

EVENT REPORT

REFUGEE WEEK KENYA CROSS - CULTURE FESTIVAL 2026 REPORT



JUNE 17TH – 19TH & 3RD JULY, 2026
University of Nairobi, Graduation Square
**Co - Conveners: Migration Pulse Hub (MPH) &
Umoja Refugee Creatives (URC)**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
About the Festival	5
Festival Outcomes and Impact	6
Impact at a Glance	8
DAY ONE	9
Policy to Practice: Advancing Refugee Inclusion through the SHIRIKA Plan	9
Key Themes Discussed from the panel discussions	11
DAY TWO	16
Beyond My Status: Strengthening Resilience and Localised Solutions	16
Key Themes Discussed	18
DAY THREE	20
Voices of Courage: Storytelling, Culture, and Community	20
Key Themes Discussed	22
Emerging Themes and Key Takeaways	26
REFUGEE WEEK KENYA FESTIVAL 2026 - 75 YEARS ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION WEBINAR	26
Significance of the 1951 Refugee Convention	27
Africa's Contribution to Refugee Protection	27
Achievements in Refugee Protection	28
Persistent Protection Challenges	28
Emerging Protection Priorities	29



Refugee Leadership and Meaningful Participation	29
Looking Ahead: The Future of Refugee Protection in Africa	29
Key Takeaway	30
<i>SPONSORSHIP & PARTNER SUPPORT</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD</i>	<i>32</i>
<i>TABLE OF FIGURES.....</i>	<i>35</i>



ACRONYMS

Action for Refugee Life	AReL
Dadaab Refugee-Led Organisation Network	DARLON
Department of Refugee Services	DRS
Golden Disability Women Organisation	GDWO
Heinrich Boll Stiftung – Horn of Africa	HBS
International Labour Organisation	ILO
International Rescue Committee	IRC
Jesuit Refugee Service	JRS
Kenya Model United Nations	KMUN
Kituo Cha Sheria	KCS
Migration Pulse Hub	MPH
Refugee Women in Nairobi	RWN
Refugee-Led Organisation Network of Kenya	RELON-Kenya
Refugee-led Organisations	RLOs
Refugees Access to Work and Inclusion East Africa	RAWI-EA
Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table	R-SEAT
Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat	ReDSS
Social Health Authority	SHA
The University of Nairobi	UoN
Ubuntu Youth Organisation	UBUNTU
Umoja Refugee Creatives	URC
United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees	UNHCR
Women For Peace and Development	WOPEDE
Youth Voices Community	YVC



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Co-conveners of Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026 (Migration Pulse Hub and Umoja Refugee Creatives) extend their sincere appreciation to all individuals and organisations who contributed to the success of this inaugural celebration.

We are grateful to refugee and host communities whose participation, leadership, creativity, and resilience brought the festival to life. We thank the panellists, moderators, speakers, artists, exhibitors, volunteers, and community leaders who generously shared their knowledge, experiences, and talents throughout the event.

Our appreciation also goes to government representatives, refugee-led organisations, civil society organisations, development partners, academic institutions, private sector actors, and all supporters who helped create meaningful dialogue and collaboration during the festival.

- Counterpoints Arts/Refugee Week UK
- Department of Refugee Services (DRS), Kenya
- United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees (UNHCR)
- The University of Nairobi (UoN)
- International Labour Organisation (ILO)
- OXFAM
- Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat (ReDSS)
- Refugees Seeking Equal Access at the Table (R-SEAT)
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- Amnesty International
- Pamoja Trust
- Women for Peace and Development (WOPED)
- Youth Voices Community (YVC)
- Refugee Women In Nairobi (RWN)
- Ubuntu Youth Organisation (UBUNTU)
- Beacon of Light
- CODE Society of Kenya
- Refugee-Led Organisation Network of Kenya (RELON-Kenya)



- Dadaab Refugee-Led Organisation Network (DARLON)
- Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK)
- Girl Power Action Initiative
- Integrated Urban Refugees
- Flying Dreams CBO
- MonyQadow Refugee Women-Led Organisation
- Union of Refugees Community
- South Wing Link & Justice Centre
- Remnant Women in Action
- Golden Disability Women Organisation
- Mombasa Refugees Union
- Action for Refugee Life (AReL)
- Social Health Authority (SHA), Kenya
- Heinrich Boll Stiftung – Horn Of Africa (HBS)
- Kituo Cha Sheria (KCS)
- Kenya Model United Nations (KMUN)
- Marie Stopes
- COHERE
- Refuge Point
- HIAS
- Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)
- Save The Children

