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“Waiting for God”

Flood Displacement and Planned Relocation of
Fisherfolk in Saint-Louis, Senegal



“Waiting for God”

**Flood Displacement and Planned Relocation
of Fisherfolk in Saint-Louis, Senegal**

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Dedication



© Khady Gueye

This report is dedicated to the families living in Khar Yalla, and, in particular, to Elimane Gueye (1956-2025), loving father and husband, who died in June 2025 of a prolonged illness that began after he was injured trying to build a sea wall to protect his family from coastal floods.

Summary

On the side of the busy highway that leads out of the city of Saint-Louis, in northwestern Senegal, is a site known as Khar Yalla. Its name means “waiting for God” in Wolof. Around 1,000 people have been living at the site, since 2016. They come from tightly knit, historic fishing communities on the Langue de Barbarie peninsula, located five kilometers from Khar Yalla, which is one of the most exposed places in Africa to sea level rise and other impacts of the climate crisis. A decade ago, the families lived in houses on the beach, within walking distance of their closest friends and relatives. Most men spent their days fishing, while most women cleaned, smoked, and sold the fish they brought back. But in 2015 and 2016, coastal floods destroyed their homes, making them internally displaced peoples (IDPs). Municipal authorities temporarily housed the displaced families in tents in the Langue de Barbarie, then moved them to Khar Yalla into houses that had been constructed for an earlier, failed planned relocation project that was meant to protect other families threatened by flooding. The families displaced by the 2015 and 2016 floods agreed to be moved to Khar Yalla, hoping that the site would offer temporary protection until they could rebuild on the Langue de Barbarie or be relocated by the government to new, permanent homes.

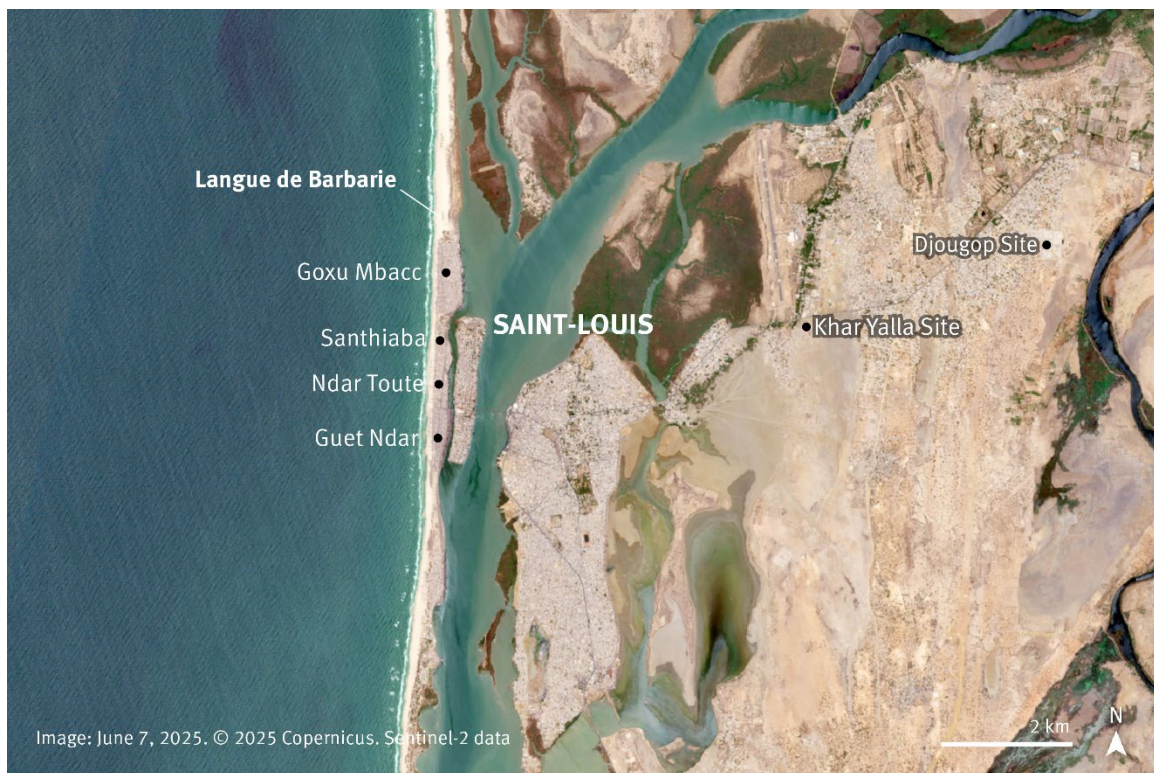
But as documented in this report—based on interviews with 101 people, including IDPs living in Khar Yalla, other members of their communities from the Langue de Barbarie, government officials, academics, civil society members, and other experts—Senegalese authorities still have not facilitated a durable solution for the IDPs through rights-respecting planned relocation or meaningfully consulted them about their needs and hopes for the future. Instead, for almost a decade, the Senegalese government has left the IDPs in a state of precarity denoted by Khar Yalla’s name, and in conditions that violate their economic, social, and cultural rights, including their rights to an adequate standard of living, adequate housing, education, health, and to take part in cultural life.

Khady Gueye’s experience is illustrative. In 2015, she was a 16-year-old star student, about to finish high school, when her home in the Langue de Barbarie was destroyed. After her family was displaced by floods, spent months in tents, and then moved to Khar Yalla, she left school. She could not afford to travel to her old one and struggled to access those closer to Khar Yalla. She also had to care for family members whose preexisting health

conditions deteriorated after the family lost their home, including her younger sister, who had long been in ill health, and her father, who had acquired a disability several years prior due to injuries he sustained while trying to build a sea wall to protect the family's home in the Langue de Barbarie. Her sister died soon after they arrived in Khar Yalla. Khady's family had to use the only humanitarian aid the government ever provided them in Khar Yalla for the funeral. Khady is now a 26-year-old mother who shares a house with three bedrooms, a kitchen, and one toilet with 14 relatives. Her father passed away in June 2025, without ever having seen his family find a durable solution for their displacement. Khady and others have worked tirelessly to improve the living conditions in Khar Yalla. But after nearly a decade in limbo, Khady is growing desperate. "We feel forgotten by decisionmakers," she said. "We've asked sometimes if the authorities consider us as human, as Senegalese. They are well aware of our situation. Most of them live nearby and pass by our homes every day. Why can't they hear us?"

The living conditions Khady and others face in Khar Yalla violate their rights to adequate housing. There is severe overcrowding, most houses lack electricity, and there is no waste collection or disposal system. Every rainy season (June to September), Khar Yalla repeatedly floods, and septic water and garbage enter the houses. Additionally, households still have only the temporary, revocable occupation permits distributed by municipal authorities in 2016, which prohibit them from modifying the houses.

The people in Khar Yalla also endure other ongoing violations to their rights to an adequate standard of living, as well as their rights to education, health, and to take part in cultural life. Khar Yalla has no state-run, secular school, health clinic, or employment opportunities. There is no affordable transportation to schools, health care, or their jobs in the Saint-Louis city center or the Langue de Barbarie. Authorities have made no efforts to help the people in Khar Yalla retrain for other professions and thwarted the community's own initiatives. The authorities have also done little to help the people in Khar Yalla with access to other income or direct provision of essentials such as food to ensure an adequate standard of living. As one woman in Khar Yalla told Human Rights Watch, "We have no support from the authorities, and when we tried to find our own solution, they stopped us." Consequently, the people in Khar Yalla are dislocated from their culture, an estimated third of the children in Khar Yalla do not attend primary or secondary school, many people have foregone preventative care, and most breadwinners' incomes have dropped to the point that families are often unable to put food on the table.

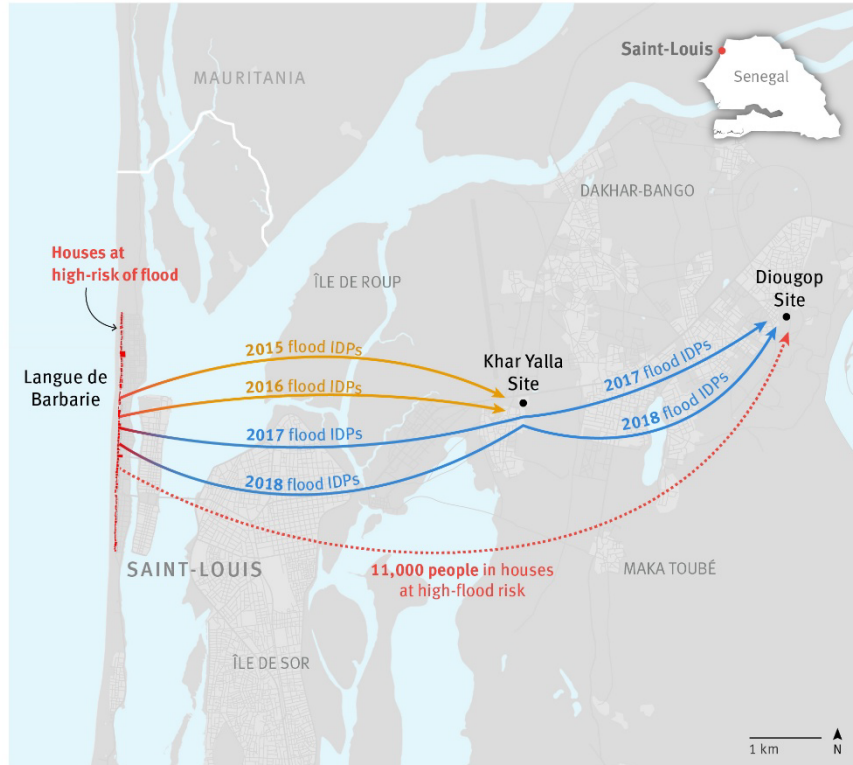


Map showing of the historic fishing neighborhoods in the Langue of Barbarie, in Saint-Louis, Senegal; the Khar Yalla site; and Djougop, the relocation site for SERRP. Image © 2025 Copernicus. Sentinel-2 data. Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch

