REGIONAL BRIEF

East African Community (EAC)

Children with Albinism in Eastern Africa: Priorities for Integrated Regional and National Action

African Child Policy Forum (ACPF)

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1. CONTEXT

This Brief highlights the situation of children with albinism in the East African region, including the various challenges they are facing and the steps taken to address those challenges. The Brief also lays out what needs to be done at the East African community level, in terms of region-wide policy and programmatic action.

The Brief draws on the findings of ACPF's continental and country case studies conducted in 2025.

Eastern Africa bears the heaviest burden of violence against persons with albinism on the continent. Tanzania alone has recorded 211 attacks, including 79 killings, 100 survivors of attempted murder, mutilation or rape, 27 grave desecrations and 1 abduction. This scale of violence is more than any other country in Africa. Burundi has documented 41 attacks, including 23 killings. Kenya has recorded 13 attacks, including 5 killings. Rwanda and Uganda have each documented grave desecrations and attempted kidnappings respectively, while cross-border trafficking of children with albinism and their body parts has been confirmed between Tanzania, Burundi, Kenya, and Uganda.

Tanzania has the largest documented population of persons with albinism in the region. There are 71,631 people with albinism on the mainland (2022 Census),[1] of whom at least 18, 549 are children. Uganda's 2024 census documents 78,876 persons with albinism. Kenya's 2019 census[2] counted 9,729 persons with albinism. These figures confirm that Eastern Africa hosts one of the largest albinism populations on the continent, yet children in this group remain among the most violently persecuted and systematically excluded.

KEY FIGURES: CHILDREN WITH ALBINISM IN SELECTED EAC MEMBER STATES		
Country	**Population of persons with albinism**	**Documented attacks on persons with albinism (JULY 2025)**
Burundi	**Not available**	**41** Including 23 killings, 13 survivors, 5 grave desecrations
DRC	**Not available**	**74** Including 18 killings, 37 survivors, 1 missing, 11 grave desecrations, 7 asylum cases
Kenya	**9,729** (2019 Census)	**13** Including 5 killings, 8 survivors
Rwanda	**1,864** (2022 Census)	1 grave desecrations
Somalia	**Data not available**	No documented attacks in UTSS database
South Sudan	**Data not available**	No documented attacks in UTSS database
Tanzania	**71,631** (Mainland Tanzania) 18,549 children (aged 0-18) (2022 Census)	**211** (including 79 killings, 100 survivors, 1 abduction, 1 missing, 27 grave desecrations, 3 asylums)- the highest in Africa

Uganda	**78,876** (2024 Census)	**9** Including 8 survivors, 1 survivors
Sources: Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics (2022); Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2024); Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019); National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) (2022); Under the Same Sun (UTSS), Reported Attacks of Persons with Albinism, Extended Version (July 2025); ACPF (2026) Living in the Shadows: Children with Albinism in Africa, Addis Ababa.		

ACPF's 2026 continental report, *"Living in the Shadows: Children with Albinism in Africa,"*[3] draws on a pan-African literature review and a qualitative country case study in four countries to document the intersecting violations these children face. This brief distils the regional evidence and identifies priority actions for the East African Community (EAC) and its Member States.

2. SITUATION OF CHILDREN WITH ALBINISM IN THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY (EAC)

2.1. Accusations of Witchcraft, Ritual Attacks, Trafficking and Cross-Border Crime

Ritual attacks driven by the belief that body parts of persons with albinism bring wealth and political power remain a critical issue within the EAC region. ACPF's Tanzania's case study documents incidents spanning decades. A case in point is the story of a two-year-old girl whose body was discovered in June 2024 in Muleba district with her hands, tongue and eyes removed; her own father and a local priest were arrested

in connection with the killing. In Burundi, a 4-year-old boy was abducted from Bujumbura in February 2022, driven 230 km to Cankuzo Province, killed and dismembered for his bones. Kenya's records include the 2015 machete attack on a man in Vihiga County, whose ear and arm were sought for sale to Tanzania.