Most importantly, we thank every participant who attended the festival and contributed to the spirit of unity, inclusion, social cohesion and shared responsibility that defined Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About the Festival

Refugee Week Festival Kenya 2026 was the inaugural national celebration of the global Refugee Week movement in Kenya, bringing together refugees, host communities, government institutions, refugee-led organisations, civil society, development partners, artists, entrepreneurs, academics, and advocates under the



theme ***“Courage in Unity: Integration and Courage – Shaping a Shared Future.”***

Held from 17th – 19th June 2026 at the University of Nairobi grounds, Nairobi, Kenya, the festival provided a platform for dialogue, learning, cultural exchange, storytelling, networking, and collaboration. Through policy discussions, exhibitions, cultural performances, community conversations, and a commemorative webinar marking the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, participants explored practical pathways toward refugee inclusion, social cohesion, and sustainable solutions.

The Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026 demonstrated the power of bringing together diverse voices around a shared vision of inclusion, dignity, and opportunity. Over three days, participants engaged in meaningful conversations, celebrated cultural diversity, explored innovative solutions, and reflected on the future of refugee protection and inclusion in Kenya and beyond. A key focus throughout the festival was the implementation of Kenya's SHIRIKA Plan and the broader shift toward refugee inclusion. Discussions explored practical pathways for integrating refugees into national systems while strengthening social cohesion, livelihoods, education, health services, and access to opportunities. The festival also provided space to examine the role of refugee-led organisations, the importance of localisation, and the need for stronger partnerships between governments, humanitarian actors, development agencies, and communities themselves. Alongside policy dialogue, the festival celebrated the rich cultural diversity, talents, and contributions of refugee communities through music, dance, poetry, storytelling, exhibitions, and creative expression.

The Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026 demonstrated that refugee inclusion is not simply a humanitarian objective, but a shared responsibility and an opportunity to build stronger, more cohesive, and prosperous societies.

Festival Outcomes and Impact

The Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026 served as more than a platform for dialogue and celebration. The festival also facilitated direct access to services, information,



and opportunities that contributed to the inclusion and well-being of refugees and host communities.

Through partnerships with government agencies, service providers, and community organisations, participants were able to access critical information and support services, including:

1. Access to Documentation and Legal Identity

- Refugees received information and guidance on documentation processes.
- Individuals seeking renewal of refugee documentation were supported through referrals and registration processes.
- Identification details were collected to facilitate follow-up support and access to relevant services.

2. Social Health Authority (SHA) Registration

- Participants received information on healthcare access and health insurance enrolment.
- Eligible individuals were supported to register under the Social Health Authority (SHA), strengthening access to healthcare services.

3. Information and Referral Services

- Participants accessed information on education, livelihoods, legal aid, social protection, and community services.
- Service providers and community organisations offered referrals for ongoing support.

4. Community Engagement and Social Cohesion

- The festival created opportunities for interaction between refugees, host communities, government representatives, and development partners.
- Participants engaged in discussions that promoted understanding, inclusion, and collaboration.

5. Refugee Leadership and Participation



- Refugee-led organisations played a central role in planning and implementing the festival.
- Refugees actively contributed as speakers, moderators, artists, exhibitors, entrepreneurs, and participants.

Impact at a Glance

INDICATOR	RESULT
<i>Total Festival Attendance</i>	<i>300–500 participants daily</i>
Refugees Reached	700 - 1200
SHA Registrations Supported	102 households
Documentation/ID Support Cases	<i>TBC</i>
Renewal Registration Referrals	<i>TBC</i>
Refugee-Led Organisations (RLOs)	16
Partner Organisations	17
Panel Discussions	2
Cultural Performances	6 nationalities (DRC, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Burundi)
Exhibitors (Art, Crafts, Digital Technology, Fashion and Culinary Arts)	16



DAY ONE

Policy to Practice: Advancing Refugee Inclusion through the SHIRIKA Plan

The first day opened with a vibrant cultural procession from different nationalities; Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan, Eritrea, and DRC. This was followed by a panel discussion on the evolving refugee policy landscape in Kenya and the opportunities presented by the SHIRIKA Plan. Government representatives, refugee-led organisations, development partners, civil society actors, and community leaders explored how refugee inclusion can move from policy commitments to practical implementation.