The families are living in protracted displacement in Khar Yalla because authorities have failed to facilitate one of the three possible settlement options identified as durable solutions in international guidance: dignified return, local integration at a site of temporary stay, or permanent relocation to a site where living conditions are comparable or better. The families in Khar Yalla cannot rebuild their homes in the Langue de Barbarie, because their land will soon become a no-build zone. Khar Yalla's exposure to flooding and lack of essential services make it inappropriate for permanent human habitation, as Senegalese government and World Bank officials acknowledge. Thus, moving the IDPs to Khar Yalla did not constitute a relocation that could offer comparable living conditions to what the IDPs had lost, and the site is not appropriate for local integration. Moreover, authorities have actively prevented local integration by only giving the people in Khar Yalla revocable, temporary occupation permits for the houses and disrupting several of their attempts to improve the site or find *in situ* sources of employment. The families in Khar Yalla are not forced to live there, but they cannot afford to move elsewhere because of the depletion in income they have experienced since being displaced.

Meanwhile, the Senegalese government failed to include the Khar Yalla families in a planned relocation it is undertaking for other households from the same Langue de Barbarie communities, facing the same climate change impacts, including people who have not yet lost their homes. Coastal floods in 2017 and 2018 displaced hundreds more families from the Langue de Barbarie. In the aftermath, the Senegalese government requested and received a World Bank loan to launch the Saint Louis Recovery & Resilience Project (SERRP). Through SERRP, the government has now permanently relocated the families displaced in 2017 and 2018 to new, government-built houses in a site located 10 kilometers inland, called Djougop. The government is also relocating approximately 11,000 other people who have not yet been displaced but who currently live in the houses closest to the sea on the Langue de Barbarie. But authorities have left their fellow community members, who were displaced since 2015 and 2016, behind in Khar Yalla.

Saint-Louis Relocation Key Events



- **2009.** City of Saint-Louis requests international assistance to relocate flood-prone households.
- **2010.** **Khar Yalla** selected as relocation site for these households; UN-Habitat agrees to carry out construction.
- **2013.** UN-Habitat finishes building 68 houses in Khar Yalla, but intended beneficiaries never relocate to site.
- **2015.** Coastal flood destroys approx. 33 houses on the Langu de Barbarie. In **October 2015**, after being housed for months in tents on the peninsula, IDPs from flood demand action from mayor's office.
- **2016.** Coastal flood destroys approx. 50 houses on the Langu de Barbarie. **By late 2016**, Saint-Louis mayor's office moves IDPs from 2015 and 2016 floods to Khar Yalla, into houses built by UN-Habitat.
- **August 2017.** Coastal flood hits the Langu de Barbarie, displacing 199 households; many are moved temporarily into **tents in Khar Yalla**.
- **February 2018.** Another coastal flood hits the Langu de Barbarie, displacing 59 households; many join those in **tents in Khar Yalla**. **By mid 2018**, Senegal launches Saint-Louis Emergency Recovery & Resilience Project (SERRP), with World Bank loan.
- **October 2019.** Households displaced by 2017 and 2018 floods are relocated **from Khar Yalla to Djougop** through SERRP; **families displaced by 2015 and 2016 floods are left behind**.
- **2026.** Estimated year for SERRP completion; by end of project, approx. 11,000 people from the Langu de Barbarie at risk of losing their homes in coastal floods are expected to be **relocated to Djougop**.

SERRP does not yet facilitate a viable durable solution for those being relocated through the program. Though a systematic analysis of SERRP is beyond the scope of this report, Human Rights Watch spoke to SERRP beneficiaries and local civil society leaders who criticized the consultation process and dissemination of information and described struggles to continue participating in their culture and earning an income from fishing. These and other concerns with SERRP notwithstanding, it offers a relocation site with several essential services that are absent in Khar Yalla, such as electricity, waste disposal, schooling, and in the future, a health clinic and food market. The government officials Human Rights Watch interviewed failed to provide credible explanations for why the families in Khar Yalla were left out of SERRP. Indeed, several local officials denied that these families had ever been displaced by climate hazards, even though it was the Saint-Louis municipal government that moved the families to Khar Yalla after the 2015 and 2016 floods.

Senegal is obligated under national and international law to respect and fulfill its people's economic, social, and cultural rights and protect them from reasonably foreseeable risks

to rights, including the impacts of sea level rise and other hazards intensified by climate change, in a way that does not violate their rights. Senegal is also required to facilitate durable solutions for internally displaced persons. It is laudable that the Senegalese government has proactively pursued strategies to protect climate displaced people, including planned relocation. Senegal has taken these issues more seriously than most other states. But its efforts should lead to durable solutions for those displaced by climate hazards, not protracted displacement leading to human rights violations, as has occurred for the IDPs in Khar Yalla.

As these families live through their ninth rainy season in Khar Yalla, at the time of writing, it is urgent that the government recognize that they were displaced by coastal floods in 2015 and 2016, meaningfully consult with them, and include them in an improved version of SERRP or facilitate another durable solution that ensures an adequate standard of living and respects their rights. In the interim, living conditions in Khar Yalla must be improved. Given the Saint-Louis municipal government's inaction, intervention from the national government is urgently required.

To prevent future experiences like those of families in Khar Yalla, the Senegalese government should become the first African country to develop a national policy on internal planned relocation aimed at protecting the rights of internally displaced persons and facilitating durable solutions for them. It should also ratify the 2009 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). By taking these actions, Senegal can become a regional leader in climate adaptation and protection for internally displaced communities.

The World Bank should reform its policies as well. In SERRP and the other climate-related planned relocation projects it has been involved in so far, the World Bank has applied policies designed for resettlements driven by development projects, such as dams and roads. But these policies do not reflect the unique nature of climate-related planned relocation. World Bank policies need to be replaced or updated to ensure that the climate-related planned relocations it funds are informed by consultation with impacted communities, based on comprehensive censuses, and anchored around the goal of protecting people and ensuring those living in protracted displacement can achieve a durable solution.

Recommendations

To the Senegal National Government

To the National Municipal Development Agency, Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development & National Committee on Climate Change, and Ministry of Territorial Communities, Planning and Development of Territories

For Khar Yalla

- Together with regional and municipal authorities, plan relocation of the people living in Khar Yalla who were displaced from the Langue de Barbarie in 2015 and 2016, with their meaningful consultation and informed consent, to Djougop or another site where their economic, social, and cultural rights—including rights to an adequate standard of living, adequate housing, education, health, and culture—are respected and fulfilled.
 - Consistent with SERRP model, enable Khar Yalla families to choose between accepting new homes or receiving compensation for their old homes in the Langue de Barbarie.
 - Compensate Khar Yalla families for the economic and non-economic losses sustained during the nine years they have been in protracted displacement, cut off from fishing livelihoods.
 - Ensure consultation of women, older persons, and persons with disabilities.
- In the absence of meaningful action by municipal authorities, dedicate maximum available resources to respect and fulfill the rights of the people in Khar Yalla while they await a permanent relocation elsewhere, including their rights to an adequate standard of living, adequate housing, health, and education.
 - Providing services and infrastructure: install electricity in homes and improve sanitation.
 - Ensuring homes are habitable: construct a dyke to protect homes from riverine flooding during the rainy season and resulting health risks, and support community-led planning to reduce overcrowding.
 - Insisting that municipal authorities provide the IDPs in Khar Yalla with secure tenure: authorize people to make necessary improvements to their

houses and the site to address overcrowding, lack of shade, and other issues.

- Facilitating access to work on-site: authorize the Khar Yalla women's association to finish constructing their training center.
 - Formally recognize the Khar Yalla women's association as an implementation partner.
- Ensuring access to essential services: provide free transportation or, with the Municipal Development Agency (ADM) and transportation unions, install bus stops near Khar Yalla and Djougop and subsidize or otherwise incentivize bus operators to transport passengers at both sites to city center and Langue de Barbarie. This is necessary to ensure access to essential services, including—
 - Nearby public schools;
 - Health care facilities, particularly for pregnant women, children, older people, and people with disabilities;
 - Culturally significant livelihoods; and
 - Other places necessary to realize their rights.

For national planning on planned relocation

- Conduct and publicize a thorough review of past and ongoing planned relocation projects in Saint-Louis, including by documenting lessons learned from community members' experiences through extensive consultations, and assessing the impacts of these projects on relocated persons' housing, culture, education, health, and income.
- Conduct a vulnerability and needs assessment of other communities in the Langue de Barbarie and elsewhere in Senegal who are displaced or at risk of displacement in the context of climate-related hazards, with particular focus on any communities who have self-identified as needing a planned relocation.
- Prioritize currently already displaced communities such as Khar Yalla in future planned relocation decisions.
- Develop a national climate-related planned relocation policy to protect rights of future communities facing sea level rise and other climate change impacts, that:
 - Is based on lessons learned from community members involved in prior planned relocation projects;

- Is centered on protection, prioritizing people already in protracted displacement before people that have not yet lost their homes (e.g., by requiring a comprehensive census and integrated needs assessment for IDPs before scope of project is determined);
- Conceptualizes planned relocation as a holistic process that recognizes non-economic dimensions, includes access to quality education and health care, as well as continued access to sites of livelihood and cultural importance;
- Establishes transparency mechanisms, e.g., publishing rationale for decisions on scope of beneficiaries and information on funding allocation;
- Requires authorities to establish robust criteria for planned relocation site selection that is safe from natural hazards, and that ensures living conditions are improved or equivalent to pre-displacement levels;
- Requires substantial opportunities for impacted communities to give input on relocation process; and
- Reflects fishing communities' needs, including to ensure continued daily transport between the relocation site and site of origin.

