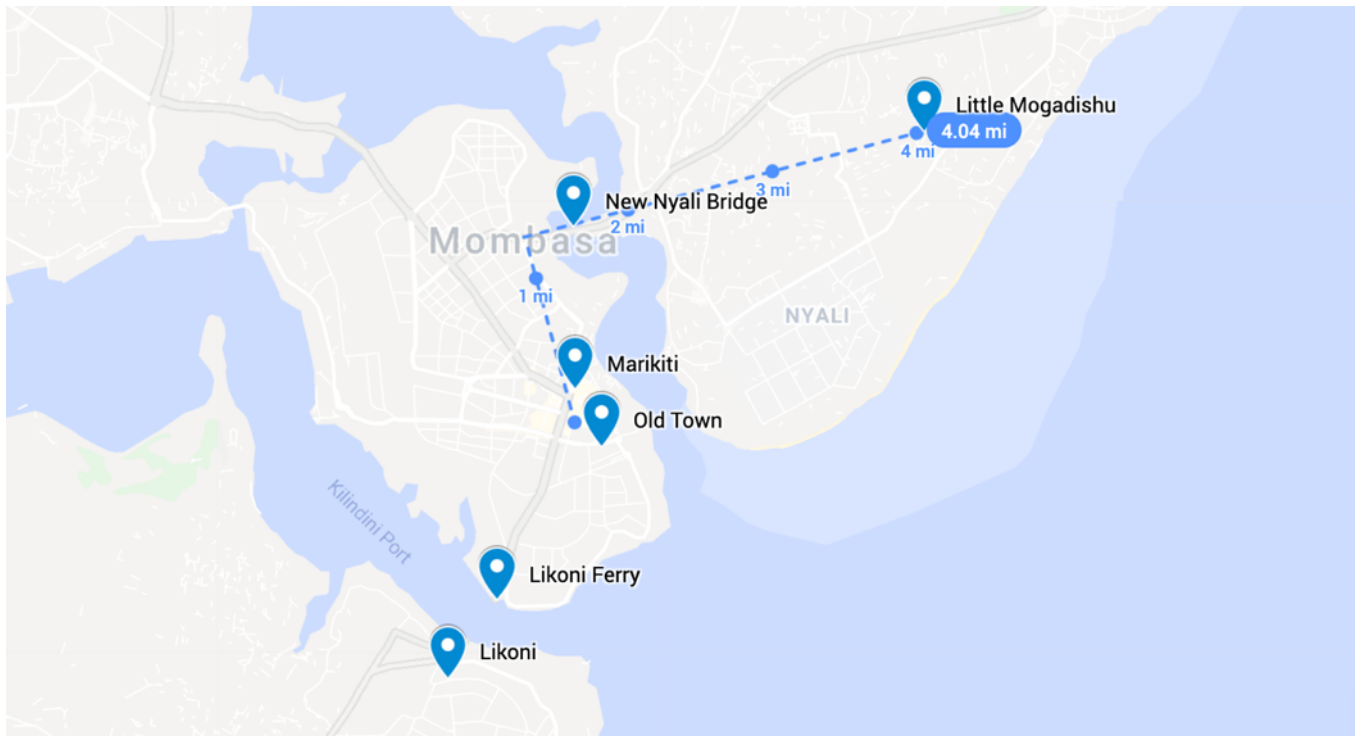
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Cover photo: A street view of Marikiti Market. Photo by Aisha Adan.

Location



The heart of Mombasa is an island, 3 miles across (5km). The island is separated by the Mombasa harbor from Nyali, a sprawling suburb that includes the Somali-majority neighborhood known as “Little Mogadishu.”



Mombasa is a coastal city, separated from both the inland capital of Nairobi and the refugee camps in the north by geography and culture. Mombasa has a unique cosmopolitan history—with international influence from Portugal, Oman, India, and the U.K.—and a large Muslim population that make it a welcoming place for Somali-Kenyans and Somali refugees.

Base map imagery © Google 2019. For more background on refugees in Kenya and Mombasa, continue to the appendices.

Introduction

If you ask about the number of refugees in Mombasa, Kenya, you get conflicting answers. According to the Kenyan Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS), there are 15,600 legally registered refugees in Mombasa, over 8,000 of whom are Somalis.¹ Yet one local security official said there are no refugees *legally* in Mombasa,² and a Kenyan businesswoman reported, “There are no more refugees in Mombasa.”³ According to a local legal aid group, there are many more refugees than are formally counted.⁴ There seems to be some confusion about the number of refugees in Mombasa.