Figure 1: Day 1 - Cultural Parade

Official opening remarks from the Joint Secretariat representatives (Jayne Doreen Oluga -MPH and Jonas Ndayisenga – URC), RLO representation (Firdaus Ahmed – Beacon Of Light), OXFAM (Abbas Kigozi) and government representative (Evans Pasua - DRS) set the tone for the festival. The speakers reflected on the importance



of inclusion, dignity, and shared responsibility while highlighting the contributions refugees make to Kenyan society.

Voices from Day One

“Integration is not a one-way street: it is a process of mutual transformation that requires courage, shared responsibility, and a commitment to building inclusive communities where everyone can thrive” - Jayne Doreen Oluga, MPH

“Refugees are not only beneficiaries of development; they are contributors to the growth, resilience, and prosperity of the communities and countries that host them” - Firdaus Ahmed, Beacon of Light

“RLOs have demonstrated that meaningful inclusion begins when refugees are trusted to lead, organise, and contribute to decisions that shape their communities” - Evans Pasua, DRS

The panel session, which was moderated by Damaris Bonareri - HBS, brought discussions on the operationalisation of policy to practice. The panellists were Mary Wangui - Independent Diplomat, Gideon Mwawasi - ReDSS, Margaret Kemuma – KCS and RAWI-EA lead, Jane Njambere - RWN and Kiza Mauridi - Action for Refugee Life (AReL). The discussions centred on access to documentation, livelihoods, education, health services, financial inclusion, and social cohesion. Participants emphasised that refugees should not be viewed solely through the lens of vulnerability but also as entrepreneurs, innovators, professionals, and leaders.

Key Themes Discussed from the panel discussions

1. Operationalising the SHIRIKA Plan



- A significant portion of the discussions focused on Kenya's SHIRIKA Plan and its potential to transform refugee inclusion from policy into practice. Panellists recognised the plan as an important step towards promoting self-reliance, inclusion, and shared development between refugee and host communities. However, they emphasised that its success will depend on effective implementation, coordinated action, and sustained collaboration among national and county governments, development partners, refugee-led-organisations, civil society, and the private sector.
- Participants emphasised that the implementation process should remain participatory and responsive to the realities experienced by refugees. Refugee voices, particularly those of women, the youth, persons with disability, and refugee-led-organisations, were identified as essential in shaping programmes that respond to community priorities. The discussions further highlighted that investments in education, healthcare, livelihoods, housing, documentation and social services should benefit both the refugee and host communities to strengthen trust, ownership and long-term sustainability.

2. Refugees as Contributors to Society

- Speakers challenged the long-standing narratives that portray refugees solely as recipients of humanitarian assistance, and highlighted the knowledge and skill, resilience and entrepreneurial potential that refugees contribute to their host communities. Examples demonstrating how refugees continually establish businesses, create employment, participate in community initiatives and contribute to local economies despite the challenges associated with displacement.
- Key gap identified was the existence of under-utilised professional qualifications, skills, expertise and innovative ideas due to administrative and legal barriers.
- The need to recognise refugees as partners in development rather than passive beneficiaries of aid arose. Supporting refugees' entrepreneurship, recognising their professional qualifications, expanding their access to financial services, and creating opportunities for meaningful economic participation were



identified as practical ways of promoting self-reliance while contributing to Kenya's development agenda.

3. Social Cohesion and Shared Development

- The importance of strengthening relationships between refugees and host communities emerged as a recurring theme throughout the panel discussion. Participants observed successful refugee inclusion depends not only on supportive policies, but also on fostering trust, mutual understanding, and shared opportunities between communities.
- Emphasis on development initiatives being intentionally beneficial to refugees and host communities were made to avoid perceptions of inequality and to promote peaceful coexistence. Further, joint investments in education, health services, livelihoods, infrastructure, and community programmes were highlighted as practical approaches for building stronger social cohesion.
- Panellists also recognised the important role of dialogue, cultural exchange and community participation in addressing misconceptions about refugees while creating spaces where refugees and host communities can work together towards common development goals.

4. Access to Services and Economic Opportunities

- The panellist discussion examined barriers that continue to affect refugees' access to employment, financial inclusion, education, healthcare and documentation. Participants acknowledged that while important progress has been made through legal reforms and expanded access to refugee documentation, practical challenges remain in translating these rights into everyday opportunities.
- An important highlight from the discussion was the need for simplification of administrative procedures, increasing public awareness and acceptance of refugee documentation, improving access to work permits for refugees, expanding financial inclusion, and creating stronger pathways for refugee entrepreneurship and employment. Equal access to education and healthcare was also identified as fundamental to promoting dignity, resilience and long-term self-reliance.