Cross-border trafficking is a persistent regional issue of concern. Under the Same Sun (UTSS) has confirmed involvement of Tanzania, Burundi, Kenya, and Uganda in the cross-border trade of body parts.[4] In April 2025, a Mozambican national attempted to traffic a 15-month-old child with albinism from Tanzania into Mozambique.[5] The April 2021 African Albinism Network (AAN)-documented case of a three-year-old boy being transported through Nairobi airport en route to Burkina Faso also illustrates the wider trafficking networks that intersect the EAC region.[6]

Impunity is pervasive. By April 2025, Tanzania recorded 210 documented attacks yet the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, in its landmark 2025 judgment (Centre for Human Rights and Others v. United Republic of Tanzania, Application No. 019/2018), found the State had failed to prevent, investigate, and prosecute these crimes, ordering Tanzania to establish a victim compensation fund, strengthen criminal sanctions, and amend the Witchcraft Act of 1928.[7]

2.2. Stigma, Discrimination and Psychosocial Harm

Children in Tanzania are commonly called "zeru zeru" (ghostlike creature)[8] and are also subjected to language and beliefs that commodify their bodies due to associations with ritual trade and witchcraft.[9] In Burundi, Uganda, and Kenya, people with albinism are similarly subjected to derogatory labels, stigma, and dehumanizing language rooted in cultural beliefs and misconceptions.[10] ACPF's Tanzania case study documented children being subjected to disciplinary punishment in the sun by teachers who forced them to "call for rain." A respondent from the Tanzania Albinism Society (TAS) described how her mother was

accused of “having sexual relations with an evil spirit” and of “breastfeeding an evil spirit.” The cumulative psychosocial harm (anxiety, nightmares, low self-esteem, school dropout) is as damaging as physical violence.

2.3. Limited Access to Health Care

Skin cancer is one of the leading causes of death among persons with albinism in sub-Saharan Africa.[11] In Tanzania, specialist dermatological and ophthalmological services are concentrated in urban centres. The Ocean Road Cancer Institute (ORCI) and the Regional Dermatology Training Centre (RDTC) provide critical services but are beyond reach for rural children who constitute over 55% of Tanzania's albinism population. WHO added broad-spectrum sunscreen to its Model List of Essential Medicines in 2025, yet access in rural East Africa remains severely limited and unaffordable. Among a sample of children in Zimbabwe, for example, only 23% had ever had their skin examined by a health professional.

Rwanda faces a severe shortage of dermatological specialists, most of whom are concentrated in Kigali leaving rural populations with little or no access to specialist care, despite the high burden of skin cancer risk among people with albinism.[12] In Uganda, access to dermatological services and sunscreen remains inconsistent, with many individuals relying on intermittent NGO-led outreach clinics with limited sustained government provision of essential preventive care.[13] Similarly, in Kenya, people with albinism experience systemic barriers to healthcare linked to stigma, poverty, and weak service coverage, limiting their ability to obtain routine skin examinations and protective resources.[14] In Burundi and neighbouring countries, harmful beliefs and social exclusion further contribute to delayed care-seeking and reduced access to appropriate medical services.[15]

2.4. Barriers to Education

Evidence shows that across many countries, including those in East Africa, children with albinism encounter systemic barriers such as lack of assistive devices, fear of sun exposure during commutes, and widespread bullying even from educators which significantly reduces school completion rates.[16] According to Standing Voice, fewer than half of children with albinism in Tanzania complete primary school and just 10% progress to secondary education which is far below the national average.[17] UNICEF Uganda data cited by GPE KIX (2024) also indicates that over 75% of persons with albinism have visual difficulties, contributing to high dropout rates even among those who initially enrol.[18]

A mapping study by the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights[19] found that poverty is a primary barrier. Many families cannot afford assistive devices, protective clothing, or school fees for children with albinism, and some parents deliberately withhold their children from school out of fear of attacks or concern that their child's learning ability will be doubted by teachers. In mainstream integrated schools, where most Kenyan children with albinism are enrolled, the Albinism Society of Kenya has raised the troubling concern that children with albinism are routinely required to learn braille despite the fact that albinism causes low vision, not blindness.[20] Grace Nzomo, a Kenyan person with albinism, described the experience as ‘like learning mathematics in Greek’ being forced into a blind learner's curriculum when she retained residual vision that could have been supported with spectacles and front-row seating.[21]

ACPF's Tanzania case study documented harmful disciplinary practices by teachers, including forcing children with albinism to sit in direct sunlight as punishment and subjecting them to a ritualised humiliation known as 'calling for rain,' where a child is made to kneel in the sun with arms raised.[22] Children also reported classrooms with no shade, school uniforms offering inadequate sun protection, and an absence of magnifiers, large-print materials, or front-row seating. The risk does not end at the school gate. On 25 June 2024, a two-year-old girl with albinism was abducted and killed in Tanzania's Kagera Region which illustrates the dangers children with albinism face during routine daily activities. The 2025 ruling of the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights found Tanzania in violation of the right to education for persons with albinism.[23]

2.5. Access to Justice and Accountability Gaps

Most attacks in the region go unreported due to the silence surrounding witchcraft-related crimes, fear of reprisals, and the frequent involvement of family members as perpetrators. The African Court's 2025 Tanzania judgment specifically identified insufficient criminalisation of body-parts trafficking, inadequate forensic and investigative capacity, absence of specialised prosecutorial units, and weak witness-protection mechanisms. Despite this, conviction rates across the region remain low, law enforcement personnel lack specialised albinism and occult-crime training, and institutionalised shelter responses continue to be used as the primary protective measure.

