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Save the Children

Creating Pathways for Refugee Teacher Certification in Kenya

Policy Brief

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Executive Summary

In Kenya's Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps, refugee teachers are the backbone of education for displaced children, yet they face systemic exclusion from formal recognition and fair compensation. This brief builds on Save the Children's Refugee Teacher Certification Policy Report (2025), which identifies six key pathways to certification: full access to national training, equivalency recognition, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), regularization of cohorts, partnerships with teacher education centres, and non-governmental training.

Each pathway addresses specific barriers, such as policy gaps, funding shortages, and bureaucratic hurdles, while offering actionable solutions grounded in Kenya's legal frameworks and regional commitments.

Key opportunities for Kenya include:

- Implementing the Djibouti Declaration's pledge (IGAD, 2017) to fast-track teacher certification through regional collaboration, which Kenya endorsed but has yet to fully operationalize.
- Leveraging the Kenya National Qualifications Authority (KNQA) to align refugee teacher qualifications with the IGAD Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF), ensuring cross-border recognition of credentials.
- Harnessing upcoming policies on micro-credentials and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to create flexible, stackable certification options for refugee teachers, particularly those lacking formal documentation.

Without action, Kenya risks perpetuating a two-tier education system where refugee teachers remain undervalued, exacerbating teacher shortages and undermining quality education for displaced children. Recognizing refugee teachers in alignment with Kenya's Refugee Act 2021, the Shirika Plan, and global frameworks like the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF).

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Who Are Refugee Teachers?

This section clarifies the three broad categories of refugee teachers in Kenya, each with distinct certification needs:

1. Qualified Refugee Teachers

- Hold teaching credentials from their countries of origin (e.g., South Sudan, Somalia) or from Kenyan institutions, but face Teacher Service Commission registration barriers due to restrictive policies (e.g., citizenship requirements or minimum grade thresholds).
- *Example:* A Somali refugee with a teaching degree from Mogadishu University cannot register with TSC despite Kenya's Refugee Act 2021 guaranteeing the right to work, highlighting a critical policy-practice gap.

2. Unqualified Refugee Teachers

- Serve as volunteer teachers or assistants in camp schools, often with secondary education but no formal training.
- *Pathways needed:* Bridging programs (e.g., Kenya's upcoming RPL Policy) could validate their experience, while accelerated diploma programs at institutions like Masinde Muliro University offer a route to qualification.

3. Aspiring Refugee Teachers

- Refugees pursuing teaching qualifications through NGO-sponsored programs (e.g., Windle International's scholarships) or distance learning.
- *Challenge:* Certifications from non-TSC-accredited programs (e.g., some NGO trainings) are not recognized, limiting career progression.

The above categories are in two dimensions: Refugee Teachers with qualifications and Refugee Teachers without qualifications



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Challenges and Opportunities: A Pathway-Based Analysis

The challenges refugee teachers face highlight the need for structural reforms rooted in existing policy frameworks. The TSC Act provides provisions for the recognition and certification of refugee teachers, while the Basic Education Act mandates the inclusion of refugee education within Kenya's national education system.

To operationalize these frameworks effectively, government and education development partners must adopt a comprehensive resource mobilization strategy to finance a costed plan for managing teachers in both refugee and host communities. This approach ensures that systemic gaps are addressed, enabling refugee teachers to make a full contribution to the education ecosystem.

1. Full Access to National Teacher Training

- Barrier: TSC requires a minimum grade of C+ in secondary school for diploma programs, as well as a C in diploma in teacher education, excluding many refugees who lack documentation or faced disrupted schooling.
- Opportunity: Satellite campuses (e.g., Masinde Muliro University in Kakuma) could decentralize training, while condensed programs during school holidays (modeled after Ethiopia's approach) would allow working teachers to upskill.
- Policy lever: Amend TSC Act to waive grade requirements for refugees with demonstrated teaching experience, as proposed in the Shirika Plan's inclusion agenda.

2. Equivalency Recognition

- Barrier: Kenya's Foreign Teacher Registration process is opaque, requiring refugees to prove credential equivalence through costly and lengthy bureaucratic processes.
- Opportunity: KNQA's forthcoming alignment with the IGAD RQF (2025) could streamline cross-border recognition, as seen in Rwanda, where refugees access certification through a centralized evaluation body.
- Example: South Sudanese teachers in Kakuma report waiting over two years for credential verification—a delay the IGAD RQF could reduce by harmonizing regional standards.

3. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

- Barrier: Refugee teachers lack awareness of Kenya's draft RPL Policy, which promises to certify skills gained informally.
- Opportunity: Pilot the UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP), already tested in Zambia and Uganda, to assess competencies via interviews and portfolios for refugees without documents.
- Critical need: RPL must be cost-free and advertised through camp-based outreach, as low literacy about pathways perpetuates exclusion.

