

MCQ Question · mcqquestion.com

Bidibidi and Dadaab: Two Refugee Settlements, Two Different Countries

Free · Share

Bidibidi and Dadaab: Two Refugee Settlements, Two Different Countries

Bidibidi is not in Kenya, a fact that has tripped up exam candidates. Bidibidi and Dadaab are two of the best-known refugee settlements in East Africa. This lesson shows where each one is, who lives there and how the two differ.

At a glance

Four key facts on this topic

01 **Bidibidi** Uganda. South Sudanese refugees.

02 **Dadaab** Kenya. Mostly Somali refugees.

03 **Dadaab began** 1991 to 1992, for 90,000 people.

04 **Exam trap** Bidibidi is not in Kenya.

Must Know · The two settlements

1 Where is Bidibidi?

1.1 Is Bidibidi in Kenya?

No. **Bidibidi is in Uganda.** It lies in Yumbe District, near the border with South Sudan.

A factsheet on the UNHCR data portal places it “in Yumbe District”. A news report says the Yumbe district in Uganda became the third largest refugee camp in the world in just over two months.



A community building in Zone 4 Annex of Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Uganda, 2024. Photo: YFTC.SAMUEL, CC0, Wikimedia Commons.

1.2 Who lives in Bidibidi?

The settlement was set up in 2016 for **South Sudanese refugees**. Most came from the Greater Equatoria region.

Fighting broke out in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, in July 2016. A report from November 2016 says nearly 300,000 people had fled to Uganda since then.

1.3 How big did it grow?

- **Early November 2016:** nearly 190,000 people.
- **Peak:** over 280,000 people, one of the largest refugee settlements in the world.
- **December 2016:** it reached maximum capacity and stopped taking new arrivals.

Sources differ on the opening month. The factsheet says September 2016. So the article says only “2016”.

> **Quick check 1.** True or false: Bidibidi refugee settlement is in northwestern Kenya. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

> **Quick check 2.** True or false: Bidibidi was set up mainly for South Sudanese refugees. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: data.unhcr.org; radiotamazuj.org

2 Where is Dadaab?

Dadaab is in Kenya, in Garissa County, near the border with Somalia.

Human Rights Watch describes the Ifo Extension camp at Dadaab as being near the Kenya-Somalia border in Garissa County.



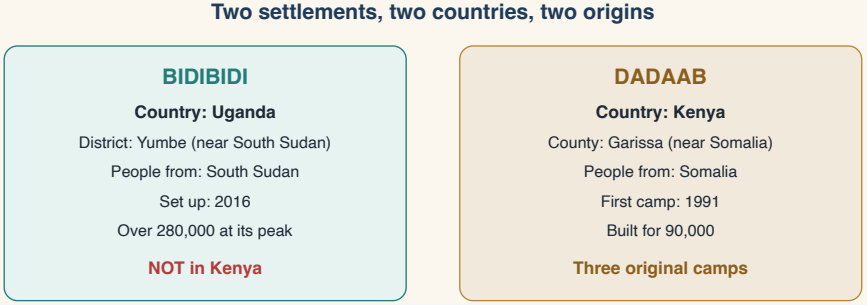
Refugee shelters in the Dadaab camp, northern Kenya, July 2011. Photo: Pete Lewis, DFID – UK Department for International Development, CC BY 2.0, Wikimedia Commons.

2.2 Who lives in Dadaab, and since when?

Dadaab began as a home for people who fled Somalia. Its government collapsed in 1991 and civil war followed.

UNHCR set up the first three camps between October 1991 and June 1992. They are **Ifo, Dagahaley and Hagadera**.

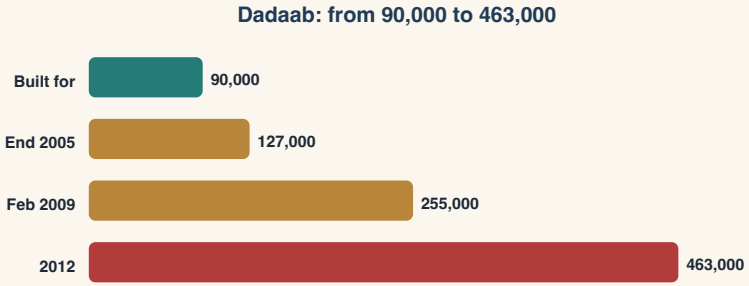
They were meant to host up to 90,000 people.



Original diagram. Sources: UNHCR/REACH factsheet, Radio Tamazuj, UN News, HRW.

Original diagram: where each settlement is and who lives there.

2.3 How big did Dadaab become?



Original chart. Sources: UN News (2012), HRW (2009). Counts are from different reports.

Original chart of Dadaab's growth.

- **End 2005:** 127,000 refugees.
- **February 2009:** just over 255,000. Human Rights Watch called it the world's largest refugee settlement.
- **2012:** more than 463,000, including some 10,000 third-generation refugees born there.