The panel discussions concluded by addressing how these interconnected challenges required stronger partnerships between government institutions, county authorities, refugee-led-organisations, development partners, financial institutions, and the private sector. Through coordinated action and sustained investment, participants agreed that refugees can be better supported to rebuild their lives while making meaningful social and economic contributions to Kenya's development.



Figure 2: Day 1 Panellists: Operationalising the SHIRIKA Plan

After the panel discussions, the participants, led by the DRS, had an exhibition tour to the exhibition tents that had activities running throughout the festival. The exhibition showcased practical examples of refugee innovation, entrepreneurship and community leadership. The exhibition centre was divided in 4 sections:

- *The Integration Exchange Hub*
 - Where the DRS, IPRS service desk addressed issues of documentation, ID collection and integration of services.



- Universal Health insurance enrolment – Spearheaded by the SHA for Social Health Insurance Fund (SHIF) medical scheme registration.
- *The Market of Hope Bazaar*
 - An open-trading marketplace showcasing small-medium business innovation, craft trade, textiles and tech products directly within urban refugee networks.
- *Culinary Journey*
 - A cultural and gastronomic pavilion uniting traditional food, coffee ceremonies and living heritage represented by Eritrea, Ethiopia and Congo.
- *The Umoja Art Exhibition*
 - An immersive culture featuring a regional art gallery where artists display their work.



Figure 3: Exhibition Tour



DAY TWO

Beyond My Status: Strengthening Resilience and Localised Solutions

The second day of the Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026 shifted the conversation from policy frameworks to the lived realities, resilience, and leadership of displaced communities. Building on discussions from the opening day, participants explored from *why refugee inclusion matters* to *examining how meaningful inclusion can be achieved* through locally driven solutions, stronger partnerships, and meaningful investment in refugee-led initiatives.

Throughout the day, speakers challenged traditional humanitarian approaches that often position refugees solely as recipients of aid and highlighted the growing role of refugee-led organisations (RLOs) in delivering services, advocating for rights, supporting livelihoods, and strengthening community resilience.

Voices from Day 2

“An inclusive future can only be achieved when partnerships work together to turn policies and plans into meaningful action that responds to the realities of displaced communities.” - Jonas Ndayisenga, URC

“Real change begins when we move beyond titles, labels and status to recognise our shared humanity and the strength that comes from embracing our diversity.” - Janice James, MPH

“Resilience is the courage to continue, rebuild and support one another even when systems fail, drawing strength from our communities and shared experiences.” - Deo Kamuzinzi, YVC



“Localised solutions become meaningful when communities are listened to, their realities are understood, and their voices help shape the decisions that affect their lives.” - Sharlene Izomo, GDWO

The panel session which was moderated by Emma Mwenda - Integrity Specialist Consultant brought discussions on strengthening resilience and localised solutions. The panellists were Dr. Thomas Obulutsa - HIAS, Siyad Tawane - DARLON, Jia Yin - UNHCR, Irene Shiundu - IRC, Sandra Ndayishimiye – WOPED, Jessica Rapp - AMALA Education, Gideon Mwawasi - ReDSS, Holu Adi Chukulisa - Girl Power Action Initiative, and Nyaruiru Ndungi - ReDSS. The panel discussions reiterated that refugees are often the first responders within their own communities and possess valuable knowledge, expertise, and leadership that should be recognised and supported. The conversations also focused on localisation and the importance of shifting resources, decision-making, and ownership closer to the refugee and host communities. Participants reflected on the need for humanitarian and development actors to move beyond consultation and towards genuine partnerships where refugee-led organisations play a central role in program design, implementation, and evaluation.

Throughout the day, the resounding message was that sustainable solutions require long-term investment rather than short-term interventions. Participants called for increased support for refugee entrepreneurship, skills development, education, innovation, and community-led initiatives that can create lasting impact for both refugees and host communities.

The day also provided space for honest reflections on existing barriers, including limited access to funding, unequal power dynamics, and challenges faced by local organisations seeking to scale their work. While acknowledging these challenges, participants shared examples of successful partnerships and innovative approaches that demonstrate what is possible when communities are trusted and empowered to lead.

By the end of the day, one message stood out clearly: ***durable solutions cannot be achieved for refugees without refugees. Meaningful participation, local***



leadership, and collaborative partnerships are essential to building resilient communities and creating pathways towards sustainable development.