The confusion is the result of changing definitions of who is a refugee and the long history of Kenyan-Somalis⁵ in Mombasa.⁶ To anyone—including Somalis—the identifiable differences between Kenyan-Somalis and Somali refugees are subtle, and often comes down to hearing their Swahili accent.⁷ From our conversations and personal experiences, the obstacles and opportunities for refugees to integrate into Mombasa come from the ambiguities between those two different statuses: Kenyan-Somalis and Somali refugees. Refugees who use this ambiguity to blend into Mombasa’s society can avoid the burdens of Kenya’s restrictive refugee policy. Assuming the legal status of Kenyan-Somalis also allows one to open a business and start a new life. On the flip side, the ambiguity creates obstacles: both Somali refugees and Kenyan-Somalis in Mombasa are subject to social marginalization and police harassment on the basis of assumptions that they are all “refugees.”

This report examines the impact and experiences of Somalis in Mombasa, and how Somali refugees and Kenyan-Somalis navigate their ambiguous identities and find creative ways to access the privileges promised by recognized legal status, with or without the status itself. This report tries to understand how Somali refugees and Kenyan-Somalis manage ambiguous identities and “belonging” in Mombasa. We begin by introducing formal documentation as symbols of identity and the key to accessing services in Mombasa, detailing the difficult experience of **Navigating Daily Bureaucracy as a Refugee**. Describing these difficulties leads into a discussion on **Using Informal Networks**; how relationships and similarities between Kenyan-Somalis and Somali-Somalis are used to overcome bureaucratic restrictions. **Refugees’ Location in Mombasa and the Effects of Harassment** then provides a look into where Somalis live and work in Mombasa, including some of the negative effects of a shared Somali identity. Finally, the section on **Privileges** explores who can claim certain privileges of “belonging” and how these claims are enacted.

¹ Author interview with Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS) officer, July 30, 2019.

² Author interview with security official in Mombasa, August 1, 2019.

³ Author interview with Somali businesswoman, July 3, 2019.

⁴ Author interview with migrant and refugee legal aid advocate, July 4, 2019.

⁵ In this report we refer to Kenyan-Somalis, Kenyans, Somali-Somalis, Somali refugees, and Somalis. The differences are explained in Box 1.

⁶ The Kenyan-Somali population has been kept separated from the rest of Kenya by a colonial history of pitting different populations against one another, by state policies since independence that have marginalized Kenyan-Somalis politically and economically, and by Somali community norms that value privacy. The Kenyan-Somali population is isolated within Kenya as a group who are legally citizens but are only limitedly integrated into wider Kenyan society.

⁷ Swahili is a national language of Kenya and is spoken by the majority of Mombasa residents. It is not a national or common language in Somalia. Many of the people who participated in this study believe one can tell where someone is from based upon their accent when speaking Swahili.

The Authors' Positions in Mombasa and Experiences Researching this Case

Co-authors Aisha Aidan and Ella Duncan first met in 2015 when working together to evaluate countering violent extremism (CVE) projects in the Mombasa area. Aisha helped Ella get to know the city as they shopped for *kitenge* (African fabric), and shared Swahili *pilao* (a local spiced rice dish). They were both committed to understanding marginalization in Mombasa and to extending empathy to people caught in destructive cycles of violence.

As Kenyan-Somalis and lifelong Coastarians,⁸ Aisha's family hosted refugees in the early 1990s. Aisha has seen the urban refugee issue fade from public attention over the years. Aisha notes shifts in how the Kenyan-Somali population is perceived by Kenyan society. There is an increase in the political activity of Kenyan-Somalis—both as public officials and as voters—and the rise of Somali owned businesses. But she also hears talk about Somalis gaining too much power and influence, and unfair associations of the entire Somali community with the terrorist group al-Shabaab. This project gave Aisha a chance to examine her work on CVE and her position as a Kenyan-Somali from a new perspective by affording her the opportunity to better understand how all parts of the Somali population have integrated into Mombasa.

