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#### THE REFUVOICES REPORT

For Us, With Us

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#### AMPLIFYING AFRICAN REFUGEES' VOICES THROUGH SHAPING CONTINENTAL ADVOCACY AGENDA.

In Nairobi, the African Refugee-Led Network (ARN) delegation and Oxfam Africa convened a historic four-day regional advocacy agenda workshop, which brought refugee leaders, civil society and partners together to set a continental advocacy strategy for Africa.

The workshop aimed at strengthening refugees' meaningful participation in decision-making spaces, placing refugees lived experiences and aspirations at the heart of policy formulations.

Since its formation in 2019, ARN has grown into a dynamic coalition of Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) across Africa. Its journey began when the Global Refugees Network (GRN) convened 72 refugee leaders from 14 nationalities in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. And to demand greater refugee participation in policymaking spaces on matters affecting refugees. Out of those historic discussions emerged seven priority areas that continue to guide advocacy today. This includes the protection of refugees, education, livelihoods, energy and infrastructure, durable solutions, mobility, addressing root causes and participation.

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The Refuvoices





The ARN delegates & development partners during the Regional Advocacy workshop in Nairobi, Kenya

Today, ARN remains committed to building strong institutions led by refugees capable of shaping and advocating for the inclusion and meaningful participation in Africa.

As the Nairobi workshop demonstrated, we can conclude that refugees are not just beneficiaries of policy, they are leaders, policy experts and advocates for change. With strong collaboration from partners like Oxfam Africa and others, ARN is determined to ensure that "Nothing for Refugees Without Refugees" becomes a reality across the continent.

## Safeguarding Child Protection and Strengthening the Capacities of RLOs in Family Reunification.

Perhaps no issue is more urgent than child protection during humanitarian crises. For refugees, many children are repeatedly separated from their families due to displacement. The challenge of safeguarding children's best interests, rights to child custody while seeking reunification with their families becomes complex. Recent training by Refuge Point International and REON-Kenya for Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) and key stakeholders aimed at strengthening their capacities in child protection, mapping children's best interests, and ensuring safe and dignified family reunification. In particular, integrate all child protection interventions into rights-based approaches.

Generally, children often experience forms of abuse such as physical violence, emotional neglect, sexual exploitation among others. Although children's rights are anchored in both the Kenya Children Act 2022 (Cap 141) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1989, which emphasize the indivisibility of rights such as education, healthcare, life, development and security. Article 260 of the Kenya Constitution 2010, in particular, further defines a child as any person below the age of 18. Conversely, children at risk such as unaccompanied minors, separated children, child-headed households, children with disabilities.







survivors of abuse and children living in hazardous conditions often face more severe forms of child abuse. Their fundamental rights are repeatedly violated, while perpetrators walk scot-free without fear of consequences due to weak adherence to child protection policies. Identifying gaps in protection is the key, and it requires emphasis on four foundational principles of child Participation, which include the best interests of the child,

## "Children don't always disclose the challenges facing them before the trust is earned."

non-discrimination, right to Life, survival and development. Managing complex cases, on the other hand, needs frontline workers to be patient and professional. Sometimes, the child may refuse to talk, protecting an abuser, breaking down emotionally or demonstrating fear. When communication breaks down with the children, an ethical interview is highly encouraged to enable the identification of traumatic symptoms, disability, cultural orientation or gender sensitivities for developing trust and effective assessments. The frontline workers should also establish clarity, demonstrate empathy, maintain confidentiality and cultural sensitivity. However, when planning a case for child protection, registration, screening, monitoring and referral pathways are crucial. One may opt to use the Best Interest Assessment (BIA) to assess the case-by-case scenario regarding denial of education or early marriage. The Best Interest Determination (BID) involves gathering detailed information on a child's identity, living arrangement, health, education, coping ability and reunification potential with family. Additionally, including the panel decisions to determine durable solutions such as repatriation, local integration, resettlement or reunification could be another viable option.

