



African Population and
Health Research Center
Transforming lives in Africa through research.



Save the Children

Creating Pathways for Refugee Teacher Recognition and Registration

Policy Brief

June 2025

Lead AUTHOR: Erick Makhapila

Co-authors

Lydia Namatende-Sakwa , Moses Ngware, Patricia Kitsao, Abdmalik Farah and Davis Musyoki, -*African Population and Health Research Center*

Nancy Njeru, Deurence Onyango, Geoffrey Tanui, Benard Orimbo and Sophie Larshford- *Save the Children International*

Creating Pathways for Refugee Teacher Recognition and Registration

Executive Summary

In Kenya's Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps, refugee teachers sustain learning for tens of thousands of displaced children—often under extremely challenging conditions. They account for over 85% of the teaching workforce in camp schools, yet continue to face systemic exclusion from formal recognition and fair compensation. This gap is not due to lack of competence, but rather the absence of clear and inclusive certification pathways.

Certification by the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) is more than a professional credential—it affirms the right to work and the right to education, both protected under Kenya's Constitution, the Basic Education Act of 2013, and the Refugee Act of 2021. Article 237 of the Constitution mandates the TSC to register all qualified teachers, while the TSC Act No. 20 of 2012 reinforces this obligation by prohibiting unregistered individuals from teaching. Establishing well-defined, accessible pathways for refugee teachers to meet these legal requirements is not only a constitutional necessity—it is a moral and practical step toward strengthening Kenya's education system, especially in underserved and crisis-affected communities.

Key opportunities for Kenya include:

- Implementing the Djibouti-IGAD Declaration's pledge 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).



Creating Pathways for Refugee Teacher Recognition and Registration

Who Are Refugee Teachers?

Refugee teachers play a vital role in providing education to displaced children in camps like Kakuma and Dadaab. They can be categorized into three groups:

1. National Teachers: Qualified educators registered with Kenya's Teachers Service Commission (TSC) working within refugee schools though not employed by TSC. They often work in refugee camps and receive full recognition and better pay as compared to refugee teachers.
2. Refugee Teachers also known as incentive teachers: Displaced individuals teaching within the refugee camps. Despite some holding teaching certificates, diplomas or degrees, their qualifications are often unrecognized due to systemic barriers laid in the existing policies, limiting access to formal roles.
3. Aspiring Refugee Teachers: Refugees who start as volunteer teachers or assistants while pursuing further qualifications.



Creating Pathways for Refugee Teacher Recognition and Registration

Certification Challenges Facing Refugee Teachers in Kenya

Refugee teachers—both as incentives and volunteers—play a vital role in Kenya’s education system, yet they face significant barriers to formal certification. Although the TSC Act and Basic Education Act provide a legal foundation for inclusion, implementation remains weak due to policy-practice gaps, unclear legal status, and poor inter-agency coordination.

Key challenges include:

- **Unclear Legal Status:** Refugee teachers often fall outside existing legal categories—neither fully recognized as Kenyan nor foreign—creating ambiguity in certification eligibility.
- **Policy-Practice Gaps:** Despite supportive laws, lack of enforcement and operational guidance continues to block practical access to certification.
- **Unrecognized Qualifications:** Credentials earned in countries of origin or during displacement are frequently invalidated or unverified. No structured process exists to assess or accredit prior learning and experience.
- **Absence of Clear Certification Pathways:** There are no defined routes for refugee teachers to register with the Teachers Service Commission (TSC)—a requirement for formal employment. Efforts to institutionalize Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) remain pending...
- **Inter-agency Conflicts:** Overlapping mandates and limited coordination among key stakeholders have led to inconsistent implementation of policy commitments.
- **Limited Access to Professional Development:** Many refugee teachers lack opportunities for Continuous Professional Development (CPD) aligned with national standards, hindering their ability to qualify for certification.
- **Exclusion from National Structures:** Operating under parallel, NGO-managed systems further isolates refugee teachers from national certification processes and policy reforms.

These challenges highlight the urgent need for coordinated action, institutional reforms, and the development of inclusive certification mechanisms that formally recognize refugee teachers and strengthen their role in national education.

In reference to the 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 centers, 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.



Creating Pathways for Refugee Teacher Recognition and Registration

Policy Pathways for the Certification of Refugee Teachers in Kenya

Refugee teachers—many of whom are qualified, experienced, and committed—remain locked out of Kenya’s formal education workforce due to systemic certification barriers. Although the **Teachers Service Commission (TSC) Act** and **Basic Education Act** support inclusive education, they lack explicit provisions for refugee teacher recognition. This legal and operational vacuum denies refugee educators formal status, fair pay, and professional growth—despite their daily contributions.