Ella's position in Mombasa was as an outsider. Previous work in East Africa and Mombasa influenced how she understood the study's themes and participants and helped build her credibility with interviewees. Ella's associations with the local non-governmental organization (NGO) Muslims for Human Rights (MUHURI) helped with the research; they hosted Ella for the summer and provided her with workspace and introductions to their network.

For both authors, previous experience working locally and regionally on violent conflict created initial bias in how they approached the study. They expected that violence and security would be the primary concerns of the Somali community.⁹ Instead what emerged were stories about Somali desires to move and work without harassment based on questioning of their legal status. What also emerged was their desire for "belonging" in Mombasa.

⁸ A "Coastarian" is a resident of the Swahili Coast, of which Mombasa is one of the ports. The Swahili Coast has a distinct culture, demography, religion, and geography from the rest of Kenya.

⁹ This expectation was based on Mombasa's struggles with organized crime and violent extremism.

Local perceptions of Americans and American foreign policy as a destructive force in the region created some tensions in conversations when Ella was present.¹⁰ But her identity as a foreigner also allowed conversations to become more explicit because participants felt compelled to clearly explain local complexities that would have been left unarticulated if discussed with a local. This included Kenyans expressing more open prejudice against Somalis in their conversations with Ella, compared to when those same participants spoke with Aisha.

For more on the methods used for this case report, continue to Appendix A.

Navigating Daily Bureaucracy as a Refugee

“The genesis of status is documentation.” – Migrant and refugee legal aid advocate

Formal documents are part of everyday life in Mombasa. Residents must provide documentation to register a SIM card, to access mobile money transfer services, to get public services such as healthcare, to pay utility bills, to pass through police checkpoints, and to register children for school.

In Aisha’s experience, her siblings faced challenges in enrolling in higher education because of the additional vetting Kenyan-Somalis face with National ID cards. Some families bribe their way through the frustrating process. She knows families who choose schools for their children (including secular schools, religious *madrassas*, or a mix) at least partially according to which documents those schools require for registration.

To access documents, refugees register at the Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS) offices,¹¹ where they are issued Refugee IDs in place of the National ID used by citizens. Refugee IDs expire after five years.

Box 1: A Note on Terminology

In this report, following local norms, “Kenyan-Somali” refers to Kenyan citizens who are ethnic Somalis; “Kenyan” refers to all non-Somali Kenyan citizens; “Somali-Somali” and “Somali refugee” refers to those who came in the 1990s following the collapse of the Somali state. Somali refugees are those who are formally registered as refugees, and Somali-Somalis refers to all other migrants from Somalia. We use “Somali” to refer to all Kenyan-Somalis, Somali refugees, and Somali-Somalis, and as a generic term to describe any ethnic Somali who chose not to disclose their status to us.

¹⁰ In a July 27, 2019 interview with a community leader, it was suggested that “it would be better if [Ella was] English or Canadian...everyone knows America is against Muslims [because of the Global War on Terror].” Multiple participants asked for a personal response by Ella to President Trump’s July 2019 political attacks on Somali-American Congresswoman Ilhan Omar.

¹¹ For more information on the topic of Kenyan refugee policy, the authors recommend (full citations are available in the report’s references): the comprehensive 2012 report, [Asylum Under Threat](#), by the Refugee Consortium of Kenya; the Somali refugee-specific 2011 journal article, [Between a Protracted and a Crisis Situation: Policy Responses to Somali Refugees in Kenya](#), by A. Lindley; the 2018 review, [Against the Odds: Refugee Integration in Kenya](#), by S. O’Callaghan and G. Sturge.

Replacing them is not only time consuming, it might also give the holder a new ID number, meaning that any existing services and records are out of sync, leading to inconveniences like the loss of access to phone numbers or to bank accounts, and the inability to find family files with the RAS.

A Refugee ID comes with limits. Card holders are restricted in their movement in and out of Mombasa, face additional bureaucratic hurdles to registering businesses,¹² often cannot open a bank account,¹³ are not permitted to take advanced university placement exams. One of the country's largest mobile providers has recently stopped accepting Refugee IDs as valid documents, restricting access to phones, SIM cards, and mobile money. Some refugees believe this corporate policy change was in response to Kenyan government pressures after mobile money was used to fund terrorist attacks in Kenya.