To the Prime Minister and Parliament

- Complete the ratification process for the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa ("Kampala Convention"), which Senegal signed in 2009.
- Implement national climate-related planned relocation policy and integrate it into the "Plan Sénégal" 2050 national development strategy and the Ministry of the Environment's Vision 2050 plan; develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) to implement this policy, including institutional responsibilities and relevant coordination procedures.
- Establish a climate-related planned relocation focal point with authority to coordinate across ministries and external actors.
- Include climate-related planned relocation, and marginalized people's perspectives thereof, in all related national planning efforts, including on climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable development.
- Pass legislation implementing the rights codified under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) into domestic law.

To the Governor and Prefect of Saint-Louis

- Together with municipal authorities, prioritize timely, iterative consultation with people in Khar Yalla, and civil society partners, on future decisions impacting them, including by:
 - Meeting with working groups coordinated by Forum Civil;
 - Conducting a census to determine the number of households and individuals displaced by 2015 and 2016 flood currently residing in Khar Yalla; and
 - Undertaking a comprehensive needs assessment of people in Khar Yalla, on the full spectrum of rights, including rights to adequate housing, education, health, and taking part in cultural life.
- Support and provide oversight of municipal authorities' implementation of the above recommendations.
- Together with ADM and other relevant national authorities, provide safe storage system for fishing boats and other equipment at the Langue de Barbarie for use by fisherfolk based in Khar Yalla and Djougop.

To the Saint-Louis Municipal Government (Mayor of Saint-Louis; Saint-Louis Municipal Development Agency)

- Inform municipal officials that the families in Khar Yalla were displaced by the 2015 and 2016 coastal floods and have been left in limbo for nearly a decade.
- Together with regional and national authorities, support municipal and regional actors to implement above recommendation to facilitate rights-respecting relocation of IDPs in Khar Yalla to Djougop or another site.
- Work with municipal and regional authorities to implement the above short-term recommendations to protect the rights of people in Khar Yalla while their planned relocation to Djougop or another site is being completed.

To the World Bank

- If requested by the Senegalese government, extend SERRP funding or provide new funding, as needed, to facilitate rights-respecting planned relocation to Djougop or another site for the people in Khar Yalla, who were displaced from the Langue de Barbarie in 2015 and 2016.

- Request national, regional and municipal authorities to construct bus stops and incentivize transportation to Khar Yalla and Djougop.
- Compile and publicize lessons learned through SERRP and other climate-related planned relocations.
- Build on compiled lessons and on guiding principles articulated in the World Bank’s West Africa Coastal Areas Resilience Investment Project Appraisal Document (PAD) Annex 9 “Community Development, Resilience, And Decision Making” to develop a new standalone policy on climate-related planned relocation or add an annex to existing policy on involuntary resettlement (OP 4.12, now ESS5) which operates under a different logic. This new climate focused policy or annex should:
 - Reflect the unique nature of climate-related planned relocation of entire communities;
 - Require grantees to develop census-taking and beneficiary identification approaches that prioritize those most in need of protection and a durable solution, including those who are living in protracted displacement and have experienced the most serious consequences of displacement for longest, in addition to those at risk of future displacement who have not yet lost their homes;
 - Include mechanisms for climate displaced communities—as opposed to their governments—to directly request planned relocation support;
 - Require grantees to conduct meaningful consultation with and incorporate views of all impacted communities, ensuring all adaptation decisions are driven by their needs.

Methodology

This report describes the human rights violations experienced by the people living in the Khar Yalla site in Saint-Louis, Senegal, to tell their hitherto overlooked stories of living in protracted displacement after climate-related disasters, draw attention to the dire conditions they are facing that require immediate resolution, and identify lessons to inform future planned relocations that the Senegalese government and World Bank may undertake.

This report is based on 101 interviews that Human Rights Watch conducted from October 2024 to July 2025, in-person or by videoconference or telephone. In April 2025, Human Rights Watch spoke to 69 people living in the Langue de Barbarie (origin site), Khar Yalla (IDP site), and Djougop (relocation site), through individual interviews and focus groups in each site. These interviews were coordinated by local partner Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD), a Senegalese NGO focused on climate justice and international financial institution accountability. In Khar Yalla, Human Rights Watch conducted separate focus groups for men and women. All interviewees were over 18 years old, ranging in age from 19 to 74. Additionally, Human Rights Watch interviewed 7 local, regional, and national government officials in-person, and 25 experts, including officials from the World Bank and United Nations agencies, academics, journalists, climate activists, and representatives of NGOs familiar with planned relocation, climate adaptation, and issues facing fishing communities in Senegal. All interviews were conducted in safe locations, in French, Wolof, or English (LSD staff provided Wolof and French interpretation). All participants were informed about the purpose of the individual interviews and focus groups, the ways that their responses may be used, and that their participation is voluntary, and received no payment, service, or other personal benefit. LSD covered community members' expenses to travel to interview locations, as they would not have had the financial means to do so themselves. The names of some community members interviewed for this report have been disguised with names and initials (which do not reflect real names), in the interest of the security of the individuals concerned.

Human Rights Watch also analyzed dozens of satellite images covering more than 15 years of the different sites in this context; documents and data from the Senegalese government, UN agencies, the World Bank, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, NGOs; and academic publications.

In June and July 2025, Human Rights Watch sent letters to the World Bank, Saint-Louis local and regional actors (the Governor, Prefect, Mayor, Municipal Development Agency, and regional Environmental Ministry), and several national ministries (the Municipal Development Agency (ADM), Environmental Ministry, and Ministry of Local Authorities & Territorial Planning). At the time of publication, the World Bank and ADM had replied. The letters and responses are included in the Annex and referenced throughout the report.

Background

Planned Relocation as a Potential Durable Solution to Climate Displacement

While urgent action by all governments can still mitigate the worst climate change scenarios, extreme weather events will become stronger and global mean sea level “will continue to rise over the 21st century,” according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).¹ Sudden- and slow-onset disasters have already displaced millions of people within their countries’ borders. In 2024 alone, 45.5 million people were internally displaced by floods, storms, and other weather-related disasters.² This number will likely rise as the climate crisis accelerates.³

According to the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Kampala Convention (which Senegal has signed but not ratified), and other international guidance, durable solutions to displacement can be achieved through three settlement options: dignified return to the person’s origin site, local integration in the area where a person seeks refuge, or relocation to another site that offers comparable or better living conditions.⁴ If implemented in a human rights-respecting manner, planned relocation can facilitate a durable solution for those displaced by climate-related disasters, or at risk of future displacement.⁵ In a planned relocation, an entire community moves collectively and permanently to a shared destination site that is less exposed to current and anticipated

¹ Paola A. Arias et al., “2021: Technical Summary,” in *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis, Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/chapter/technical-summary/> (accessed October 12, 2024), p. 77.

² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), “2025 Global Report on Internal Displacement,” <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2025/> (accessed May 25, 2025).

³ Hans Pörtner et al., “2022: Technical Summary,” in *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_TechnicalSummary.pdf (accessed September 15, 2024), p. 65.

⁴ See, e.g., “Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework on Durable Solutions for IDPs,” Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, April 2010, <https://www.refworld.org/reference/themreport/brookings/2010/en/89707> (accessed 27 November 2024), p.5.

⁵ According to the IASC, a durable solution for IDPs requires the fulfilment of eight human rights-based criteria, including “an adequate standard of living, including at a minimum access to adequate food, water, housing, health care and basic education; access to employment and livelihoods; access to effective mechanisms that restore their housing, land and property or provide them with compensation...” Ibid., p. A-4.

climate-related hazards.⁶ Such planned relocations are driven not just by sea level rise and other visible effects of the climate crisis, but also by demographic, political-economic, and socio-cultural factors.⁷ Under international guidance, planned relocations are considered a measure of last resort, pursued once efforts to adapt in place have been exhausted.⁸

Over 400 planned relocations have already taken place or are ongoing worldwide in response to disasters.⁹ IPCC scientists predict that more will become necessary as the climate crisis intensifies.¹⁰ Some relocations are initiated by communities.¹¹ Others are carried out by governments, with support from international financial institutions.¹² Planned relocations entail high financial costs and even higher emotional, cultural, and other costs to those who are relocated.¹³ Well-executed planned relocations can enable displaced peoples to get back on their feet and build towards a future safer from climate hazards and other risks to their human rights.¹⁴ But when poorly carried out, they can pose profound risks to rights.¹⁵

⁶ Erica Bower, Sanjula Weerasinghe, and Daria Mokhnacheva, “Mapping of planned relocation cases: a foundation for evidence-based policy and practice,” *Forced Migration Review*, 69 (2022), <https://www.fmreview.org/climate-crisis/bower-weerasinghe-mokhnacheva> (accessed October 8, 2024), pp. 48-51.