In a nutshell, safeguarding child protection requires asking oneself the central questions of the shared responsibility of child as follows: who is responsible for child safeguarding? Secondly, will children always disclose abuse? And finally, what if the abuse is internal?







Members of RLOs during the Child Protection Training with Refuge Point & RELON-Kenya's staff

In a scenario where the abuser is internal, consider reporting the matter immediately to relevant authorities and stakeholders, for further intervention and assistance could be a better alternative. For many RLOs in Kenya, establishing referral channels with partners and specialized agencies on child protection, such as UNHCR, HIAS, RefuShe, Windle Trust, Jesuit Refugee Service, Refuge Point, Red Cross and International Organization for Migration (IOM) is helpful for supporting vulnerable children.

Therefore, safeguarding child protection is everyone's responsibility, as summarized by the African Proverb that "It Takes a Whole Village to Raise a Child." You too should take a stand against child abuse, exploitation and ensure children have dignified access to family reunification processes.







RELON-Kenya staff with representatives from ARD, NUDIPU & Ruiru RLO inititative.

#### INCLUSION IS NOT CHARITY: WHY DISABILITY INCLUSION MATTERS AT DECISION-MAKING TABLES

When conversations about refugees are being discussed at conference halls or government offices, refugees with disabilities are often overlooked. Yet, their voices and lived experiences are essential to make decisions that are truly inclusive.

As of November 2024, Kenya hosted 819,686 registered refugees and asylum-seekers from over 20 countries, as well as 650,000 internally displaced people among other countless undocumented individuals. Among these populations, persons with disabilities are particularly at risk.

"Whereas the global prevalence of disability is 16% (WHO), it is believed to be even higher among forcibly displaced persons in Kenya

Whereas the global prevalence of disability is 16% (WHO), it is believed to be even higher among forcibly displaced persons in Kenya. In other words, hundreds of refugees with disabilities are currently living in Kenya undocumented.

Despite government, UNHCR and civil society efforts to reduce disparity, their challenges remain largely undocumented and unaddressed. The exclusion of refugees with disabilities creates more barriers in accessing asylum and registration for disability certifications, denying them basic services. Furthermore, their persistent absence from decision-making spaces where their futures are determined without them places PWDs at the periphery of society. It is this gap that the new project 'Advancing Inclusion and Meaningful Participation of Displaced Persons with Disabilities in Kenya and Beyond' was born to address. Launched in October 2024, when the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), RELON-Kenya, United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK), Association of Refugees with Disabilities (ARD) in Uganda,







Humanity & Inclusion, Refuge point, Oxfam Africa among other partners convened the five-day co-designed workshop in Nairobi under "East African Refugees with Disabilities Conference" to reaffirmed their commitment towards inclusion he project aims to address four concrete objectives; to facilitate inclusive participation of displaced persons with disabilities in key decision-making spaces at the levels. Identify barriers and increase access to disability certification for refugee with disabilities.

"The true inclusion cannot be achieved without the participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) themselves. The refugees with Disabilities have a unique voice on displacement, inclusion and accessibility

To enhance legal pathways to safety and promote the rights of displaced persons with disabilities. And finally, to provide technical and advisory support to Organizations led-by Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) and Refugee-Led Organizations. This milestone was symbolic in that, the empty cups were used to represent the new beginnings, as well as the collective responsibility to fill them with tangible progress or lasting change for refugees with disabilities across East Africa.

As a result, the recent learning exchanges with the National Umbrella for Persons with Disabilities in Uganda (NUDIPU), Association of Refugees with Disabilities (ARD) in Uganda and the Ruiru Initiative—RLO was to further strengthened this vision. The visit highlighted the value of South-to-South cooperation, where refugee-led organizations and Organizations led-by Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) collaborate across borders to elevate voices that consistently excluded from policymaking spaces.