Refugee ID holders face uneven treatment by police. Official police training in Mombasa does not include how to deal with urban refugees. A local legal aid group provides short workshops on refugee law that are often the only training Mombasa police receive on the legal status of urban refugees, but the workshops are not mandatory for officers.¹⁴ The result is a confused and fearful environment for refugees. Regular police demands for documentation amount to harassment with the intent of bribery: police ask for or accept bribes to release Somalis whose documentation they find to be insufficient.¹⁵

Box 2: Conflicting Interpretation of Refugee Policies

Since 1991, the government of Kenya's encampment policy has required all refugees to be in camps. In 2006, the newly created Refugee Act stated that valid refugee IDs protect from arbitrary arrest, detention, or expulsion. Refugee advocates argue the 2006 Act provides protection for urban refugees, and the operation of Refugee Affairs Secretariat offices in cities like Mombasa is seen as an acknowledgement of urban refugees. Yet the encampment policy continues to serve as a heavy threat.

Box 3: Refugees' Path to Kenyan Citizenship

The 2010 Constitution technically allows a path for naturalized citizenship, but no one we spoke to in the refugee community or civil society knew of a refugee actually getting citizenship.

From both government and civil society actors, we heard, "We encourage people to apply for naturalization because you never know, but we tell them not to expect it." We came across one public example of a Congolese refugee who was naturalized after he was selected to play for a Kenyan football team.

¹² [Refugees are only eligible for Class M working permits](#) which do not allow them to register businesses themselves.

¹³ Refugees and civil society actors told us some banks do accept Refugee IDs, while others do not. It's unclear if this variance reflects the attitude and training of clerks or the policies of different banks.

¹⁴ Author interview with migrant and refugee legal aid advocate, July 4, 2019.

¹⁵ According to Transparency International (2018), one in four people in Africa pay bribes to access basic services, and Kenya is ranked 144 out of 180 internationally in the 2018 Global Corruption Perception Index. Corruption in Mombasa is not unique

Aisha and Ella experienced this demand for documentation together. They were stopped by police and required to produce IDs. The officer hoped that we would not have the correct documents and would be easy marks for a bribe. As Aisha said, “A Somali and a foreigner! The police were seeing money.” Luckily, we were assured in the correctness of our documents, but for someone with less confidence in their position, the interaction could be a very pressured one.

Using Informal Networks

“A Somali can do business with anybody. It doesn’t matter if there is a written contract, if I trust you, we will make a deal.” – Somali businesswoman

To avoid obstacles, restrictions, and harassment, Somali refugees make informal contracts with Kenyan-Somalis for everything from registering for M-Pesa accounts (the Kenyan mobile money system),¹⁶ registering businesses, to claiming each other’s children as their own to access Kenyan National ID cards.

The use of informal networks is most clearly seen in the private sector. Kenyan-Somali businesspeople, shopkeepers, NGO employees, and Aisha’s own family all told us how the arrival of Somali refugees in the 1990s was a revolution for Somali businesses in Kenya. Somali refugee businesses enhanced Somalis’ reputation as risk-taking entrepreneurs. Despite legal restrictions on their ability to work and register businesses, Somali refugees used relationships with Kenyan-Somalis and diasporic networks¹⁷ to force a door open into Marikiti—the major market in Old Town. Kenyan and Kenyan-Somali shopkeepers credit Somali refugees for making it possible for them to do business in Marikiti.¹⁸ Somalis are praised for being “willing to negotiate,” and “if you walk into a Somali shop you can get something worth whatever you have in your pocket.”¹⁹ A spirit of “everything is negotiable” fits well with the Swahili ethos of flexibility and hospitality.

Spice Stall in Marikiti Market



Figure 1: Spice sales and other trade of goods provide a taste of home for Somalis, and a source of informal labor. Photo by Ella Duncan.

to Somalis or refugees. Still, Somali refugees, Kenyan-Somalis and Kenyans told us Somali refugees experience the highest levels of harassment by police.

¹⁶ M-Pesa mobile money is used for daily transactions, paying bills, and accessing public services like healthcare. Kenya’s leading mobile money platform, M-Pesa is a key service, especially in urban areas.

¹⁷ By banding together their money and calling on international networks, Somali-Somalis are able to buy in bulk from international markets and sell their goods at a lower price. Interview with author, Somali businessman, July 26, 2019.