> **Quick check 3.** True or false: Dadaab is in Garissa County, Kenya. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Quick check 4. True or false: The first three Dadaab camps were set up in the 1990s. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: hrw.org; news.un.org

Good to Know · Mix-ups and policy

3 Why the mix-up?

3.1 How do the two compare?

Bidibidi and Dadaab side by side

	Bidibidi	Dadaab
Country	Uganda	Kenya
Area	Yumbe District, near the South Sudan border	Garissa County, near the Somalia border
Refugees from	South Sudan	Somalia
Set up	2016	1991 to 1992 (first three camps)
Size	Over 280,000 at its peak	Built for 90,000. Over 463,000 in 2012

Sources: UNHCR/REACH factsheet, Radio Tamazuj, UN News, Human Rights Watch.

7. **Think it through:** Which clue should you trust? See answer ↓

3.2 Why is Bidibidi often placed in Kenya?

Both are very large refugee settlements in East Africa. Kenya also hosts many South Sudanese refugees.

UNHCR's Kenya page shows refugees in Kenya by origin as of 31 August 2026. Somalia is first at 51.6 percent. South Sudan is second at 33.3 percent.

So "South Sudanese refugees in Kenya" sounds right. But Bidibidi is not one of the places they live. It is in Uganda.

3.3 What is the safe rule?

- **Uganda:** Bidibidi, and mostly South Sudanese refugees there.
- **Kenya:** Dadaab, and mostly Somali refugees there.
- **Check the country first,** then the origin.

> **Quick check 5.** True or false: Refugees in Kenya come only from Somalia. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: data.unhcr.org

4 How do they treat refugees?

4.1 What is Uganda's approach?

Uganda hosts 2,050,820 refugees and asylum-seekers, according to the UNHCR portal, updated on 30 September 2026.

A World Bank paper calls its policy one of Africa's pioneering frameworks. It grants freedom of movement, the right to work and access to social services.

- **Plots:** in the 1990s each household typically received a small 30-by-30-metre plot.
- **Land:** refugees cannot legally buy or formally own land. They can agree with host communities to use better plots.
- **Status:** Uganda gives prima facie refugee status to South Sudanese and Congolese refugees.

4.2 Is life easy there?

Not always. The World Bank paper says that in 2018 nearly half of refugees (46 percent) lived below the national poverty line. For host communities the figure was 17 percent.

4.3 What happened to Dadaab's future?



Original diagram. Gold dots: Dadaab. Teal dots: Bidibidi. Dates: HRW and IRC.

Original timeline of the two settlements.

In May 2016 Kenya’s Interior Ministry announced it would close the refugee camps within the shortest possible time. It cited national security.

Two Kenyan rights groups went to court. On 9 February 2017 the High Court ruled the closure decision unconstitutional. Kenya Law reports the judgment as dated 9 February. The International Rescue Committee’s press release gives 8 February, but the Human Rights Watch report of 9

February says the ruling came “today”. Judge Mativo said the plans discriminate against Somali refugees and break the rule against forced return.

In March 2019 Human Rights Watch said a renewed push to close the camp threatened 250,000 people, mostly Somali refugees and asylum seekers.

> **Quick check 6.** True or false: In February 2017 a Kenyan court blocked the planned closure of Dadaab. *(True or False?)* See answer ↓

Sources: data.unhcr.org; documents1.worldbank.org; hrw.org; rescue.org

Exam Practice

5 Exam traps and the PYQ

5.1 What did UPSC ask?

UPSC's official key for Series A gives **(c)**. The key gives no reasons. The reasons here are ours, from the sources above.

5.2 Why is the answer (c)?

- **Statement 1 is wrong:** Bidibidi is in Uganda, not Kenya.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** Bidibidi hosts South Sudanese refugees.
- **Statement 3 is correct:** Dadaab, in Kenya, was set up for people who fled Somalia.
- **So:** only statements 2 and 3 hold.

5.3 Which mix-ups does this topic invite?

- **Which country is Bidibidi in?** Uganda.
- **Who lives in Bidibidi?** South Sudanese refugees.
- **Which country is Dadaab in?** Kenya.
- **Who lives in Dadaab?** Mostly Somali refugees.

Remember this

- **Bidibidi:** Uganda, Yumbe District, South Sudanese refugees, set up in 2016.
- **Dadaab:** Kenya, Garissa County, mostly Somali refugees, first camps 1991 to 1992.
- **Sizes:** Bidibidi over 280,000 at its peak. Dadaab built for 90,000, over 463,000 in 2012.
- **Uganda's approach:** freedom of movement and the right to work. Refugees cannot own land.
- **Dadaab closure:** blocked by the High Court in February 2017.

Explain it back: Say in your own words why Statement 1 of the exam question is wrong.