Together, our message is very clear. "The true inclusion cannot be achieved without the participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) themselves. The refugees with Disabilities have a unique voice on displacement, inclusion, and accessibility, because they have lived it. Engaging refugees with disabilities directly at decision-making tables makes policies fairer and beneficial to entire community. Hence, inclusion is not charity. It is justice. And justice requires that no one is left behind." Said by JeanPaul B. Kasika. During the Global Disability Inclusion Summit.

## Learning from South Africa: The inclusive Leadership and Conflict Resilience in Refugee-Led Movements (RLOs).

Between 12th – 14th August 2025, RELON-Kenya, represented by our Executive Director, Mr. Jeanpaul Kasika, joined hands with the South African Refugee-Led Network (SARLN), Cohere among other partners in Pretoria, South Africa, for a workshop on Building Inclusive Leadership and Strengthening Conflict Resilience in Refugee-Led Movements.

This gathering brought together refugee leaders, advocates and partners in Africa to reflect on shared struggles, celebrate milestones as well as learning from one another the lessons that make refugee-led organizations (RLOs) stronger.

For RELON-Kenya, it was an opportunity to not only share our own experiences from Kenya, but to hear, learn and forge deeper partnerships that will shape the future of refugee advocacy in Africa.

The workshop focused on two key themes: Firstly, the Inclusive Leadership, which aims at understanding various voices in refugee movements that need to be heard and seen in areas of decision-making. And secondly, the Conflict Resilience, which emphasizes the need to establish conflict resolution mechanisms within RLOs Movement, to mitigate the internal and external conflicts so that movements can remains united and sustainable.

As SARLN shared in their reflections, the testimonies were overwhelmingly emotional. "Some of us are born on the move. Home is just a story. Without documentation, who are we?" said one of the refugee community leaders in South Africa. This powerful statement struck a deep chord like a thunderbolt, resonating with many participants in the room who had lived experiences of displacement and understood what it means daily.

The majority of asylum seekers and refugees often face restrictive legal barriers in receiving countries, leading to protracted situations and, in some cases, statelessness. Therefore, advocacy on statelessness, legal identity and recognition should be treated as a priority.

Another key lesson was the importance of the mental well-being of community leaders. Refugee leaders often carry the invisible weight of their communities 'struggles, which can lead to secondary trauma. As the first point of contact when refugees or asylum seekers seek assistance, Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs) and their leaders shoulder immense responsibility.







RLO movements should therefore embed self-care as a cornerstone of sustainable leadership. As SARLN emphasized during the vote of thanks: "Dear community leaders, you are precious to us, and your mental well-being is our priority."

The Pretoria exchange reaffirmed that RLOs are not just service providers but movements of resilience and hope. With the continued support of partners such as IRAP, Oxfam in Africa, Cohere and the Hilton Foundation, African refugee-led networks across the continent will simply grow stronger as a collective advocacy force for inclusion and meaningful participation of marginalized and underrepresented communities.

As RELON-Kenya, returning from South Africa was inspiring in that, it encourages us to deepening cross-border partnerships. And reinforced the conviction that; when refugee voices are mobilized across borders, they can shift systems and build inclusive model of leadership. Indeed, we are building movements together that not only call but also heal, include and transform.

"Some of us are born on the move. Home is just a story. Without documentation, who are we?"







Participants during the inclusive Leadership and Conflict Resilience in Refugee-Led Movements (RLOs). in Pretoria South Africa July 2025







WHY INCLUSIVE DATA MATTERS FOR REFUGEES WITH DISABILITIES

"The way we ask questions shapes the answers we receive." That simple truth set the tone at a recent workshop on disability inclusion, where the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and National Council for Persons with disabilities (NCPWDS) came together to confront a critical challenge: that the lack of sign language interpreters and inaccessible survey formats often left out persons with disabilities in the data that shapes policies and services.

Silenced by barriers and overly complex language, the opinions of persons with disabilities (PWDs) are excluded without accessibility aids like language interpreters and assistive devices in place.