If refugee teachers are already teaching in our classrooms, why can’t they be formally recognized?

Pathways to Reform

a) Institutionalize Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

- Establish a formal RPL framework under TSC and KNQA for refugee teachers.
- Develop procedures to assess knowledge, experience, and competencies—even in the absence of complete academic documents.
- Support mobile or camp-based vetting processes through the Foreign Teacher Vetting Committee.

b) Develop Tailored TSC Certification Pathways

- Amend TSC regulations to explicitly include refugee teachers as a certifiable category.
- Create a dedicated refugee teacher certification track, with clear steps and eligibility criteria.
- Align teacher training programs (e.g., MMUST) with MoE, KNEC, and KICD requirements to ensure their outputs are certifiable.

c) Strengthen Multi-Agency Coordination

- Establish a joint task force (TSC, MoE Directorate of Teacher Education, KNEC, KNQA, UNHCR) to oversee refugee teacher certification policy and practice.
- Develop unified certification guidelines for all actors involved.

d) Clarify Legal Provisions within the TSC Act

- Introduce amendments or policy directives that explicitly allow for refugee teacher registration under special provisions.
- Recognize refugees as a distinct group within national teacher workforce planning frameworks.

If we recognize refugee learners in national exams, why not recognize their teachers in national certification systems?

Certifying refugee teachers is not just a technical fix—it is a policy commitment to equity, professionalism, and quality education for all. With coordinated action, political will, and the right frameworks, Kenya can lead the region in transforming refugee education from informal and fragmented to formal, dignified, and inclusive.



Creating Pathways for Refugee Teacher Recognition and Registration

Policy Recommendations: Certification of Refugee Teachers in Kenya

To create an equitable and sustainable education system, Kenya must prioritize the certification of refugee teachers through inclusive policy design, legal reforms, and targeted investments. These recommendations align with existing legal frameworks such as the TSC Act, Basic Education Act, and national strategies like the Shirika Plan, while recognizing certification as a right—not just a technical requirement.

a) Legal Reforms & Policy Frameworks

- Amend the TSC Act (2012) to include explicit provisions for refugee teacher certification.
- Institutionalize Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) under TSC and KNQA to assess and validate prior teaching experience and qualifications, especially for those lacking formal documentation.
- Harmonize refugee teacher inclusion within national strategies such as the Basic Education Act (2013) and the Shirika Plan for integrated service delivery.

Why certify refugee teachers? Because it affirms their right to work, teach, and belong.

b) Prioritize Refugee Teachers in Education Policy

- Create a dedicated certification track for refugee teachers within national teacher management systems.
- Remove regulatory and administrative barriers that prevent qualified refugee teachers from practicing their profession in Kenya.

c) Professional Development & Certification Access

- Design modular and flexible certification programs tailored to refugee contexts, ensuring access for those in camps and urban areas.
- Collaborate with institutions like the Kenya Teacher Training College (KeTTC) and other Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) to offer short courses, mentorship, and pedagogical up skilling aligned with MoE, KNEC, and KICD requirements.

d) Sustainable Financing for Certification Inclusion

- Establish a Refugee Education Fund to support certification, training, and accreditation processes—drawing contributions from government, UNHCR, and private donors.
- Leverage public-private partnerships to support infrastructure, technical assistance, and up skilling for refugee teachers.

e) Promote Gender Equity in Certification

- Introduce scholarships specifically for female refugee teachers to pursue certification and formal training.
- Establish mentorship and leadership pathways to support women's professional development in the education workforce.

f) Community Engagement for Policy Acceptance

- Launch awareness campaigns in host communities to demystify refugee teacher certification and promote social cohesion.
- Partner with local civil society organizations to advocate for inclusive education and counter stigmatization.

By recognizing and certifying refugee teachers, Kenya can unlock a powerful, underutilized resource—while advancing the constitutional right to education, the right to work, and the regional promise of inclusive development.

What if refugee teachers were no longer seen as a stop-gap measure—but as an integral part of the solution?

Creating Pathways for Refugee Teacher Recognition and Registration

Conclusion

Kenya stands at a critical juncture—where policy, practice, and principle must converge to affirm the rights and contributions of refugee teachers. These educators are not temporary stand-ins; they are committed professionals who form the backbone of learning in displacement contexts. By establishing inclusive certification pathways, amending legal frameworks, and investing in targeted training and recognition, Kenya can lead the region in transforming refugee education.

Certifying refugee teachers is more than an administrative reform—it is a statement of intent: that every child deserves a qualified teacher, and every qualified teacher deserves recognition. It is a constitutional obligation, a humanitarian necessity, and a strategic opportunity to strengthen Kenya's education system for all. Now is the time to act—decisively, collaboratively, and inclusively.