Key Themes Discussed

1. Refugee-Led Solutions

- Recognition of refugee-led organisations as critical actors in protection, advocacy, service delivery and community mobilisation as they are equal partners and not solely beneficiaries. Refugees possess invaluable lived experiences, leadership, and technical expertise that should be recognised as assets within humanitarian and development programming. RLOs were identified as equal partners in designing, implementing, and evaluating solutions that respond to the realities of displacement.

2. Localisation and Partnerships

- Localisation emerged as one of the strongest themes by noting the importance of shifting power, resources, and decision-making closer to refugee and host communities to ensure programmes are informed by local realities. Stronger partnerships between governments, RLOs, civil society, development partners and the private sector were identified as essential for creating sustainable solutions. Panellists highlighted that genuine collaborations require trust, shared accountability and recognition of local expertise.

3. Sustainable Financing

- Meaningful refugee inclusion cannot be achieved through short-term humanitarian funding alone. Instead, long-term investments that strengthen refugee self-reliance through education, entrepreneurship, innovation, vocational training, and livelihood opportunities reflect meaningful inclusion. Supporting refugee-led organisations through flexible and sustainable financing was identified as critical intervention for strengthening local ownership, expanding successful initiatives and creating lasting impact for both refugee and host communities.

4. Accountability and Community Participation



- Communities should actively shape programmes intended to support them as meaningful participation goes beyond consultation by ensuring refugees are involved in identifying priorities, designing interventions, implementing activities, and evaluating outcomes. Programmes become more responsive, inclusive and sustainable when refugee communities have genuine opportunities to influence decisions affecting their lives. Strengthening accountability mechanisms and creating spaces for continuous dialogue were identified as essential stages towards building trust and improving programme effectiveness.



Figure 4: Day 2 Panellists - Strengthening Resilience & Localised Solutions



DAY THREE

Voices of Courage: Storytelling, Culture, and Community

The final day of the Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026, moderated by Carrol Njeri (ArtPoriumKe), shifted the focus from policy discussions to the lived experiences, talents, and aspirations of refugees. Through presentations, personal testimonies, creative showcases, and impact stories, participants demonstrated that refugees are not defined by displacement but by their resilience, innovation and determination to rebuild lives.

- *Film Screenings:*
 - Jonas Ndayisenga (URC) - Voices of Resilience
 - Ebanda Mialano (Flying Dreams CBO – Kakuma) - Permaculture
- *Poetry, Spoken Word, Storytelling and Creative Showcase:*
 - K2
 - Kigezo
 - Mary Anyango – Courage In Unity; Shaping a Shared Future
 - Dr. Tecla Lorupe and Francois Msafiri – Refugee Athletics Team
 - Two Voices
 - Seraphin Ntumwa
 - Feiza – Story
 - Lamech (URC) – Stories through Art

Voices from Day 3

“Despite being forced to leave their homes, refugees continue to demonstrate extraordinary courage,



rebuilding lives, sharing their dreams and shaping new futures in solidarity with the communities that welcome them.” – Mary Anyango, Poet

“Refugees are not defined by the circumstances that displaced them; they are architects of their own futures, using their talents, skills, and determination to rebuild their lives and strengthen their communities.” Dr. Tecla Lorupe, Storytelling

“Hope and resilience emerge when opportunities are created for refugees to move beyond hardship, discover their potential, and pursue a future that once seemed out of reach.” – Kigezo, Spoken Word

“Being a refugee is not a choice, but every refugee carries dreams, aspirations and potential that deserve opportunity to flourish despite the barriers they face. As refugees, being given platforms to share our stories and the opportunity to work alongside the host community means so much to us. Thank you to the Kenyan people for hosting us for all these decades and continue to stand in solidarity with us.” – K2, Poet

Many of the stories shared throughout the day reflected themes of displacement, hope, perseverance, identity, and the search for belonging. Participants spoke openly about the realities of being forced to flee their homes, the challenges of adapting to new environments, and the courage required to rebuild lives while maintaining hope for the future. Despite the hardships discussed, the presentations consistently highlighted the strength of refugee communities and their continued contributions to their host societies.

The day also highlighted the importance of representation and visibility. By sharing personal experiences and creative works, refugees were able to tell their own stories in their own voices, challenging stereotypes and offering more nuanced perspectives on displacement, inclusion and integration. Their presentations reinforced the



festival's broader messages that refugees are leaders, innovators, artists, entrepreneurs, and active contributors to society.

The atmosphere throughout the day reflected the spirit of the festival's theme, ***Courage in Unity***. Participants celebrated achievements, forged new relationships, and reaffirmed their commitment to building inclusive communities where diversity is valued and everyone has an opportunity to contribute.