3. EAC REGIONAL COORDINATION AND ADDED VALUE

The EAC already has regional mandates and policy instruments that can be used to protect children with albinism. Article 120 of the EAC Treaty provides for cooperation on social welfare and common approaches for disadvantaged and marginalised groups, including children.[24] The EAC Child Policy and the Framework for Strengthening Child Protection Systems provide a basis for harmonising standards, addressing cross-border child-rights violations and coordinating access to education, health and social protection.[25]

The EAC's peace and security architecture provides a second entry point. Article 124 of the Treaty and the EAC Regional Strategy for Peace and Security support cooperation on cross-border crime and the security of persons and property. [36]These structures provide a regional basis for missing-child alerts, border notifications, victim referral, evidence exchange and coordinated investigation of abduction, trafficking, killing and grave desecration involving persons with albinism.[26]

Operational cooperation can also draw on the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organization (EAPCCO), which supports joint strategies, crime-information sharing and legal harmonisation against transnational organised crime.[27] EAPCCO operations already target trafficking in human beings and people smuggling through intelligence-led cooperation and INTERPOL systems.[28] Although EAPCCO has a wider membership than the EAC, structured cooperation between the EAC Secretariat, Partner States, EAPCCO and INTERPOL could strengthen regional alerts and investigations in albinism-related cases.[29]

The EAC can also add value by setting common standards, generating regional evidence, convening peer learning and monitoring implementation. Kenya offers lessons from disability-law reform and government-supported sunscreen and assistive products; Uganda and Tanzania provide national action-plan experience; and Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania provide census or

administrative data that can inform a common regional baseline.[30] These national experiences can be compared, adapted and monitored through existing EAC child-protection, disability, health, education and social-affairs structures.[31]

A timely institutional opportunity emerged in July 2026, when EAC Partner States adopted a five-year regional strategy covering children, persons with disabilities and social protection, together with an EAC Social Protection Policy and Action Plan, under the newly operationalised Sectoral Council on Social Affairs.[32] This platform can bring children with albinism into regional implementation on disability inclusion, social protection, health, education, migration and child protection, while strengthening accountability across Partner States.[40]

4. LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

KEY GAPS IN THE EAC FRAMEWORK

- No EAC-level framework addresses ritual attacks on, or cross-border trafficking of, persons with albinism.
- Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Burundi have no shared intelligence protocol or extradition framework for albinism-related crimes.
- Most EAC Member States do not disaggregate census data on albinism by age and sex, leaving children statistically invisible.
- The AU Plan of Action on Albinism (2021–2031) has not been operationalised at EAC level; only Tanzania and Uganda have national action plans.
- Institutional shelter responses, used in Tanzania since 2015, lack the legal framework, family reunification, and psychosocial support required under children's rights standards.

5. PROMISING PRACTICES IN THE REGION

Kenya passed the Persons with Disabilities Act No. 4 of 2025, which modernises Kenya's disability-rights framework and includes albinism in the definition of disability. Kenya has also operated a government albinism sunscreen and support programme, including sunscreen, lip care, protective clothing and access to eye-care products through NCPWD and KEMSA.[33]

Uganda's Persons with Disabilities Act, 2020 recognises albinism as a disability category, and Uganda's National Action Plan for Persons with Albinism 2020-2025 provides a targeted policy framework for protecting and promoting the rights of persons with albinism. Uganda's Prevention and Prohibition of Human Sacrifice Act criminalises human sacrifice generally, while parliamentary materials note that such practices target vulnerable persons, including children and persons with disabilities.[34]

Tanzania's National Action Plan on Albinism (2024-2029) is a landmark commitment, explicitly recognising albinism as a distinct rights issue with objectives covering protection, health, and education.[35] The National Assistive Technology Strategy (2024-2027) includes provision of sun-protection spectacles and hats.[36] Government subsidies to the Tanzania Albinism Society (TAS) fund sunscreen and hat distribution,

though concerns about equitable distribution remain. Standing Voice Tanzania operates community-based health and education programmes.[37] Under the Same Sun has supported the production and distribution of locally made “Kilisun” SPF 30+ sunscreen for children in shelters.