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4. Regularization of Cohorts

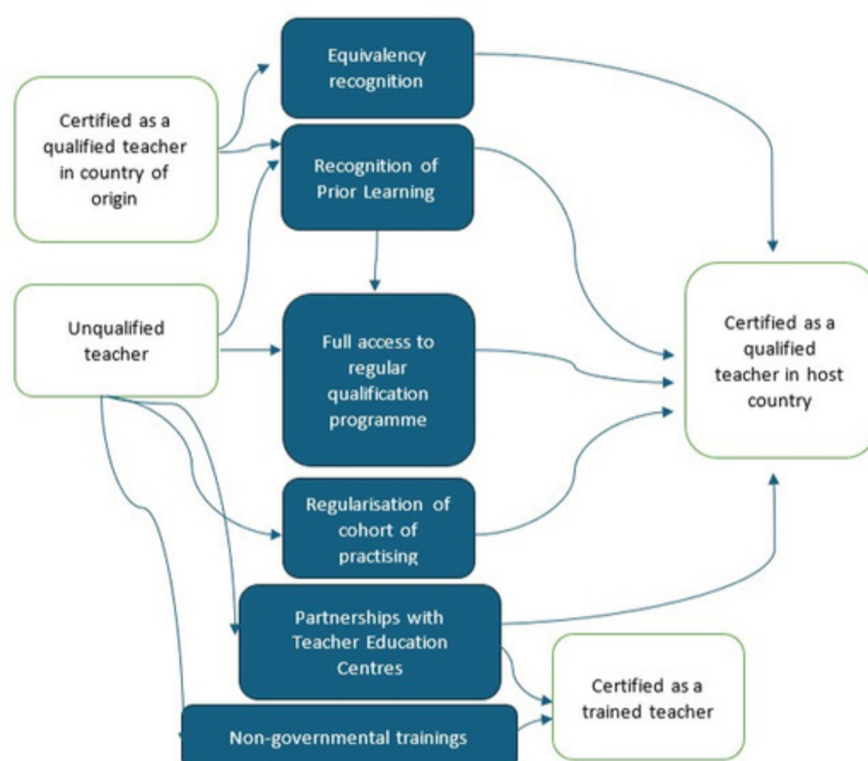
- Barrier: Kenya has no large-scale programs to certify unqualified refugee teachers en masse, unlike Uganda's "coding" initiative for refugee schools.
- Opportunity: Design bridging programs with KNQA accreditation, targeting cohorts of refugee teachers in high-need subjects (e.g., science, English).
- Lesson from Mali: Partnering with unions to regularize community teachers boosted retention—a model Kenya could adapt for camps.

5. Partnerships with Teacher Education Centres

- Barrier: Certificates of courses that do not meet the minimum entry points are not recognized by TSC, deterring refugee enrollment.
- Opportunity: Pre-negotiate TSC accreditation for refugee-specific programs, as done in South Sudan's JRS-University of Juba partnership.
- Funding note: Donors could sponsor scholarships tied to accredited programs, ensuring qualifications translate to labor market gains.

6. Non-Governmental Training

- Barrier: NGO trainings (e.g., INEE's TiCC Pack) remain disconnected from national systems, leaving refugees with non-transferable certificates.
- Opportunity: Kenya's Micro-credentials Policy (2025) could integrate NGO courses into the KNQF, allowing refugees to "stack" credits toward diplomas.
- Example: The TESSA network's Open Educational Resources (OER) offer free, adaptable teacher training—ideal for camp contexts if aligned with CBC standards.



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Policy Recommendations

1. Prioritize Refugee Teachers in Education Policy

- **Action:** Amend the TSC Act to exempt refugees from mandatory grade requirements if they demonstrate teaching experience, and include them in the Micro-credentials Policy.
- **Accountability:** Task the Refugee Education Secretariat (Shirika Plan) with annual progress reviews.

2. Plan for Multi-Step Certification

- **Action:** KNQA to map refugee teacher qualifications using RPL and the IGAD RQF, creating individualized upskilling plans.
- **Funding:** World Bank's SHARE program could finance a costed transition plan to absorb refugee teachers into national systems.

3. Partner for Accredited Training

- **Action:** Scale Masinde Muliro's Kakuma campus with TSC-approved curricula, and join IGAD's Regional Teacher Training Initiative for cross-border collaboration.
- **Stakeholders:** Involve TSC in Refugee Education Working Groups to pre-approve programs.

4. Ensure Refugee Teacher Participation

- **Action:** Launch awareness campaigns in camps on RPL and equivalency, co-designed with refugee teacher associations.
- **Model:** Uganda's union membership for refugees improved advocacy—Kenya's KUPPET could replicate this.

5. Link Certification to Pay Equity

- **Action:** Implement a two-tier incentive system (higher pay for certified teachers), funded by the Refugee Education Fund (Shirika Plan).
- **Precedent:** Chad's tiered payments reduced attrition by 30%—a proven model for Kenya.



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Conclusion

Kenya stands at a critical crossroads: it can either continue to marginalize refugee teachers or emerge as a regional leader in inclusive education. By aligning the Shirika Plan with the certification commitments of the Djibouti Declaration and leveraging national frameworks like the KNQA, Kenya has a timely opportunity to transform its parallel education structures into a cohesive, quality-driven model. The cost of inaction is profound—refugee learners remain underserved, and the country loses out on a valuable solution to its own teacher shortages.

Recognizing and integrating refugee teachers is not just a moral imperative; it is a strategic investment in strengthening education systems and fostering social cohesion. By dismantling systemic barriers and providing clear, supported pathways to certification and deployment, Kenya can empower refugee teachers to make meaningful and sustainable contributions. Policymakers among them, Ministry of Education and TSC should act now to turn commitment into action. The journey of refugee teachers deserves more than acknowledgment—it calls for bold, coordinated support that drives long-term resilience and inclusivity in education across the region.