As the festival came to a close, there was a strong sense of optimism and collective responsibility. The stories, conversations, performances, and connections formed over the three days served as a reminder that inclusion is not only about policies and programmes but also about relationships, understanding, and shared humanity.

Key Themes Discussed

1. Storytelling as Advocacy

- The presentations demonstrated the power of storytelling in creating understanding and influencing change. The presenters shared deeply personal experiences of displacement, resilience, and rebuilding their lives, reminding participants that every refugee journey represents both loss and hope.
- One presenter reflected on the courage refugees demonstrate when they are forced to leave their homes and begin life again in unfamiliar environments, emphasising that refugees remain the architects of their own futures despite the circumstances that forced them to flee. Another speaker encouraged participants to view refugee stories not through the lens of victimhood, but through resilience, determination and solidarity.
- Presenters also highlighted that refugees continue to pursue education, careers, and community leadership despite significant barriers, demonstrating that lived experiences should inform policies and programmes intended to support displaced communities.

2. Arts, Skills and Culture as Tools for Inclusion



- Several presentations illustrated how creativity, vocational skills, and cultural expression contribute to refugee inclusion and self-reliance.
- Umoja Refugee Creatives shared how skills development initiatives have enabled refugees to rebuild their lives through tailoring, salon services, cinematography, and other livelihood opportunities. They emphasised that investing in people's talents restores confidence, strengthens independence and enables refugees to contribute meaningfully to their communities.
- Lamech's (URC) creative showcase further demonstrated how arts and culture promote dialogue, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence between refugees and host communities.
- Beyond vocational skills, presentations showcased the diversity of talents and innovations emerging from refugee communities. Flying Dreams CBO demonstrated how refugees through agricultural initiatives are using small-scale farming, kitchen gardening, and climate-smart agricultural practices to strengthen food security, generate household income and promote environmental sustainability within refugee and host communities. This highlighted agriculture not only as a livelihood opportunity but also a pathway towards self-reliance and community resilience.
- Sports also emerged as a powerful platform for inclusion and empowerment. Dr. Tecla Lorupe and the country representative, shared how athletics has provided young refugees with opportunities to develop discipline, confidence, leadership and teamwork while creating pathways to regional and international competitions. Their experiences demonstrated that sport has the power to bridge cultures, strengthen social cohesions, inspire young people to pursue their ambitions despite challenges of displacement.

3. Refugee Identity and Belonging

- A recurring message throughout the presentations was the importance of recognising refugees beyond their legal status.
- K2 (Poet) reflected on how conflict and forced displacement often interrupt education, careers, and personal aspirations, leaving many refugees with limited choices about their future. He further noted that being labelled a



refugee is often a consequence of war and conflict rather than a personal identity emphasising that behind every legal status is an individual with ambitions, skills, and desire to continue positively to society.

- Challenges affecting refugee children and young people, including limited educational resources, overcrowded classrooms, and restricted opportunities to pursue their original career aspirations. This led to a call towards investing in education, inclusion, and opportunities that enable refugees to realise their full potential while contributing to their host communities.
- Access to education was highlighted by making scholarships, mentoring, vocational training, and digital learning opportunities available to allow the refugees pursue their careers and become professionals within their communities.

4. Celebrating Resilience and Community Leadership

- The conclusion of the third day of the Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026 highlighted a powerful celebration of the resilience, leadership, and determination found within Kenya's refugee communities. A key focus was placed on the vital importance of proactively pursuing education, employment, entrepreneurship, and local leadership, even when facing limited external support. Across various fields—including the creative arts, agriculture, sports, advocacy, and business—refugees vividly demonstrated how determination and innovation can successfully turn formidable challenges into meaningful opportunities.
- The impact stories shared during the event demonstrated that true success is measured not just by individual achievements, but by the positive transformation brought about within families and entire communities. The discussions also re-emphasised the critical need to empower refugees with skills, supported by inclusive policies and meaningful opportunities to participate in society, cementing their status as active contributors to national development and catalysts for positive change.
- The various presentations underscored that courage, resilience, and unity can take many forms, which remained the central message guiding the creation of inclusive communities and sustainable futures.