¹⁸ Interview with Kenyan-Somali Marikiti shopkeeper and Arab Marikiti shopkeeper, July 16, 2019. Also worth noting are the tensions created with the previously dominant Asian business class, who were usurped by Somalis in some Kenyan urban centers. This history did not emerge in our interviews but is noted in other research. For more on the dynamics of Somali investment, see F. Abdulsamed, *Somali Investment in Kenya*, Chatham House, 2011.

¹⁹ Interview with Somali religious leader, August 5, 2019.

To illustrate how these informal business relationships work, a Somali refugee and a Kenyan-Somali might make an arrangement like this:²⁰ Amina is a Somali refugee who wants to start a small business. She has a connection who can help import clothes cheaply from Asia, but her refugee status does not allow her to register the business with the Kenyan Revenue Authority (KRA). She is connected through a cousin's marriage to Dalmar, a Kenyan-Somali born in Mombasa. Dalmar registers the business under his name, but Amina runs the operation. Both partners benefit from the income, but without a formal contract Amina has no legal protection if the deal turns sour. As the business grows, they hire more Somalis, including refugees who are working illegally. Amina and Dalmar take on the responsibility of bribing the police to not harass their employees, extending a form of protection and patronage to their community.

The Somali community's ability to navigate informal and corrupt systems requires the ability to pay to access those systems, pricing many Somalis out of what has become a normalized way of doing business. Furthermore, Somalis' business success brings accusations that Somali money is connected with piracy, terrorism, and al-Shabaab.²¹

Refugees' Location in Mombasa and the Effects of Harassment

"I don't cross the bridge." – Somali refugee woman

The refugee population is spread out across Mombasa, with enclaves divided by wealth and physical constraints. Some Somalis are moving to the Congolese neighborhood of Likoni, just south of the city and separated from Mombasa Island by creaking ferries that move commuters back and forth around the clock. Most Somalis stay close to the market in Old Town and surrounding areas on the island and in the elite Nyali suburb of "Little Mogadishu" to the north (see Map 1).

Box 4: Gender and Coping Strategies

Both men and women experience harassment, but men we spoke to were more likely to describe using proactive solutions (bribing an authority, calling on more powerful associates to deal with police, or using family connections to get an ID) whereas women were more likely to share passive coping strategies (avoiding crossing the bridge, not going out after dark).

The Somali refugee community in Old Town is close to the market and avoids the danger of crossing the new Nyali Bridge, a spot often used by the police to stage roadblocks and police checks. In Old Town, Somalis live together, alongside Swahili neighbors. Their shared religion and some intermarriage

²⁰ This example is a hypothetical one, but each detail was taken from our interviews.

²¹ For more background on violent extremism in Kenya, please continue to Appendix C.

help keep the community cohesive. The homes in Old Town are crowded, but residents can be confident they are never far from a trusted friend if they need any kind of help.

On the other hand, as refugee neighborhoods become known as home to vulnerable people without rights, they attract the attention of gangs or religious extremists who intend to recruit them. This attention in turn brings indiscriminate crackdowns from the police, making the security of living among your own people a double-edged sword. One Kenyan-Somali colleague told us that when he moved to Mombasa, he planned to live near Old Town but was warned against it because its association with Somalis and al-Shabaab had made it a target for police raids.²²

Ethnic profiling by security and police in Mombasa hits the Somali refugee community particularly hard.²³ In conversations, Kenyans regularly portrayed Somalis as leading vulnerable young men who are otherwise “good boys” to al-Shabaab. Somali refugees told us that if they are caught by the police, their refugee status means they are labeled terrorists, and their precarious legal status gives them little leverage to push back.

In booming Nyali, residents of Little Mogadishu are generally better off in terms of wealth, education, skills, and personal connections than those in Old Town.²⁴ Aisha moved to Little Mogadishu with her husband and children from an area that had few Somalis. They feel safer in Little Mogadishu where Somalis are the majority. The area is quite self-contained, with shopping centers, a hospital, *madrassas*, mosques, and cafes. This makes life easy for those living there, but there are reports of police raids on Somali residents. As the neighborhood grows, non-Somali Kenyans are moving in. While there is still segregation by plot and building, Aisha feels people get along if they speak the common language of Swahili. But some Somali-Somalis and returnees from the diaspora struggle with Swahili and are more isolated. Aisha is satisfied with her life in Little Mogadishu: “My kids go to a *madrassa* that is close to home, there is easy access to a nearby mosque, and our home has plenty of space and privacy unlike previously where all these benefits were not accessible.”