⁷ These include wealth inequality and settler colonialism, in which settlers colonized and then displaced Indigenous and tribal Peoples, often out of more desirable safer locations across the globe. See, e.g., Justin Farrell et al., “Effects of land dispossession and forced migration on Indigenous peoples in North America,” *Science* 374 (2021): 6567, <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abe4943> (accessed October 10, 2024).

⁸ See, e.g., Georgetown University, Brookings Institution, and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Guidance on Protecting People From Disasters and Environmental Change Through Planned Relocation,” October 7, 2015, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/596f15284.html> (accessed 20 May 2023).

⁹ Erica Bower and Sanjula Weerasinghe, “Leaving Place, Restoring Home: Enhancing the Evidence Base on Planned Relocation Cases in the Context of Hazards, Disasters and Climate Change,” 2021, Platform on Disaster Displacement and Kaldor Centre, <https://disasterdisplacement.org/portfolio-item/leaving-place-restoring-home/> (accessed October 11, 2024).

¹⁰ Hans Pörtner et al., “IPCC Sixth Assessment Report,” p. 65.

¹¹ See, e.g., Human Rights Watch, “*There’s Just No More Land*: Community-led Planned Relocation as Last-resort Adaptation to Sea Level Rise in Solomon Islands,’ March 17, 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/03/17/theres-just-no-more-land/community-led-planned-relocation-last-resort-adaptation>; “*The Sea is Eating the Land Beneath Our Homes*: Indigenous Community Facing Lack of Space and Rising Seas Plans Relocation,’ July 31, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/31/panama-indigenous-community-needs-further-support-relocate>.

¹² UN Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Paula Gaviria Betancur, on planned relocations of people in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/56/47, July 1, 2024, <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g24/108/49/pdf/g2410849.pdf> (accessed September 4, 2024), para. 23.

¹³ Annah Piggott-McKellar et al., “A livelihood analysis of resettlement outcomes: Lessons for climate-induced relocations,” *Ambio* 49 (2020):9, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-019-01289-5> (accessed October 13, 2024).

¹⁴ UN Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, Paula Gaviria Betancur, on planned relocations of people in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters, paras. 36-58.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Climate Change Impacts and Displacement in Saint-Louis, Senegal

Senegal is exposed to multiple slow-onset effects of climate change, particularly sea level rise and other impacts to its long coastline.¹⁶ Thousands of Senegalese people have already been displaced by storm surges that are likely to intensify as the climate crisis accelerates.¹⁷ The city of Saint-Louis, a UNESCO World Heritage site that was formerly the colonial capital of Senegal and is now the capital of Senegal's northwest Saint-Louis region, is one of the most exposed African cities to rising sea levels and coastal erosion.¹⁸ One of its most at-risk areas is the Langue de Barbarie, a narrow, 40-kilometer-long peninsula that is around two meters above sea level and sits between the Atlantic Ocean and Senegal River.¹⁹ On the peninsula, approximately 80,000 people live in several densely populated neighborhoods—Goxu Mbacc, Ndar Toute, Santhiaba, and Guet Ndar—which have been central to West Africa's artisanal fishing sector for centuries.²⁰ The beaches of the peninsula are filled with brightly painted fishing boats, called *pirogues*, as well as piles of fishing nets, concrete barrels used to dry fish, and shelters where fisherfolk rest, eat, and repair nets and boat engines between trips on the sea.

¹⁶ The World Bank Group, "Senegal," Climate Change Knowledge Portal, <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/senegal/vulnerability> (accessed June 26, 2025).

¹⁷ IDMC, "Country Profile: Senegal," <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/senegal/> (accessed June 26, 2025). The World Bank uses the term 'storm surges' to refer to coastal floods that have hit the Langue de Barbarie in recent years. See, e.g., The World Bank, "International Development Association Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit in the Amount of Euro 24.4 million (US\$30 million equivalent) to the Republic of Senegal for a Saint-Louis Emergency Recovery and Resilience Project," May 24, 2018, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/823891528601503799/pdf/SENEGAL-EMERGENCY-NEWPAD-05292018.pdf> (accessed December 10, 2025), p. 10.

¹⁸ UN Office of Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), "Saint Louis – Senegal," https://www.unisdr.org/campaign/resilientcities/cities/senegal/saint-louis.html?itid=lk_inline_enhanced-template (accessed December 20, 2024).

¹⁹ Clara Therville et al., "How relocation in the face of coastal risk shapes sense of place and vulnerabilities? The case of a coastal community in Saint-Louis, Senegal" (paper presented at the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), Barcelona, Spain, July 2024); Caritas International, "Free to leave and free to stay: Protecting human rights in the context of environmental mobilities. Case studies in Bangladesh, Honduras and Senegal," September 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/376679092_Free_to_leave_and_free_to_stay_Protecting_human_rights_in_the_context_of_environmental_mobilities_Case_studies_in_Bangladesh_Honduras_and_Senegal (accessed December 21, 2024), p. 47 ("The Langue de Barbarie ... is highly vulnerable to sea-level rise and coastal erosion due to its location at the intersection between powerful northern marine flows and the ... [Senegal] river mouth"); Djiby Sambou et al., "Socio-ecological Resilience of Vulnerable Communities in the Senegal River Delta in the Face of Climate Change" ("Résilience Socio-Écologique Des Communautés Vulnérables Du Delta Du Fleuve Sénégal Face Aux Changements Climatiques"), French Red Cross Foundation, February 2020, <https://www.fondation-croix-rouge.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/resilience-changements-climatiques-delta-fleuve-senegal-sambou.pdf> (accessed March 24, 2025), p. 10. The Red Cross Foundation study found that from 2000 to 2018, the coastline in the Senegal River delta retreated on average 0.35 meters per year and by 0.69 meters per year in the stretch of the Langue de Barbarie from Guet Ndar to Goxu Mbathie.

²⁰ World Bank, "SERRP IDA Project Appraisal Document," p. 10; Carl Söderbergh, "Senegal: the impact of the climate crisis on the fisher community of St. Louis," Minority Rights Group, November 13, 2019, <https://minorityrights.org/senegal-the-impact-of-the-climate-crisis-on-the-fisher-community-of-st-louis/> (accessed December 12, 2024).



Stacked fishing nets and buoys (top) and traditional fishing boats, known as *pirogues* (bottom) on the Langue de Barbarie, April 2025. © 2025 Erica Bower/Human Rights Watch

Around two-thirds of the city of Saint-Louis is “prone to flooding in case of high tide, river discharge or heavy rainfall.”²¹ Since 2010, increasingly severe and frequent storm surges and swells have hit the Langue de Barbarie.²² In early 2015 and late 2016, coastal floods hit the Goxu Mbacc and Guet Ndar neighborhoods, destroying approximately 80 houses, as well as fishing boats and materials.²³ The families impacted by these floods are those still living in Khar Yalla today.²⁴ A subsequent coastal flood in August 2017 displaced around 199 families (approximately 2000 people), destroying houses, a school, a mosque, and dozens of fishing boats.²⁵ And in February 2018, around 59 families (around 590 people) lost their homes in yet another coastal flood.²⁶

It has become increasingly difficult for fisherfolk to make an income in the Langue de Barbarie. Marked increases in coastal erosion, salinization, sea level rise, and fluctuations in water temperature and currents are reportedly linked to depletions in fish stocks and diversity, and have made it more dangerous to fish and harder to bring home enough fish to sell.²⁷ “I have personally seen the impacts of climate change, said Papa Nale Diop, an older fisherman.²⁸ “We don’t have fish at the time we are hoping for. And with the level of the sea rising a lot, we’ve had so many accidents at sea.”²⁹ Mame Mousse Ndiaye, a 40-year-old fisherman, remarked, “Previously, we had more fish at this time of year. Before, we understood the sea, and we used to have a lot of fish. Now we have more problems understanding.”³⁰ These climate-related hazards and their consequences on fisherfolk’s

²¹ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), “Sustainable resettlement and reconstruction in flood-prone peri-urban areas of Saint Louis, Senegal,” Cities and Climate Change Initiative Newsletter, June 2013, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/cities-and-climate-change-initiative-newsletter-june-2013> (accessed December 2, 2024), p. 1.

²² Oumar K. Ndiaye, “Update of the environmental & social impact study of the final development of the Djougop relocation site and the liberation of the 20-m band in the Langue de Barbarie” (“Actualisation de l’étude d’impact environnemental et social de l’aménagement définitif du site de relogement de Djougop et de la libération de la bande des 20 mètres sur la Langue de Barbarie”), Municipal Development Agency, Government of Senegal, June 2022, p. 10.

²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Iba Diagne, Langue de Barbarie, April 8, 2025.

²⁴ See Section I, below.

²⁵ World Bank “SERRP IDA Project Appraisal Document,” p. 10. An older fisherman noted that the storms also damaged and destroyed boats and fishing equipment on the beaches. Human Rights Watch interview with Papa Nale Diop, Langue de Barbarie, April 5, 2025.

²⁶ World Bank “SERRP IDA Project Appraisal Document,” p. 10

²⁷ Caritas International, “Free to leave and free to stay,” p. 47. One reason that fishing is becoming more dangerous is that, with depleted fish stocks, fisherfolk are venturing further out to sea than the distances their small fishing boats were built for. Human Rights Watch interview with Borso Tall, Dakar, April 10, 2025.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Papa Nale Diop, Langue de Barbarie, April 3, 2025.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Mame Mousse Ndiaye, Langue de Barbarie, April 3, 2025.

safety and livelihoods have been exacerbated by overfishing by foreign ships,³¹ offshore oil and gas exploitation,³² and a failed government flood mitigation project to dig an outlet through the Langue de Barbarie.³³



The Greater Tortue Ahmeyim liquified natural gas platform is 10 kilometers off the shore of the Langue de Barbarie, April 2025. © 2025 Erica Bower/Human Rights Watch

³¹ Researcher Caroline Zickgraf asserts that both “licensed and irregular foreign vessels” are responsible for overfishing: their “trawling often indiscriminately picks up fish that are traditionally left in the waters, for example by catching fish before full maturity and therefore harming reproduction.” Caroline Zickgraf, “The Fish Migrate and So Must We: The Relationship Between International and Internal Environmental Mobility in a Senegalese Fishing Community,” *Medzinárodné vzťahy Journal of International Relations* 16(2018): 1, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/brv/journal/v16y2018i1p5-21.html> (accessed December 15, 2024), p. 13.