These barriers don't just make communication harder; they erase people with disabilities from the record. And when voices go unheard, the data becomes incomplete, leading to policies that miss those most in need.

For refugees with disabilities, invisibility in data has even higher stakes. Without accurate information, humanitarian programs and social protection systems can overlook their needs entirely. The gaps in numbers quickly become gaps in protection as a result.

The inclusion of PWDs in data is not an afterthought. It must be designed into every stage of data collection. That's why accessible tools such as braille, sign language interpretation, and easy-to-read formats should be integrated during data collection processes.

There's a need for training data collectors in disability-sensitive methods too. Even the most accessible tools can only be effective if the people conducting the data collection know how to use them appropriately and respectfully. While recognizing intersectionality, that refugees with disabilities, such as women and children are counted.

True inclusion means changing how we ask, listen, and record. Only when every voice is counted can we confidently deliver on the global promise to "Leave No One Behind." Because we cannot fix what we do not see or count. Therefore, acknowledging disaggregated disability data and prioritizing inclusive data for Refugees with Disabilities in Kenya is key to inclusive planning and policy.







Participants with the GIZ-CPS & RELON-Kenya staff during Workshop on Peacebuilding & Conflict Transformation in Mombasa 2025

#### BUILDING BRIDGES OF PEACE: REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES UNITE IN MOMBASA, KAKUMA, AND NAIROBI.

Across the migration terrains, the stories of displacement often carry layers of pain and resilience. Refugees and asylum seekers hold grudges for every conflict that displaced them to refugee settlements and reception centers. Other conflicts arise from cultural shocks or competing for scarce resources, such as water points or during firewood collections. For decades, refugee settlements have often been mired in ethnic tensions.

However, the GIZ-CPS & RELON-Kenya's Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation initiative for refugees and host communities is telling a different story, one being written in dialogue and unity. In June, July and August of 2025, the RELON-Kenya & GIZ-Civil Peace Service (CPS) conducted a series of capacity strengthening and capacity building trainings on peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation for refugees and host communities in Mombasa, Kakuma, and Nairobi. The initiative targeted refugee leaders, Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs), and host communities to transform conflicts into peaceful coexistence and build pathways toward sustainable peace. In June and July 2025, refugee leaders and host communities from Mombasa and Kauma were taken through practical applications of conflict analysis, mapping out underlying causes of tensions, analyzing cultural dynamics and learning ways to settle disputes before it escalated further. A course co-designed by GIZ-CPS peace specialists and RELON-Kenya local peace experts to prepare the participants for real conflict scenarios.

By August 2025, in Nairobi, the focus shifted a bit from theories to practices. In that, those previously trained in Peacebuilding & Conflict Transformation were introduced to advanced dialogue facilitation, an exercise aim at mending divisions through inclusive conversation.



Participants with the GIZ-CPS & RELON-Kenya staff during Workshop on Peacebuilding & Conflict Transformation in Kakuma 2025







Participants with the GIZ-CPS & RELON-Kenya staff during Workshop on Peacebuilding & Conflict Transformation in Mombasa 2025

In a nutshell, these trainings had not just built bridges to peace but indeed nurtured relationships across diverse groups as partners in peace. As the saying goes, "Peace is not given; it is built day by day by the community." RELON-Kenya and GIZ-CPS are determined to stand with refugees and host communities as they build a new chapter of peaceful coexistence. A path where migration challenges are not viewed as crevices, but opportunities for shared humanity and strength.



Participants with the GIZ-CPS & RELON-Kenya staff during Workshop Graduation Ceremony on Community-Based Dialogue Approaches at Davana Hotel in Nairobi 2025







#### MOVING BEYOND CAPACITY QUESTIONS TO STRENGTHENING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

A persistent question has been whether RLOs have the capacity to deliver humanitarian responses effectively. This framing is deeply flawed. RLOs are not in competition with INGOs or NGOs; rather, they complement their work at critical junctions where local knowledge, trust and lived experience are required. The more urgent question is, how do we equip RLOs to deliver humanitarian responses in line with international humanitarian principles? This is the pathway ICVA has chosen to work on integrating RLOs into global platforms, expanding their networks, and strengthening their access to funding opportunities.