Daily Life in the City



Figure 2: Kids play soccer on the beach below Fort Jesus in Mombasa's Old Town. Photo by Ella Duncan.

²² B. Sanga, and P. Mwakio, “100 aliens seized in Mombasa swoop.” *Standard Digital*. April 14, 2014. Accessed August 5, 2019.

²³ A 2018 survey found that the two most common things Kenyans heard about refugees were that the government was closing the camps and that refugees were a terrorist security threat. International Rescue Committee, Kenya: Citizens’ Perceptions on Refugees, Nairobi, 2018.

²⁴ Reflects a 2004 UNHCR Working Paper that highlights stratifications in refugees according to their resources. Please see S. Banki, Refugee Integration in the Intermediate Term: A Study of Nepal, Pakistan, and Kenya, New issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper No. 108.

Privileges

“I would never know she was a refugee.” – Kenyan-Somali woman

The ability of Somali refugees and Kenyan-Somalis to work, move around the city, and live free from harassment is dependent on their ability to claim the privileges of a recognized legal status. Yet the protections offered by different legal statuses are uneven. Enjoying the protections of a status depends on language skills and access to resources.

Language skills, or the ability to speak fluent Swahili (even better if it is with a Coastarian accent), set the foundation for how any interaction with a business, person on the street, police officer, or authority figure will go. These skills are most common in Kenyan-Somalis and long-term refugees, such as young adults who came to Mombasa as children. Language skills are associated with “belonging” as a local, which comes with some privileges associated with being Kenyan, particularly the ability to move around the city. Aisha has many examples of when her accent has helped her. One time she was taking a local cab, the driver was trying to charge her double the normal fare. When she called out the driver for overcharging in a Coastarian accent, the driver agreed with the normal rate, telling her, “You are a Somali, but your accent is different: your fellow Somalis always pay the doubled fare and they don’t complain!” In a more serious context, she was stopped by a police officer and asked for her documents, but once he heard her speaking fluent Swahili, he said, “Don’t worry about the ID card.” He wanted to confirm she was Kenyan, and her accent provided enough proof for him to consider the question answered. Refugees could have legal status and documentation, but without the language skills to explain themselves and their situation, they might still be restricted by police when moving around the city.

Access to resources—in the form of financial or social capital—smooths the path to access legal documentation or to live without them. Somali refugees and Kenyan-Somalis alike are often expected to pay premiums for services promised to them by their legal status.²⁵ Two recurrent examples are: money needed to secure permission to open a business, and the social capital needed to mobilize a network if you get arrested by the police.

However, the role of resources is changing. From the bottom up, young people want “the right thing done the right way.” Younger Somalis expressed resentment at the need to use informal networks to live comfortably. Increased government and corporate control over marginal spaces is making it more difficult and expensive to use social or financial resources to avoid bureaucratic obstacles. Programs like the Huduma Namba,²⁶ barriers to SIM and M-Pesa registration,²⁷ and increased government scrutiny of taxation are making informal workarounds harder.

²⁵ One young Kenyan-Somali woman shared a story of trying to get a passport. She was identified as a Somali and given the option to: 1) pay a hefty bribe for immediate service, thus embracing a stereotype of Somalis having money and being willing to pay; or 2) reject the stereotype and insist on being treated as a Kenyan citizen, but then having to wait an extended period for the service.

²⁶ A national biometric database mandated by the government of Kenya; roll-out began in 2019.

²⁷ Please see Section on **Navigating Daily Bureaucracy as a Refugee**.

Looking to the Future

Inconsistent recognition of legal status makes informal arrangements appealing for refugees to start new lives and businesses. These ventures in turn create opportunities for Kenyan-Somalis to come along as business partners who are valuable because of their legal status.

In the long term, inconsistent recognition may serve to isolate the entire Somali community. International resources are being poured into Mombasa and the Swahili Coast to combat violent extremism, and Somali refugees fear that engaging in civil society will bring unwanted attention to their status and increase harassment by police. In Aisha's professional experience, both the Kenyan-Somali and Somali refugee populations are largely absent from CVE programming, which is misguided given the insights the Somalis could bring.

Somali refugees in Mombasa are not confident about the future. They are aware that things could be better: international media and social networks provide vivid examples of how Somali refugees are integrating in other parts of world. Kenyan-Somali citizens also want to enjoy protections and not be punished for associating with refugees.