³² Greenpeace Africa, “Oil and gas exploitation in Senegal: new threats to marine and coastal ecosystems” (“Exploitation pétrolière et gazière au Sénégal : de nouvelles menaces sur les écosystèmes marins et côtiers”), June 8, 2018, <https://www.greenpeace.org/africa/fr/les-blogs/2251/exploitation-petroliere-et-gaziere-au-senegal-de-nouvelles-menaces-sur-les-ecosystemes-marins-et-cotiers/> (accessed December 15, 2024). In 2018, Senegal and Mauritania approved the development of a liquefied natural gas platform off the coast of Saint-Louis. See British Petroleum (BP), “The Greater Tortue Ahmeyim Project – Creating a new energy hub in Africa: Partnering to deliver a bright energy future for Mauritania and Senegal,” https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/country-sites/en_sn/senegal/home/pdf/greater-tortue-ahmeyim-fact-sheet-english.pdf (accessed June 5, 2025). Lumière Synergie pour le Développement (LSD) has found that one reason the project has further restricted the fish supply available to fisherfolk is because the platform was built above a fish spawning area, which fisherfolk previously relied on as a source of fish. Fisherfolk are prohibited from approaching within 500 meters of the platform. See LSD, University of Gaston-Berger, and Energy Transition Fund, “Langue de Barbarie Gas Study on Jatara” (“Langue de Barbarie Du Gaz Sur Jatara”), July 2024, <https://lsdsenegal.org/en/> (accessed April 20, 2025).

³³ Caritas International, “Free to leave and free to stay,” pp. 45-47. As the Caritas report explains, “The opening of [the] breach in the strip of land in 2003 has worsened climate change’s effects. This is visible by increased coastal erosion and a sharp rise of the sea level and salinsation,” and has caused several fatal accidents, including at least 5 in 2023.



Satellite imagery comparison between March 11 and October 3, 2017, shows destroyed houses on the shoreline in Guet Ndar, Langue de Barbarie, following the August 2017 coastal flood. Images © 2025 Maxar Technologies. Google Earth. Graphics © 2025 Human Rights Watch

Planned Relocation in Saint-Louis

In response to the challenges facing the Langue de Barbarie fishing communities, some community members have chosen to leave. Many of Human Rights Watch’s interviewees reported that male relatives or friends had planned or attempted irregular migration by boat (including in their own pirogues) to Spain’s Canary Islands, in part because they believed they could no longer make an income from fishing in the Langue de Barbarie.³⁴ A few wealthier families have built homes inland to protect themselves from coastal floods.³⁵

But most of those living in the Langue de Barbarie whom Human Rights Watch interviewed expressed a desire to stay and did not intend to move inland before floods destroyed their homes and they were required to do so.³⁶ Other research has similar findings. For instance, academic research based on in-depth interviews and focus groups also found that permanently leaving the Langue de Barbarie has been “[h]istorically ... out-of-the-question culturally.”³⁷ And 83 per cent of respondents to a 2023 survey conducted by Caritas International in Guet Ndar had not left their homes and had no intention to do so.³⁸

By contrast, since at least the mid-2000s, Senegalese authorities have considered planned relocations of populations from the Langue de Barbarie in the name of protecting

³⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews, Khar Yalla, Langue de Barbarie, and Djougop, April 2025. See Borso Tall, “Across the Atlantic, fishermen ask themselves a potentially deadly question: Should I go?” *The Post and Courier*, December 8, 2024, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/special_reports/migration-climate-change-fishng-senegal-spain/article_c2d8988a-aco8-11ef-bdf6-f7335c7fba9f.html (accessed December 16, 2024). Tall told Human Rights Watch that it is dangerous, but unfortunately common, for fisherfolk from the Langue de Barbarie to attempt to cross to Europe in their own *pirogues*. Tall has documented multiple instances of pirogues—which are not built for long-distance travel, and many of which are old—collapsing during these migration journeys, and their riders drowning. Human Rights Watch interview with Borso Tall, Dakar, April 10, 2025.

³⁵ Zickgraf, “The Fish Migrate and So Must We,” pp. 16, 19.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews, Langue de Barbarie, April 3, 4, 5 and 8, 2025.

³⁷ Zickgraf, “The Fish Migrate and So Must We,” p. 16.

³⁸ Caritas International, “Free to leave and free to stay,” pp. 16, 50.

the peninsula's residents from floods and other climate hazards.³⁹ In 2010, the city of Saint-Louis, led at the time by Mayor Cheikh Bamba Dièye, launched a project to plan relocation of flood-prone households in Guet Ndar and an informal settlement in Saint-Louis called Diaminar further inland, to the Khar Yalla site.⁴⁰ The project was funded by Japan, with technical assistance from the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).⁴¹ A 2022 report from the national Municipal Development Agency (ADM) described the project as being “part of the strategic coastal retreat” from the Langue de Barbarie.⁴² UN-Habitat prepared the Khar Yalla site for the relocation and built houses for the intended beneficiaries from Guet Ndar and Diaminar.⁴³ But the municipality failed to provide water or electricity at the site. The beneficiaries never relocated to Khar Yalla because they preferred to stay in their homes.⁴⁴ In 2016, Saint-Louis municipal authorities moved⁴⁵ the families displaced by the 2015 and 2016 coastal floods from tents in the Langue de Barbarie into the houses in Khar Yalla built for the prior, failed planned relocation project.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, through SERRP, the Senegalese government is currently undertaking a larger-scale planned relocation that aims to both provide a reactive solution for people already

³⁹ The World Bank, which has helped Senegalese government for over a decade with climate resilience planning, recommended in a 2013 study that the Senegalese government should undertake “strategic retreat” in the Langue de Barbarie, in addition to implementing temporary protection measures such as dykes. See World Bank Group, “Economic and Spatial Study of the Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change of Coastal Areas in Senegal: Synthesis Report,” August 2013, <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/537811468305337766/economic-and-spatial-study-of-the-vulnerability-and-adaptation-to-climate-change-of-coastal-areas-in-senegal-synthesis-report> (accessed April 15, 2025), p. 5. As a Municipal Development Agency (ADM) official explained to Human Rights Watch, the Senegalese government did oversee the construction of two dykes that run 2,630 meters along the Langue de Barbarie. The Senegalese government funded the first, which spans just 130 meters of Goxu Mbacc. The second, much longer, more robust dyke was built with funds donated by the French Development Agency after President Emmanuel Macron visited the Langue de Barbarie following the 2017 and 2018 floods. These dykes are designed to be temporary, not permanent solutions: for instance, the longer dyke is only meant to last around 15 years. Human Rights Watch interview with ADM official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Dakar, April 11, 2025. See also Agence France-Presse, “Macron pledges aid for historic Senegal city threatened by Atlantic,” *France 24*, March 2, 2018, <https://www.france24.com/en/20180203-macron-pledges-aid-historic-senegal-city-threatened-atlantic> (accessed December 16, 2024).

⁴⁰ Ndiaye, “EIES Update,” p. 22. Many still refer to the Khar Yalla site at the center of this report as “Khar Yalla Cheikh Bamba Dièye,” because of the then mayor’s involvement in this project. Human Rights Watch interviews, Khar Yalla and Langue de Barbarie, Saint-Louis, April 3 and 5, 2025.

⁴¹ Ndiaye, “EIES Update,” p. 22.

⁴² Ibid. (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

⁴³ See Section I, below.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ In this report, ‘migration’ is used to describe movement to Europe for labor purposes. ‘Displaced’ refers to forced movement due to coastal floods or other drivers. ‘Planned relocation’ refers to the intentional, coordinated process involving movement of a whole community as a durable solution to resolve displacement. When a form of movement does not fall into one of these three categories, it is described simply as movement.

⁴⁶ See Section I, below.

displaced and an anticipatory strategy to prevent future displacement.⁴⁷ SERRP is partially funded by World Bank loans, the first of which Senegal obtained after the 2017 and 2018 coastal floods.⁴⁸ The relocation encompasses the IDPs from the 2017 and 2018 floods and around 11,000 people who are not yet displaced, but who reside in a 20-meter-by-3.6-kilometer band on the Langue de Barbarie, which the Senegalese authorities have designated as “high-risk [and] extremely vulnerable to coastal erosion.”⁴⁹ Residents of this 20-meter band can choose to be relocated to Djougop, a site ten kilometers inland, in neighboring Gandon Municipality, or receive compensation for their house in the Langue de Barbarie and find accommodation elsewhere.⁵⁰ The government’s stated plan is to demolish their homes after they leave and make the 20-meter band a no-build zone, with natural vegetation.⁵¹

Djougop is meant to have around 5,000 houses, a school, market, health clinic, and other services once the site is completed (projected December 2026).⁵² As of February 2025, 4,500 people have been relocated to 167 completed houses in Djougop.⁵³ Construction of other infrastructure has begun but is not yet completed, as Human Rights Watch observed on-the-ground. As discussed further in the next section, the families displaced in 2015 and 2016 and moved to Khar Yalla were not included in SERRP.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., World Bank, “SERRP IDA Project Appraisal Document,” p. 36; ADM, “Saint-Louis Emergency Response and Resilience Project (SERRP): Description of the Project” (“Project de Relèvement d’Urgence et de Résilience à Saint-Louis (SERRP): Présentation du Projet”), Government of Senegal, <https://www.adm.sn/en/serrp> (accessed June 9, 2025).