Figure 5: Day 3: Voices of Courage - Poetry, Spoken Word, Storytelling & Creative Showcases

Closing Reflections

"Refugees are leaders, organizers, entrepreneurs, and humanitarians—not defined by their status, but by their dignity and potential. The stories, art, and lived experiences shared over these three days remind us that we must move beyond charity towards true justice and meaningful inclusion." – Damaris Oluga, MPH



"Reaffirming safety and dignity is only the first step; we must transform recognition into action by strengthening service delivery, streamlining documentation, and ensuring refugees and RLOs sit at the center of decision-making. Our commitment to the SHIRIKA Plan means actively improving systems so that inclusion becomes a lived reality for every refugee."
– Richie Olaka, DRS.

Emerging Themes and Key Takeaways

- Refugee inclusion must move from policy to practice.
- Refugees are partners, not beneficiaries.
- Refugee-led organisations are central to sustainable solutions.
- Localisation strengthens impact.
- Social cohesion benefits everyone.
- Culture and storytelling builds understanding.
- Meaningful participation of refugees improves outcomes.
- The future for refugees requires sustainable long-term investment and collaboration.

REFUGEE WEEK KENYA FESTIVAL 2026 - 75 YEARS ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1951 REFUGEE CONVENTION WEBINAR

The culmination of the Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026 was marked by commemorating the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, through a hybrid webinar.

The panel session moderated by Janice James - Migration Pulse Hub, provided an opportunity to reflect on the achievements, challenges, and future of refugee



protection globally and within Africa after the adoption of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The panellists were Achol Okoo - Advocate of the High court of Kenya, Alem Meskerem - Refugee Advocate, Kawai Steve - Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, and Jean Marie - Refugee Advocate. They acknowledged the Convention as a landmark instrument that has shaped international refugee protection and contributed significantly to safeguarding the rights of displaced persons globally.

Significance of the 1951 Refugee Convention

Key reflections emphasised that the Convention remains an important foundation for refugee protection and has inspired progressive legal and policy developments across Africa. It was noted that the milestone provides an opportunity to celebrate achievements while also examining persistent gaps in refugee protection and inclusion.

Key points included:

- Recognition of the Convention's contribution to protecting refugee rights globally.
- The need to continue localising international refugee frameworks to better respond to African realities.
- Reflection on existing protection gaps affecting refugees today.
- Acknowledgement of the Convention's role in advancing progressive refugee protection policies.

Africa's Contribution to Refugee Protection

The panellists highlighted Africa's significant contribution to the development of refugee law through the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, which expanded the refugee definition and strengthened protection mechanisms across the continent. The following were identified:

- Expansion of the refugee definition beyond individual persecution to include broader causes of displacement.
- Recognition of emerging displacement drivers, including climate-related factors.



- Promotion of context-specific and localised legal frameworks.
- Continued relevance of African refugee protection models in addressing contemporary displacement challenges.

Achievements in Refugee Protection

Several achievements made over the past seventy-five years in strengthening refugee protection across Africa were reflected upon and the key achievements pointed out were:

- Adoption of open-door asylum policies in several African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.
- Development of progressive regional and national frameworks such as:
 - The 1969 OAU Refugee Convention.
 - The Kampala Convention.
 - The Maputo Protocol.
 - Kenya's Refugee Act 2021.
 - The SHIRIKA Plan and related refugee regulations.
 - The Makatet Plan
- Growing recognition of localisation and refugee participation in protection responses.

Persistent Protection Challenges

Despite progress, panellists noted several challenges that continue to affect refugees across the continent are:

- Gaps in the implementation of existing laws and policies.
- Restrictions on freedom of movement through encampment policies.
- Limited access to dignified employment due to barriers in obtaining work permits.
- Educational barriers and unequal access to learning opportunities.
- Limited meaningful participation of refugees in policy-making processes affecting their lives.



Emerging Protection Priorities

The discussion explored how current refugee protection frameworks can better respond to evolving displacement realities by:

- Addressing climate-related displacement and mixed migration.
- Strengthening digital rights and data protection for refugees.
- Expanding access to durable solutions.
- Enhancing legal empowerment and awareness of refugee rights.
- Ensuring refugee participation in decision-making processes.

Refugee Leadership and Meaningful Participation

A recurring theme throughout the webinar was the importance of refugee leadership and meaningful participation. Panellists emphasised:

- Intentional inclusion of refugees in policy and programme development.
- Adaptation of laws and systems to reflect refugees' lived realities.
- Strengthening refugee-led organisations as key actors in protection and development.
- Institutionalising refugee participation within governance structures.
- Sustaining political commitment to refugee inclusion beyond changes in government administrations.