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Appendix A: Methods

This report is based on a desk review, and conversations and interviews in Mombasa with Kenyan-Somalis, Kenyans, Somali refugees, and Somalis who chose not to disclose their status in Mombasa.

Desk Review

Our desk review focused on Kenya’s refugee policy, examining its political evolution and its application. We also reviewed research about the gaps between the law and the experience of refugees on the receiving end of the policy. Additionally, we reviewed the history of the Somali people in Kenya.

Context Review for Cultural Sensitivities

Context reviews of the study protocol were completed prior to the start of research by local co-author Aisha Aidan—advised by the Kenya-based consulting group Wasafiri—and by the Mombasa-based NGO MUHURI. The context review was kept fresh by ongoing reflection between Aisha, Ella, and the staff of MUHURI. The ongoing reflection sought to recognize and adapt specific questions asked to participants and discussion styles to local cultural sensitivities.

Interviews

In July 2019, Aisha led preliminary research in Mombasa. In late July and August, Aisha and Ella both conducted interviews. In total, we conducted 31 interviews with 26 participants.

We purposively spoke with Kenyan-Somali and Kenyan members of the host community; NGO and government staff working on refugee issues; experts on the history of the Somali community in Kenya;

civil society and community leaders; businesspeople and shopkeepers; and Somali refugees. Each individual participant represented multiple identities, e.g., a Kenyan-Somali shopkeeper, or a Somali refugee who is a community leader. See Table 1 for a breakdown of interviewees by gender and Somali/non-Somali identification.

Table 1. Interviewees by gender and identification

	Female	Male
Non-Somali	7	8
Somali	4	7

The interviews were the basis of the mapping portion of this report. Each location identified as a refugee neighborhood is based on multiple accounts from different sources. In addition to the interviews, Ella and Aisha went on neighborhood walks and had a tour from a local civil society leader who described the historical and contemporary uses of key public spaces by different groups.

Through Aisha’s personal network and reflexive writing on her personal experiences, we connected with young and middle-aged men and women from the Kenyan-Somalis and Kenyan host population—particularly shopkeepers and businesspeople—and Somali refugees. Older women were difficult to bring to conversations, and older men were less interested in discussing the issues relevant to this report. Older men saw refugees as a small part of larger social concerns, and older Kenyans in particular questioned the focus on Somalis and refugees. Younger people were more interested in and informed about minority rights and refugee issues.

We were surprised when our snowball method²⁸ faltered, even though it has worked well for us in our CVE work in Mombasa in the past. The process of participants recommending further people to talk to failed. This development made Aisha’s position as a local Somali and Ella’s association with MUHURI crucial to the process and the report’s completion, as we had to rely heavily on the immediate personal connections of Aisha and associates of MUHURI for interviews.

Limitations

This report is missing the stories of refugees who do not have the necessary skills or networks to confidently identify themselves to an outside report. We only got the perspectives of people who are well established and have figured out how to navigate the city with refugee status. Without those other stories, we cannot know what their experience is, but we believe it would be different.

As mentioned elsewhere in the report, men were more likely to speak freely and even to enjoy the opportunity to share what they knew about parallel systems of business. At least one participant was clearly proud of his ability to maneuver around regulations, and chose a very public spot to meet, taking the opportunity to introduce the author to his business associates. Conversely, women were more reserved and denied knowing information that we had specifically been directed to them to discuss. We can speak more authoritatively to the experiences and strategies of men as compared with those of women.

²⁸ Snowball sampling is a research sampling technique in which existing study participants recommend future participants from among their own networks. Thus, the sample group is said to grow like a rolling snowball.

Appendix B: A Very Brief History of Somalis in Mombasa

Ethnic Somalis are spread across Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Djibouti; Somalis have been in Kenya since before independence. Separated by colonial and now national borders, these populations retain a shared religion (Sunni Muslim), ethnic identity, and family ties.

Historically, the Kenyan central state has not made Somalis feel welcome.²⁹ Kenyan-Somalis were systematically marginalized through political exclusion. In 1989, the government mandated screening requiring all Kenyan-Somalis to submit to bureaucratic tests of their “legitimacy” as citizens.³⁰ The ethnically Somali Northeastern Provinces (NEP) were subject to widespread state violence, and economic and political marginalization under emergency rule until 1991.