⁴⁸ World Bank Group, “Senegal – Saint-Louis Emergency Recovery & Resilience Project (English),” <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/823891528601503799> (accessed June 9, 2025).

⁴⁹ World Bank, “IDA Project Appraisal Document,” p. 54.

⁵⁰ ADM, “SERRP: Displacement and Resettlement of Populations and Activities Located in the 20-m Band from the Langue de Barbarie in Saint-Louis – Resettlement Action Plan: Final Report” (“Déplacement et Réinstallation des Populations et des Activités Situées sur la Bande des 20 mètres de la Langue de Barbarie à Saint-Louis : Rapport Final”), Government of Senegal, April 2020, pp. 85-98.

⁵¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Saint-Louis municipal government official, Saint-Louis, April 8, 2025, official from regional environmental ministry (DRECC), Saint-Louis, April 7, 2025, and ADM officials, Dakar, April 11, 2025 (names and details withheld by Human Rights Watch). It was clear that not all residents of the Langue de Barbarie are aware of this plan: numerous interviewees in the Langue de Barbarie, including community leaders who have frequent contact with government officials, shared rumors they had heard that the land will be used for another purpose, such as building hotels or oil and gas exploitation. Human Rights Watch interviews, Langue de Barbarie, April 3, 4, 5 and 8, 2025.

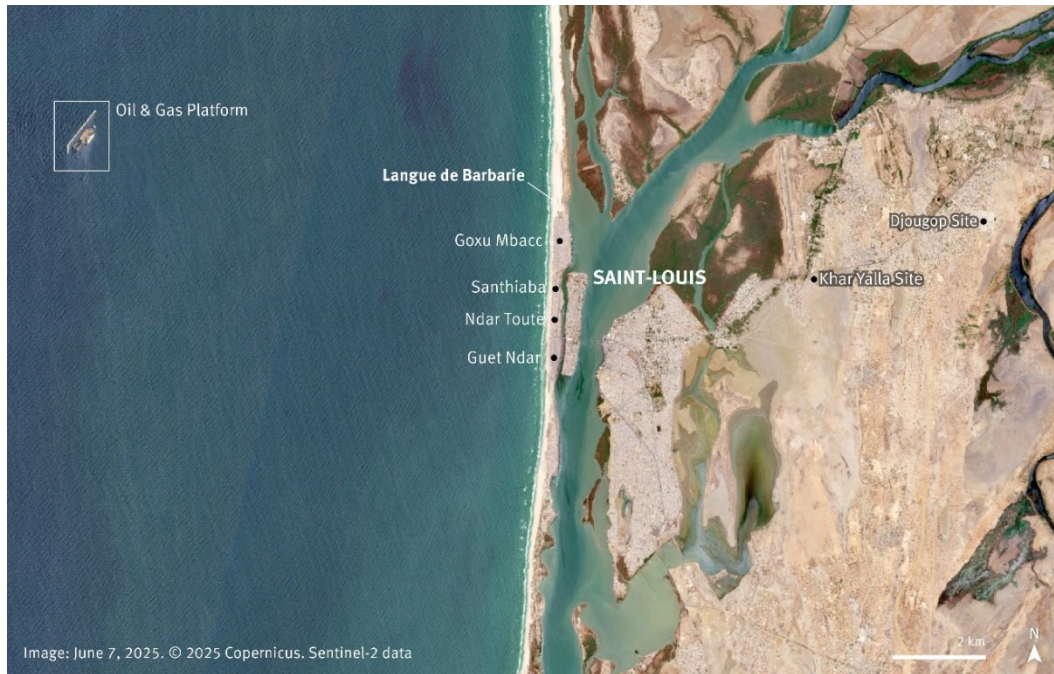
⁵² The Senegalese government is using its power to expropriate land for public utility to relocate the families living within the 20-meter band and demolish infrastructure there. ADM, “Resettlement Action Plan,” pp. 59-66; Human Rights Watch interviews with ADM officials (names and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Dakar, April 11, 2025.

⁵³ World Bank Group, “Implementation Status & Results Report, SERRP,” April 10, 2025, <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099041025190041627> (accessed January 14, 2025), pp. 4-5. Most of the current residents of Djougop include those who were displaced from their homes in the Langue de Barbarie by floods in 2017 and 2018, but a few had not yet lost their homes and opted to relocate to Djougop.

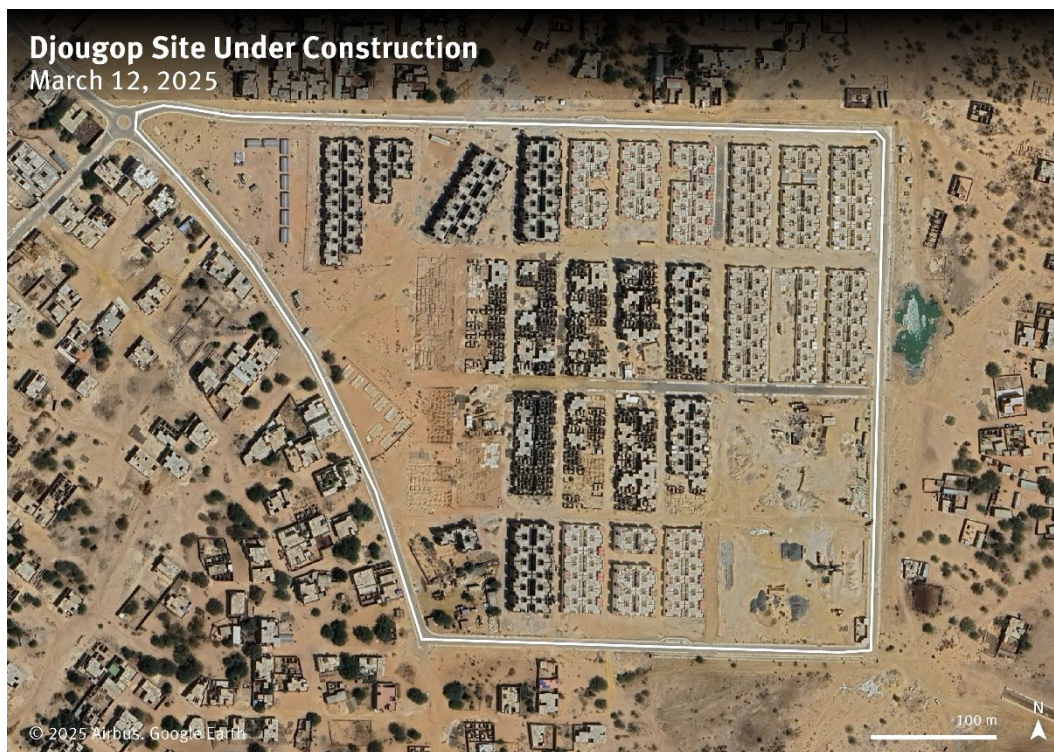
**Houses and other buildings
designated high-risk and
extremely vulnerable to
coastal erosion**



Map of the houses and other buildings located within the 20-meter band from the shoreline that Senegalese authorities have designated as “high-risk” and “extremely exposed to coastal erosion,” and whose inhabitants are being relocated to Djougop through SERRP. Data © Saint-Louis Emergency Recovery and Resilience Project (SERRP). February 2023. Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch.



Map showing of the historic fishing neighborhoods in the Langue of Barbarie, in Saint-Louis, Senegal; the Khar Yalla site; and Djougop, the relocation site for SERRP. Image © 2025 Copernicus. Sentinel-2 data. Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch



Satellite imagery from March 12, 2025 shows the Djougop – the planned relocation site for SERRP – under construction. Image © 2025 Airbus. Google Earth. Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch

I. Displaced by Floods to Khar Yalla

“The government said, ‘You’ll stay [in Khar Yalla] for a little while, and then we’ll find a solution that will enable you to go somewhere else’ ... Now, almost 10 years later, the population is still there, with absolutely nothing.”⁵⁴

2015 and 2016 Floods and Resulting Displacement

The people living in Khar Yalla today were moved there after they lost their houses on the Langue de Barbarie in coastal floods that hit the peninsula in early 2015 and late 2016.⁵⁵ Government data on the damage caused by these floods is scarce. But according to Iba Diagne, a 50-year-old, retired teacher and locally elected president of the northernmost fishing neighborhood, Goxu Mbacc, the 2015 flood destroyed 33 houses in his neighborhood, and the 2016 flood demolished approximately 50 houses in Guet Ndar, the southernmost neighborhood.⁵⁶ Diagne explained to Human Rights Watch that 80 per cent of the people who were moved to Khar Yalla in 2016 were from Goxu Mbacc, and included some of his former students.⁵⁷

In both floods, the impacted families had little warning of the disaster and lost most of their possessions. “The sea destroyed our whole house and everything we had,” said Cheikh Sere, a 32-year-old teacher, now living in Khar Yalla.⁵⁸ “My mother refused to leave the house because she was old. We just had time to get her out before the flood came and destroyed all we had,” recounted one woman in Khar Yalla from Guet Ndar.⁵⁹ Thiare Fall, a 69-year-old woman in Khar Yalla, recalled, “After the floods, we had nothing left. We didn’t even have shoes when we left the house.”⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025.