ACERWC Investigative Mission to Tanzania

In 2016, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) conducted an investigative mission to Tanzania on the situation of children with albinism held in temporary holding shelters. The mission report documented serious concerns about the conditions in which children with albinism were being held, including separation from their families, poor accommodation, inadequate nutrition, limited access to medical care, education and opportunities to play, and in some cases physical attacks within the shelters themselves. The mission found that shelters established as emergency protective responses had in practice become sites of prolonged institutionalisation, contrary to both their original intent and the best interests of the children concerned.

On the basis of these findings, the ACERWC issued concrete recommendations to the Government of Tanzania, including to: ensure that shelters are genuinely temporary and that children are reunited with their families as swiftly as possible; improve the conditions in existing shelters to meet minimum standards of care, nutrition, education, and health; develop and implement a durable community-based protection strategy that enables children with albinism to live safely within their families and communities rather than in institutional settings; strengthen law enforcement capacity to investigate and prosecute ritual attacks, thereby addressing the root cause of displacement into shelters; and ensure that the voices of children with albinism and their families are meaningfully included in the design of protective responses. The ACERWC has subsequently included Tanzania in its monitoring and follow-up processes, and its Working Group on Children with Disabilities has conducted further engagement with the Tanzanian government on implementation of these recommendations.

The ACERWC mission to Tanzania is significant as a model for accountability. It demonstrates that the African child rights monitoring system can and should be used proactively to document violations against children with albinism, generate evidence-based recommendations, and hold governments accountable for both acts of omission and well-intentioned but harmful protective responses. The ACERWC's 2025 Guiding Note on Reporting on the Rights and Welfare of Children with Albinism, which builds on the lessons of the Tanzania mission, now requires all AU Member States to include disaggregated data on children with albinism in their periodic reports under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EAC AND ITS MEMBER STATES

For the EAC Secretariat and Relevant Organs

- Establish an EAC Inter-State Task Force on Albinism to coordinate cross-border intelligence sharing, harmonise anti-trafficking laws and develop mutual legal assistance protocols specifically targeting organ and body-parts trafficking involving persons with albinism.
- Adopt an EAC Regional Action Plan on Albinism which is aligned with the AU Plan of Action to End Attacks and Other Human Rights Violations Targeting Persons with Albinism (2021-2031)
- Commission a regional mapping study on cross-border trafficking routes to close enforcement gaps at border zones, particularly Tanzania-Burundi-Kenya-Uganda corridors.
- Direct the relevant department within the EAC secretariat to include children with albinism in its disability-inclusive development agenda.

For EAC Member States

- Recognise albinism as a disability in national legislation (as Kenya and Uganda have done) ensuring access to social protection, disability grants, and subsidised services.
- Criminalise possession and trade of body parts of persons with albinism in all jurisdictions where no such specific offence yet exists and treat ritual attacks as aggravated offences, consistent with the 2025 African Court ruling against Tanzania.
- Train immigration and border patrol to work to undertake systematic check of passengers travelling with persons with albinism
- Develop and ratify extradition protocols and mutual legal assistance agreements to ensure cross-country cooperation
- Integrate dermatological care and ophthalmological services into primary health systems with subsidised sunscreen (as recommended by the UN Independent Expert on Albinism) and visual aids included in essential service packages for children with albinism.
- Develop and fund national inclusive education policies that provide reasonable adjustments for children with low vision, prohibit bullying, and train teachers specifically on the needs of children with albinism.
- Invest in community-based awareness campaigns through trusted channels including community radio by engaging traditional healers and faith leaders to dismantle myths and challenge demand for body parts.
- Expand psychosocial and trauma-informed care services for survivors of attacks and ritual violence, ensuring family-centred approaches rather than institutionalisation.
- Include albinism-disaggregated data in national censuses and administrative data systems as per the guidance provided in the ACERWC's Guiding Note on Reporting on the Rights and Welfare of Children with Albinism (2025).

7. CONCLUSION

The EAC region bears the heaviest documented burden of violence against persons with albinism in Africa. The EAC must translate national legislative progress in Kenya and Uganda, Tanzania's new National Action Plan, Uganda's the Prevention and Prohibition of Human Sacrifice Act

and the African Court's landmark ruling into a coherent regional framework that closes accountability gaps, ends cross-border trafficking and ensures every child with albinism in East Africa is protected, supported, and able to claim their rights with dignity.

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