Looking Ahead: The Future of Refugee Protection in Africa

Looking toward the future, participants called for reforms that promote dignity, inclusion, and self-reliance. The recommendations highlighted:

- Gradual transition away from encampment-based approaches.
- Expansion of refugee definitions to reflect contemporary displacement realities.
- Improved access to work permits and livelihood opportunities.
- Strengthened legal awareness and capacity-building initiatives.
- Greater policy harmonisation across countries and regions.
- Enhanced refugee participation in all matters concerning refugee protection and inclusion.



Key Takeaway

A central message emerging from the webinar was that refugee protection is most effective when responsibility is shared among governments, communities, regional institutions, humanitarian actors, and refugees themselves. Participants emphasised that meaningful inclusion, access to opportunities, strengthened refugee leadership, and progressive policy implementation are essential to building a more inclusive and sustainable future for displaced populations across Africa.





Figure 6: Refugee Week Kenya 2026 Webinar - 75th Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention

SPONSORSHIP & PARTNER SUPPORT

The Refugee Week Kenya Cross-Culture Festival 2026 was made possible through the generous financial and in-kind contributions of our key institutional, international, and grassroots partners:

- Counterpoints Arts/Refugee Week UK
- DRS
- UNHCR
- UoN
- ILO



- OXFAM
- Amnesty International
- R-SEAT
- ReDSS
- Pamoja Trust
- KMUN
- YVC
- WOPENDE
- UBUNTU
- RWN
- Beacon of Light
- CODE Society of Kenya

We extend our profound gratitude to each partner for their indispensable support and commitment to refugee inclusion. We look forward to deepening these strategic alliances to expand the reach, impact, and sustainability of this movement in future iterations.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

The inaugural Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026 successfully created a platform for dialogue, celebration, learning, and collaboration among diverse stakeholders committed to refugee inclusion and social cohesion. The festival reinforced the importance of implementing inclusive policies, strengthening refugee leadership, supporting localisation, and fostering partnerships that benefit both refugee and host communities.

The Refugee Week Kenya 2026 Webinar - *75th Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention* provided an opportunity to reflect on the progress made in refugee protection over the past seven decades, while examining emerging challenges facing displaced populations today. Participants recognised the contribution of the Convention and Africa's leadership through the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention in shaping refugee protection globally. At the same time, discussions underscored the



need to strengthen implementation of existing frameworks, promote meaningful refugee participation, expand access to rights and opportunities, and adapt protection systems to contemporary realities such as climate-related displacement and protracted refugee situations.

Beyond dialogue and reflection, the Refugee Week Kenya Festival 2026 also generated tangible outcomes by connecting participants to services and opportunities. Refugees accessed information on documentation processes, registration and renewal support, Social Health Authority (SHA) registration, referrals to service providers, and information on livelihoods, education, and community support initiatives. These practical interventions demonstrated the value of combining advocacy, awareness, and direct service delivery within community-centred events.

Looking ahead, several priorities emerged from both the festival and webinar discussions:

- Strengthening implementation of the SHIRIKA Plan and other inclusive refugee policies.
- Promoting meaningful refugee participation in the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programmes affecting refugees.
- Supporting refugee-led organisations as key actors in humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding efforts.
- Expanding access to education, livelihoods, legal identity, and healthcare services.
- Strengthening localisation and community-led approaches to refugee protection and inclusion.
- Enhancing policy harmonisation and implementation across national, regional, and international frameworks.
- Encouraging evidence-based research, awareness raising, and positive narratives that promote social cohesion and refugee inclusion.
- Sustaining partnerships between governments, host communities, refugee communities, civil society organisations, development partners, and the private sector.



The inaugural **Refugee Week Kenya** demonstrated that courage, unity, and shared responsibility are essential foundations for building inclusive societies. As Kenya and the wider African continent continue advancing refugee inclusion and protection, the festival and commemorative webinar served as powerful reminders that lasting solutions are achieved when refugees are recognised not only as persons in need of protection, but also as valued members of society whose voices, experiences, and contributions help shape a shared future.

"The future of refugee protection lies not only in the existence of laws and policies, but in our collective willingness to translate them into meaningful opportunities, dignity, participation, and belonging for all."



TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Day 1 - Cultural Parade.....	10
Figure 2: Day 1 Panellists: Operationalising the SHIRIKA Plan	14
Figure 3: Exhibition Tour.....	15
Figure 4: Day 2 Panellists - Strengthening Resilience & Localised Solutions.....	19
Figure 5: Day 3: Voices of Courage - Poetry, Spoken Word, Storytelling & Creative Showcases	25
Figure 6: Refugee Week Kenya 2026 Webinar - 75th Anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention	31