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews, Khar Yalla and Saint-Louis, April 2025; see Annex 1 and 2.

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch correspondence with Iba Diagne, June 2025. Diagne reports that information on the damage caused by the 2015 flood was collected through a census that volunteers conducted, overseen by informally and formally elected local political representatives, and that after the 2016 flood, the Saint-Louis prefect’s office conducted a census. Human Rights Watch asked for official data on the impacts of the 2015 and 2016 floods from the Saint-Louis mayor’s office, prefect’s office, and governor’s office, but received no response. See Annex.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Iba Diagne, Langue de Barbarie, April 8, 2025.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Cheikh Sere, Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Aissatou W., Langue de Barbarie, April 5, 2025.

⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Thiare Fall, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

The families displaced by both the 2015 and 2016 floods were housed in tents provided by the authorities on a sports field in the Langue de Barbarie until late 2016.⁶¹ During this time, they did not have adequate sanitation or clean drinking water, and their tents repeatedly flooded, destroying many of the possessions they had salvaged during the coastal floods.⁶² “We had to do everything in the tents—cooking, bathing relieving ourselves—and we slept alongside our animals,” recalled Khady Gueye.⁶³ In October 2015, several of the displaced families protested outside the Saint-Louis mayor’s office, demanding assistance.⁶⁴ In late 2016, the mayor of Saint-Louis, Mansour Faye, and the then prefect of Saint-Louis, moved the displaced families to Khar Yalla.⁶⁵

Origins of Khar Yalla Site

The Khar Yalla site to which the displaced families were moved had been built as part of a failed planned relocation project that was meant to model how to protect urban populations from climate-related hazards.⁶⁶ In 2009, the municipality of Saint-Louis requested foreign assistance to “relocate vulnerable populations living in flood-prone areas to safer sites.”⁶⁷ The Japanese government provided US\$2 million and asked UN-Habitat to execute the project with the municipality.⁶⁸ The original goal was to move 150 households from Guet Ndar on the Langue de Barbarie and Diaminar—a flood-prone informal settlement on the mainland—into modular, prefabricated houses that UN-Habitat

⁶¹ Human Rights Watch focus group interviews with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025, and interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 9, 2025; Ndar Info TV, “(“Flood victims from Goxu Mbacc chain themselves together in front of City Hall” (“Les sinistrés de Goxu Mbacc s’enchainent devant la Mairie”), October 3, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGMWtXcZ8Qo> (accessed June 1, 2025).

⁶² Human Rights Watch focus group interviews with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025, and interview with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025; Ndar Info TV, “Flood Victims from Goxu Mbacc” (“Sinistrés Goxu Mbacc”), August 20, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9M8S2SH7mQ> (accessed June 1, 2025).

⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 9, 2025.

⁶⁴ Ndar Info TV, “Flood victims from Goxu Mbacc chain themselves together in front of City Hall.”

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch focus group interviews with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025, and interview with Mouhamadou Lamine Tall, University of Gaston-Berger, April 7, 2025. In Senegal, the mayor is the popularly elected administrator of a town; the prefect is appointed by the central government and administers one of Senegal’s 45 departments; the governor is appointed by the President and is the administrative head of one of Senegal’s 11 administrative regions.

⁶⁶ UN-Habitat, “Sustainable resettlement and reconstruction,” p. 2; Human Rights Watch interview with UN-Habitat official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), April 21, 2025 (videoconference).

⁶⁷ UN-Habitat, “Sustainable resettlement and reconstruction,” p. 2.

⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with UN-Habitat official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), April 21, 2025 (videoconference).

would construct on a site protected from flooding and close enough to the sea for inhabitants to continue their fishing livelihoods.⁶⁹

But the project did not succeed. Its implementors chose Khar Yalla as the relocation site,⁷⁰ even though they knew at the time that it was flood-prone.⁷¹ Ultimately, half the project's funds went to raising the level of the housing foundations, leaving UN-Habitat with enough resources to build just under half of the originally planned number of houses.⁷² Even then, the project was never completed. The intended beneficiaries from Guet Ndar and Diaminar never moved in, because while UN-Habitat upheld its side of the agreement and finished 68 houses in 2013, the municipality did not fulfill the responsibilities it had agreed to: providing a number of public and social services in Khar Yalla.⁷³ UN-Habitat ended its involvement in the project. The authorities did not repurpose the houses or authorize anyone else to live in them until 2016.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Ibid.; UN-Habitat and City of Saint-Louis, "Social Housing Project and Climate Change: Report of Findings from Socioeconomic Surveys in Guet Ndar and Diaminar" ("Projet de Logements Sociaux et Changements Climatiques: Rapport de Presentation des Enquetes Socioeconomiques à Guet Ndar et Diaminar"), July 2011, p. 7.

⁷⁰ UN-Habitat, "Sustainable resettlement and reconstruction," p. 2. Human Rights Watch georeferenced photos used in the UN-Habitat report about the project with satellite imagery to confirm the location of the site that is known today as "Khar Yalla (Cheikh Bamba Dièye)."

⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interviews with Saint-Louis municipal government official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Saint-Louis, April 8, 2025, and July 16, 2025 (videoconference), and Reine Dasylla, Dakar, April 1, 2025.

⁷² Human Rights Watch interview with UN-Habitat official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), April 21, 2025 (videoconference).

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interviews with Saint-Louis municipal government official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Saint-Louis, April 8, 2025, UN-Habitat official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), April 21, 2025 (videoconference), Iba Diagne, Langue de Barbarie, April 8, 2025, Mouhamadou Lamine Tall, University of Gaston-Berger, April 7, 2025, and Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025.

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Saint-Louis municipal government official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Saint-Louis, April 8, 2025, and Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025, and focus group interviews with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025. Multiple people in Khar Yalla told Human Rights Watch that when they were first moved to Khar Yalla, there were some people living in the houses in an unauthorized manner whom the authorities evicted, and that some of the unauthorized inhabitants stole doors and other components of the houses before leaving.



Satellite imagery from January 14, 2013 shows the Khar Yalla site under construction. Some houses appear already finished, while others are under construction. Heavy machinery of the kind used to raise ground level is visible. Image © 2025 Maxar Technologies. Google Earth. Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch



Satellite imagery from October 13, 2013 shows the 68 completed houses in Khar Yalla site already affected by flooding the year of their construction. Between 2013 and 2016, no one lived with authorization in the houses. Image © 2025 Maxar Technologies. Google Earth. Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch

Failures Unresolved, No Consultations

After moving the families displaced from the Langue de Barbarie in 2015 and 2016 to Khar Yalla, municipal authorities provided them with some assistance upon their arrival. Authorities divided families among the houses built for the prior, failed planned relocation project, and gave each household a temporary occupation permit, as well as “100,000 francs CFA⁷⁵ [around US\$175], two 50 kg bags of rice, a 5 [liter] can of oil, two chairs, one mattress and one mat.”⁷⁶

But, as discussed further in the following sections, municipal authorities did not rectify the failures of the earlier planned relocation project. Namely, the municipality still did not provide water, electricity, or other public and social services in Khar Yalla when it moved the families displaced in the 2015 and 2016 floods there.⁷⁷ Nor did authorities provide protections against flooding.⁷⁸ Furthermore, at the time of writing, the authorities had not consulted with the displaced people about their situation. Numerous people living in Khar Yalla recalled to Human Rights Watch that the authorities had assured them that they would only have to stay in Khar Yalla temporarily, until a more permanent solution was found for them.⁷⁹ They said that the authorities have never asked them about their needs, and that their primary interactions with officials occur ahead of elections, when politicians make unkept promises about improving conditions in Khar Yalla.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ The Senegalese currency is CFA Franc XOF (Franc of West African Communities). This report uses CFA as the shorthand for this currency.

⁷⁶ RADDHO, “Situational Study Report of the Climate Impacts Facing Displaced Persons in Khar Yalla and Djougop Undertaken in March 2025” (“Rapport Étude Situationnelle des Impacts Climatiques Relogés à Khar Yalla et Diougop Effectuée en Mars 2025”), August 2025 (publication pending), p. 6 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025, interviews with Mouhamadou Lamine Tall, University of Gaston-Berger, April 7, 2025, and Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

II. Inadequate Housing in Khar Yalla

“The way we live in Khar Yalla is inhumane. We need solutions.”⁸¹

Senegalese authorities’ neglect of the displaced people in Khar Yalla for nearly a decade violates their economic, social, and cultural rights essential to an adequate standard of living, particularly their right to adequate housing. Several of the criteria that makes housing adequate under international human rights law are not met in Khar Yalla: habitability; availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure; security of tenure; and, as addressed in Section III, location with access to employment opportunities, schools, and healthcare services.⁸² Municipal authorities have inhibited attempts by the families in Khar Yalla to improve conditions at the site.⁸³

Uninhabitable Housing

Severe overcrowding makes the housing in Khar Yalla uninhabitable. Around 1,000 people are spread across just 68 houses.⁸⁴ Households can include multiple families and range from 10 to 35 people, sharing one kitchen, one toilet, three rooms, and a courtyard.⁸⁵ The houses were not designed to accommodate households of this size. Many families reported that they are forced to use their kitchen as an additional bedroom, given the lack of space, and to cook outside in the courtyard, where many keep livestock to protect them from theft.⁸⁶ This leads to sanitation issues.⁸⁷ In one house Human Rights Watch visited, 18 people who inhabit the space have to use the courtyard as a kitchen, where their three goats and five chickens also feed and defecate.