"RLOs are not in competition with INGOs or NGOs; rather, they complement their work at critical junctions where local knowledge, trust and lived experience are required."

RELON-Kenya, through its new partnership with the ICVA, is perceived by many refugee-led organizations (RLOs) in Kenya as a path to bridge local and global humanitarian spaces. That's ensuring RLOs align their strategic visions and standards of operations with humanitarian principles while retaining their community-rooted approaches.

For others, expanding networks with INGOs, such as UN agencies and others, means access to funding and technical support to strengthen organizational systems. As well as to elevate refugee voices within the global humanitarian architecture.

Although the truth may lie somewhere there. Many international agencies and governments envision a future where refugees are self-reliant, reducing dependency on host states and external aid through the realization of the CRRF and the Global Compact on Refugees. This vision could be achieved only if INGOs and RLOs/local actors work hand in hand





The INGOs bring resources, technical expertise and global advocacy reach. While the RLOs contribute contextual understanding, cultural sensitivity and community trust. In this regard, they form a complementary ecosystem of response that is both principled and practical.

Initially, the adoption of the New York Declaration in 2016 introduced the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), which set a solid foundation for a more inclusive refugee response. The CRRF called for reducing the burden on host states, promoting refugee self-reliance, and providing durable solutions, such as returning to the country of origin, resettlement or locally integrating in the host country.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 was a turning point that exposed the vulnerabilities of traditional humanitarian systems. As global commerce came to a halt and international staff were immobilized, refugees turned to their own initiatives for survival.

Refugee-Led Initiatives (RLIs) and RLOs acted as the first responders, delivering life-saving information, soap, sanitizer, masks, and psychosocial support to their communities in the most forgotten urban slums during the COVID-19 lockdown. Their closeness to local communities made them more efficient and responsive than external actors during the global pandemic.

This incident taught us that RLOs are not just spectators in humanitarian actions. They are fierce frontline responders whose roles should not be overlooked. The ICVA's integration of RLOs into its global platform is, therefore, more than inclusion. It is a recognition that humanitarian effectiveness depends on leveraging the strengths of both international and refugee-led actors.



#### NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US - DAGORETTI PWDS IN CONVERSATION

RELON-Kenya had recently held a discussion with people with disabilities (PWDs) from Dagoretti on the IRAP-funded disabilities program. The meeting aimed at creating open space where PWDs can freely share challenges they face. Regarding access to services, economic inclusion opportunities among others directly with RELON-Kenya team,

Gathering their opinions would provides genuine solutions for the disability program to be more inclusive, accessible and successful.

At RELON-Kenya, we that inclusion does not come from developing programs for beneficiaries but with them. Hence, these conversations are not just consultations but a guiding principles for impactful projects.

Listening to the voices of PWDs and their lived experience guarantees that our interventions meet real needs and advance dignity.

The Dagoretti session was a direct commitment to their famous disability inclusion slogan that "Nothing About Us Without Us."

Thus, it is only through real community engagement that we can co-create answers that empower PWDs to succeed and lead.





# Lowering barriers for all: Ensuring equitable access to solutions for diverse and marginalized communities Room 9

LOWERING BARRIERS FOR ALL: RELON-KENYA TAKES DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP TO GENEVA

During the 2025 UNHCR Consultations on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways (CRCP) in Geneva between 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> June, RELON-Kenya placed disability inclusion on the global resettlement agenda. Our Executive Director, JeanPaul B. Kasika, moderated the breakout session "Lowering barriers for all: Ensuring equitable access to solutions for diverse and marginalized communities." The discussion spotlighted the lived experience with policy, bringing together Elham Youssefian of the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), a disability inclusion champion in humanitarian action, with other leaders who have been advocating for Disability inclusion.