In the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees fleeing civil war came to Kenya. They remain the largest refugee group in Kenya’s camps and urban centers.³¹ Refugees arriving in Mombasa joined relatives in town or settled at one of the three United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refugee camps in surrounding areas. All three Mombasa camps are now closed,³² and the 20,000 inhabitants were given the choice to move to the super-camps in the north or repatriate to Somalia.³³ Many camp-dwellers did neither; instead they moved to Mombasa and joined the Kenyan-Somali community. Small numbers of refugees continue to arrive in Mombasa on a weekly basis from the camps and from Somalia.³⁴

The refugees and RAS officers we spoke with consider Mombasa to be a more relaxed and personable environment for refugees compared to Nairobi or other urban centers; it was often noted that Mombasa has a large Muslim population (approximately 40% of the city’s population), which makes it uniquely welcoming to Somali refugees.

²⁹ T. Scharrer, “Ambiguous citizens”: Kenyan Somalis and the Question of Belonging, *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 12, No.3 (2018): 494–513.

³⁰ E. Lochery, “Rendering Difference Visible: The Kenyan State and Its Somali Citizens,” *African Affairs* 111 (September, 2012): 615–639.

³¹ UNHCR, UNHCR Population Statistics. Accessed August 5, 2019.

³² International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, “Somali Refugees Situation Report No. 4,” Relief Web. Last modified February 11, 1997. Accessed August 5, 2019.

³³ Author interview with Somali religious community leader, August 5, 2019.

³⁴ Author interview with migrant and refugee legal aid advocate, July 4, 2019 and RAS officer, July 30, 2019.

Appendix C: Violent Extremism in Kenya

Al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate, is seeking to create an Islamic state in Somalia.³⁵ The Rift Valley Institute reports that as early as 2010, al-Shabaab's leaders "harbored aspirations to establish a regional presence and recruit fighters from across countries in eastern Africa who understood their respective countries' vulnerabilities. Al-Shabaab also inspired the creation of several affiliated jihadist groups and autonomous networks, which have organized attacks."³⁶ Kenya experienced at least 200 terrorist attacks from al-Shabaab between 2008 and 2014, resulting in the deaths of over 500 people and the injuring of over 1,000.³⁷ The number of attacks stepped up after 2011 in retaliation for Operation Linda Nchi, a Kenyan military operation that deployed Kenyan troops over the border in Somali conflict zones to engage al-Shabaab.³⁸

In addition to the direct attacks, there are increasing numbers of radicalized Kenyan nationals leaving the country to join al-Shabaab as well as associating with and supporting al-Shabaab in Kenya. A United Nations (UN) investigation in 2014 found that al-Shabaab had "created extensive funding, recruiting and training networks in Kenya."³⁹ Of great concern is the Kenyan government's responses to threats posed by al-Shabaab. The US Department of State maintained in 2015 that "reports of violations of human rights by Kenya's police and military forces during counterterrorism operations continued, including allegations of extra-judicial killings, disappearances, and torture."⁴⁰ These are believed to increase radicalization. According to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), the Kenyan security services are "engaged in a dangerous cycle of violence [with] blunt and hardened security responses generat[ing] more recruits and further polar[izing] the Kenyan and ethnic Somali communities in the country."⁴¹

³⁵ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2016*, Institute for Economics and Peace, New York, 2016, 57.

³⁶ Rift Valley Institute, *Violent Extremism in Kenya*, Rift Valley Institute Meeting Report, February, 2017.

³⁷ A. Pate, M. Jensen, and E. Miller, *Al-Shabaab Attack on Garissa University in Kenya*, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, April 2015.

³⁸ Institute for Security Studies, *Kenya: Terrorist Attacks Increase after "Linda Nchi,"* May 30, 2012.

³⁹ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, *Global Terrorism Database*.

⁴⁰ US Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2015: Africa: Kenya*, 2105.

⁴¹ G. Holmer, *Creating Spaces for Effective CVE Approaches*, September, 2014, 1.

About the RIT Project

The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University and funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

Our goals are twofold

Our first long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up by compiling a global database of case studies and reports to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. These cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world.

Our second more immediate goal is to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

Why now?

The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

For more on RIT

On our website, there are many more case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release more reports as our project develops.

www.refugeesintowns.org

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Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

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