Practice MCQs

1. Consider the following statements:

1. Bidibidi is a large refugee settlement in north-western Kenya.

2. Some people who fled from South Sudan civil war live in Bidibidi.

3. Some people who fled from civil war in Somalia live in Dadaab refugee complex in Kenya.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 and 2

B. 2 only

C. 2 and 3

D. 3 only

See answer ↓

2. In which country is the Bidibidi refugee settlement located?

A. South Sudan

B. Kenya

C. Uganda

D. Ethiopia

See answer ↓

3. The Bidibidi refugee settlement was set up mainly for refugees from which country?

A. Eritrea

B. Somalia

C. Burundi

D. South Sudan

See answer ↓

4. The Dadaab refugee complex lies in which county of Kenya?

A. Turkana

B. Nairobi

C. Mombasa

D. Garissa

See answer ↓

5. The first three Dadaab camps, set up between 1991 and 1992, were meant to host up to how many people?

A. 250,000

B. 30,000

C. 463,000

D. 90,000

See answer ↓

6. What did the Kenyan High Court do about Dadaab in February 2017?

A. Approved the closure plan

B. Ordered all refugees to return to Somalia

C. Handed the camp over to the UN

D. Blocked the government's plan to close the camp

See answer ↓

Answer Key

1. **C.** The correct answer is **2 and 3**. Statement 1 is wrong. Bidibidi is in Yumbe District, Uganda, not Kenya. Statement 2 is right. Bidibidi was set up for South Sudanese refugees. Statement 3 is right. Dadaab in Kenya was set up for people who fled Somalia. So 1 and 2 fails on statement 1. 2 only drops statement 3. 3 only drops statement 2. Memory hook: Bidibidi is Uganda and South Sudan. Dadaab is Kenya and Somalia. UPSC's official Series A key gives the same answer. ↑ Q1
2. **C.** The correct answer is **Uganda**. Bidibidi is in Yumbe District, near the South Sudan border. Kenya is wrong because Dadaab is the big Kenyan settlement. Ethiopia is wrong because no source places Bidibidi there. South Sudan is wrong because the settlement lies on the Ugandan side of the border. Memory hook: Bidibidi means Uganda. ↑ Q2
3. **D.** The correct answer is **South Sudan**. The factsheet says Bidibidi was set up for the rapid influx of South Sudanese refugees. They fled fighting that began in Juba in July 2016. Somalia is wrong because Somali refugees are the main group at Dadaab in Kenya. Burundi and Eritrea are wrong because neither source names them as Bidibidi's main group. Memory hook: Bidibidi, South Sudan. ↑ Q3
4. **D.** The correct answer is **Garissa**. Human Rights Watch places Dadaab near the Kenya-Somalia border in Garissa County. UNHCR's Kenya page lists Garissa, Turkana and Nairobi as the places where refugees live. Turkana and Nairobi host refugees too, but Dadaab is not there. Mombasa is wrong because no source places Dadaab on the coast. Memory hook: Dadaab, Garissa, Somalia border. ↑ Q4
5. **D.** The correct answer is **90,000**. UN News and Human Rights Watch both give this design figure. 463,000 is wrong because it is the 2012 population. 250,000 is wrong because it is a later figure for people at risk if Dadaab closed. 30,000 is wrong because no source gives it. Memory hook: built for 90,000, grew past 463,000. ↑ Q5

6. **D.** The correct answer is **it blocked the government's plan to close the camp**. The International Rescue Committee and Human Rights Watch both report the ruling. The judge said the plans discriminate against Somali refugees. Ordering a return to Somalia is wrong because the court halted such plans. Handing the camp to the UN is wrong because the ruling did not do that. Approving the closure is wrong because the court called such plans unconstitutional. Memory hook: February 2017, court says stop. ↑ Q6

Quick-check answers

1. **False.** It is in Yumbe District, Uganda, near the South Sudan border. ↑ 1
2. **True.** The factsheet says it hosts the rapid influx of South Sudanese refugees. ↑ 2
3. **True.** Human Rights Watch places the Dadaab camps near the Kenya-Somalia border in Garissa County. ↑ 3
4. **True.** UN News says Ifo, Dagahaley and Hagadera were set up between October 1991 and June 1992. ↑ 4
5. **False.** UNHCR data shows South Sudan is the second largest origin in Kenya, after Somalia. ↑ 5
6. **True.** The International Rescue Committee and Human Rights Watch both report the High Court ruling against the closure. ↑ 6
7. **Think it through.** Match the country to the origin. Bidibidi pairs with Uganda and South Sudan. Dadaab pairs with Kenya and Somalia. ↑ 7

Curated by Arsalan Zuberi · mcqquestion.com

Scan to read online

https://mcqquestion.com/articles/intlrel0148-bidibidi-dadaab-refugee-settlements/