Importantly, UNHCR's latest estimate that 2.5 million refugees would need resettlement in 2026, arguing for the need to lowering barriers that excluded people with disabilities from benefitting from these opportunities.

CRCP at 30: From Dialogue to Action, commemorating three decades of this multi-stakeholder dialogue (on the "30 years of securing solutions together"), this year's consultations focused on open processes, transparency of data and community-led design.

Just a few months ago, the Global Disability Summit (GDS) 2025 in Berlin earlier April, jointly cohosted by Germany, Jordan and the International Disability Alliance, brought governments, civil society, and refugee leadership together to commit to tangible inclusion within humanitarian responses and development agendas.

The current Geneva Summit in 2025, was building on that momentum. RELON-Kenya, urged the global community to apply disability-inclusive data tools (i.e., Washington Group-style functioning questions), makes assistive technologies, sign-language and interpretation support, accessible information formats available to persons with disabilities.





Panelists: Director of RELON-Kenya on first left, Elham Youssefian IRAP's Director of Inclusion second left and other experts during Global Disability Inclusion in Geneva 2025.

Also throughout referral pipelines, persons with disabilities are includes in planning, quotas and country reports. This is to ensure that we shifted from positioning persons with disabilities as vulnerable to viewing them for their abilities and rights. In line the message of the Global Disability Inclusion Report 2025, which also highlights both ingrained exclusion and actual solutions.

As a community of refugees, RELON-Kenya also promoted co-leadership frameworks with OPDs (organizations of persons with disabilities) and RLOs. We also highlighted how Kenya's evolving refugee management system can be employed as a model in other displacement settings. The recent collaboration with the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK), RELON-Kenya, Association of Refugees With Disabilities in Uganda and the National Umbrella for Persons with Disabilities in Uganda (NUDIPU), Refugees Consortium of Kenya (RCK), the Department of Refugee Services (DRS), UNHCR-Kenya, Humanity & Inclusion, among other partners, is leveraging on how inclusive processes in registration, documentation, referral and integration services can be scaled up.

The Global Disabilities Summit 2025 reiterated that the number of people with disabilities is greater than 16% of the world population availed. And that exclusion is costly in both humanly and economically. Particularly, in low and middle income countries.

For resettlement pathways to be inclusive, there are three things to change immediately; invest in reception centres and integrate supportive system such as assistive devices, accessible housing and transportation system. Secondly, finance Organizations led by Persons with Disabilities (OPDS/RLOs), or co-implement to ensure accountability. And thirdly, increase resettlement quotas for persons with disabilities.





In order to operationalize Geneva's lessons learned, RELON-Kenya plan with three tracks; we aims to advance meaningful participation of displaced persons with disabilities in key decision-making processes and public platforms at local, national, regional, and international levels.

Also identify and address barriers that hinder equal access to refugee registration, asylum applications, and the acquisition of disability certification for displaced persons with disabilities in Kenya.

And to enhance access to legal pathways to safety for displaced persons with disabilities and ensure their rights and protection are upheld.

We also assembled the technical and advisory support to OPDs and RLOs, in collaboration with key partners such as the Association of Refugees with Disabilities in Uganda (ARD), United Disabled Persons of Kenya (UDPK), and the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), among others partners.

We acknowledged tireless efforts made by the Global Disability Advocate, Ms. Elham Youssefian, whose vision for disability inclusion continues to set international standards and ensure persons with disabilities are engaged meaningfully on matters affecting their day-to-day lives. For peer networks pushing disability inclusion agenda in Africa, thanks you.

The Geneva message was clear, to focus on inclusion and equity is the blueprint. With diminishing resettlement only deliberately accessible systems will provide justice.





#### **RELON - KENYA**

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