EXODUS world service

Kakuma Refugee Camp

Overview

Kakuma Refugee Camp was established in northwestern Kenya in 1992 as a safe place for the Lost Boys of Sudan to flee during the Second Sudanese Civil War. Today, the camp hosts over 313,000 refugees from 19 countries, including Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Origins and Geography

- Kakuma is located in Kenya's northwestern Turkana County, a sweltering desert region about 470 miles from Nairobi. Kakuma is divided into four sections and encompasses approximately 12 square miles.
- The Kalobeyei settlement, about 12 miles from Kakuma, was created in 2015 to help alleviate overcrowding. Kalobeyei's institutional priority is to promote self-reliance among refugees in the camp.
- Kakuma means "nowhere" in Swahili. Despite its name, refugees and organizations have built temporary schools, facilities, and infrastructure to help support long stays, which is the reality for most refugees.

Population

- With more than 340,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers, Kakuma is the second largest camp in Kenya. The southeastern Dadaab Refugee Camp houses over 409,000 refugees and asylum seekers.
- Women and children make up 75 percent of the total population.
- Eighty-eight percent of Kakuma's population is 35 or under. This means that many of Kakuma's refugees have spent nearly their entire lives in the camp.
- The camp is run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who works closely with the local and national governments. It has more than forty operational partners and sister U.N. agencies. There are also approximately 60 refugee and community-led organizations offering support.
- Famous people who formerly lived in Kakuma include Australian soccer star Awer Mabil, supermodels Halima Aden and Adut Akech, and Valentino Achak Deng, the subject of Dave Eggers' bestselling novel, *What Is the What.*

Current Situation

- Kakuma has always had limited resources, but the situation has become particularly dire following USAID cuts in 2025. Presently, acute malnutrition is rampant in the camp.
- The Kenyan government has stated its intent to transition Kakuma Refugee Camp into an official municipality. The government believes this transition will encourage self-sufficiency, social integration, and the building of permanent infrastructure.