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Cheikh F., Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

⁸² UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing, U.N. Doc. A/HRC/43/43, December 26, 2019, para. 16(b); Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “The human right to adequate housing,” <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-housing/human-right-adequate-housing> (accessed June 13, 2025).

⁸³ Human Rights Watch sent letters requesting comments from the Saint-Louis mayor’s, prefect’s, and governor’s offices (see Annex). None of these offices replied.

⁸⁴ These numbers come from a census conducted by community leaders in Khar Yalla, shared with Human Rights Watch. Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 7, 2025 and correspondence with Khady Gueye, June 2025.

⁸⁵ Ibid.; see also RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 6 (“People live in very overcrowded conditions, crammed into four-room houses where each household has only two rooms, and households often have an average of 10 people, and the septic tanks leak”) (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with women, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

⁸⁷ Ibid.



Goats in the courtyard of a house in Khar Yalla, which is also used as a kitchen, April 2025. Multiple families described that they had to use their kitchens as additional bedrooms to reduce overcrowding in their homes. © 2025 Erica Bower/Human Rights Watch



Houses in Khar Yalla, April 2025. © 2025 Charlotte Finegold/Human Rights Watch

Overcrowding has become progressively worse over the nine years that the families in Khar Yalla have been living—and growing in size—in the site.⁸⁸ Mbaye F. is one of several people in Khar Yalla whose house is too crowded to accommodate her family.⁸⁹ She shares a house with 28 people from three different but related families and has to rent separate accommodation outside of Khar Yalla where she sleeps with her eight children.⁹⁰

Every rainy season (June to September, approximately), the houses in Khar Yalla flood repeatedly, leading to health risks.⁹¹ Satellite imagery analyzed by Human Rights Watch shows that, almost every year towards the end of the rainy season, the same flooding scenario repeats itself: water coming from the south, around the Diouk neighborhood, creates a passage to the south of the Khar Yalla neighborhood and flows into the floodplain around the Khar Yalla site. Several women explained that during storms, the families in Khar Yalla try and protect themselves with sandbags and by digging trenches to facilitate drainage.⁹² But these efforts do not stop water from flooding the spaces between their houses or from entering their houses.⁹³ The aluminum sheets of the roofs get damaged during storms and leak; floodwater also frequently mixes with wastewater from septic tanks, which poses severe risks to residents' health.⁹⁴ Residents reported increases in rashes, malaria, and other illnesses during the rainy season.⁹⁵ As one woman noted, when it floods, children in Khar Yalla “want to have fun and play in the water, but after they have health problems, like rashes and skin conditions.”⁹⁶ Khady Gueye explained that after storms, “The water turns green after some time and brings microbes that cause small rashes on the children. My youngest child gets lots of sores on his head during the rainy

⁸⁸ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with women, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

⁸⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mbaye F., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Human Rights Watch correspondence with Khady Gueye, June 2025. The rainy season runs roughly from June to September, and the dry season from October to May. See World Bank, “IDA Project Appraisal Document,” p. 9.

⁹² Human Rights Watch focus group interview with women, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Khady Gueye, July 19, 2025 (telephone), and Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025.

⁹⁵ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025, and interview with Fanta N., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025. In its forthcoming report, RADDHO describes how, when it rains heavily, the river near Khar Yalla floods and septic water leaks out of tanks and stagnates, facilitating the proliferation of mosquitoes in the site. RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 8; see also Modou Ndiaye and Elhadji Oumar Toure, “Perception of health risk and adaptation to climate change,” French Red Cross Foundation, March 2024, https://www.fondation-croix-rouge.fr/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Paper56-health-risk-and-adaptation-to-climate-Senegal-Modou-NDIAYE_Elhadji-Oumar-TOURE.pdf (accessed May 15, 2025), p. 20.

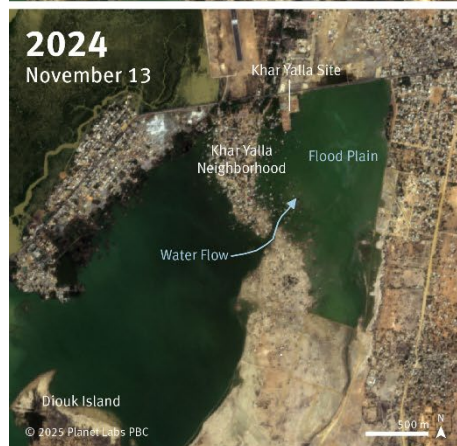
⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Miriama F., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

season.”⁹⁷ She added that older people are also particularly prone to health problems during the rainy season in Khar Yalla. “We brought a lot of older people back to Guet Ndar [to live with relatives], because it’s not healthy to live here.”⁹⁸ Khady was one of numerous residents who expressed their frustration to Human Rights Watch that after having been displaced by floods from the Langue de Barbarie, they still had to face the impact of floods. “We came from a place with floods and here we have floods,” she said.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, July 19, 2025 (telephone).

⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

⁹⁹ Ibid. In its forthcoming report, RADDHO emphasized that health workers have not visited Khar Yalla to address these or other health issues. See RADDHO, “Situational Study Report, pp. 5-6.



Satellite imagery from the last three years shows how, at the end of the rainy season in October or November, water coming from the south around Diouk Island creates a passage to the south of the Khar Yalla neighborhood and flows into the floodplain around the Khar Yalla site. Images © 2025 Planet Labs PBC. Graphics © 2025 Human Rights Watch

Lack of Services and Infrastructure

Water, Waste Disposal and Sanitation

Until 2022, the houses in Khar Yalla had no pipe-borne water, and the entire population of the site had to share one tap.¹⁰⁰ As discussed above, families in Khar Yalla report that septic water leaks into their water supply during heavy flooding. While other parts of Saint-Louis have waste collection systems managed by the state,¹⁰¹ Khar Yalla has no system for disposing of household waste or wastewater.¹⁰² Families dump their household waste into an expanse of dirt located past their houses and mosque. During the rainy season, flooding brings waste back into their houses; the wind does the same in the dry season.¹⁰³ This poses health risks: as the Senegalese NGO Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO) explains in a recent report on Khar Yalla, the population “live[s] or coexist[s] with household waste that is neither collected nor buried. This remains a constant danger to the health of the population.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025, and focus group interviews with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025; see also RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Human Rights Watch correspondence with Mouhamadou Lamine Tal, August 2025. The Project for the Promotion of Integrated Solid Waste Management and Economy in Senegal (“Projet pour la Promotion de la Gestion Intégrée et de l'Economie des Déchets Solides au Sénégal” (PROMGED)) and Integrated Management of Wastewater and Household Waste (“Gestion d'Intégrée des Eaux Usées et des Ordures Ménagères” (GIE CETOM)) are waste collection and management programs that benefit other parts of Saint-Louis. See Government of Senegal, “PROMGED,” <https://promoged.sn/> (accessed August 2, 2025); World Bank Group, Nordic Development Fund and Fem, “Saint-Louis: Ensuring the Sustainable Development of a Historic City in Danger and Its Surrounding Area,” <https://www.ndf.int/media/project-files/adm-capitalisation-note-03-en-web-191217.pdf> (accessed August 2, 2025).

¹⁰² RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 8.

¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch interview with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025.

¹⁰⁴ RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 8.



(Top): Space next to houses in Khar Yalla where people dump their household waste, in the absence of a state-run waste management system; (bottom): Khady Gueye, a community leader in Khar Yalla, in front of the waste dump. © 2025 Erica Bower/Human Rights Watch

Lack of Electricity

As of July 19, 2025, all but one house in Khar Yalla lacks electricity,¹⁰⁵ which has numerous negative consequences for Khar Yalla residents' sense of physical safety, education, incomes, and food security. Multiple residents reported that they feared leaving their houses when it is dark.¹⁰⁶ Several shared that they had experienced thefts at night, and one mother described that her daughter was once assaulted when she went outside in the evening.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, "At night we don't have lights for kids to be able to study," explained Inda Diaw, a 65-year-old mother of eight.¹⁰⁸ Most residents felt they had no choice but to purchase solar units to provide their houses with some amount of energy, which cost 500,000-700,000 CFA (US\$860-1,200), a heavy financial burden, particularly for families who have only precarious tenure over their houses.¹⁰⁹ A unit can power just a few devices—such as a small television and a couple of lamps—but cannot sustain a refrigerator or freezer, forcing families to buy ice to preserve their food.¹¹⁰ The lack of electricity makes it much harder for families to store and preserve food, particularly the vegetables their family members buy in markets at the Langue de Barbarie and the fresh fish products they catch, which have historically been a no-cost staple of their complete diets.¹¹¹ As a result, families' food-related expenses and food insecurity have increased since they were moved to Khar Yalla.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Several interviewees explained that one house has electricity because a resident works for an electricity company, and that the municipality gave free electricity to the mosque in Khar Yalla. Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025; see also RADDHO, "Situational Study Report," p. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025; see also Ndiaye and Toure, "Perception of health risk and adaptation to climate change," p. 20.

¹⁰⁷ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025, and interview with Thiare Fall, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Inda Diaw, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Marieme Ndiaye Soda, Khar Yalla, April 7, 2025; see also RADDHO, "Situational Study Report," p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Khady Gueye and Marieme Ndiaye Soda, Khar Yalla, April 7, 2025. Khady and Marieme reported that families are permitted to pay for the solar units in installments, but that it is common for the solar units to stop functioning, and even if this happens, families still have to pay.

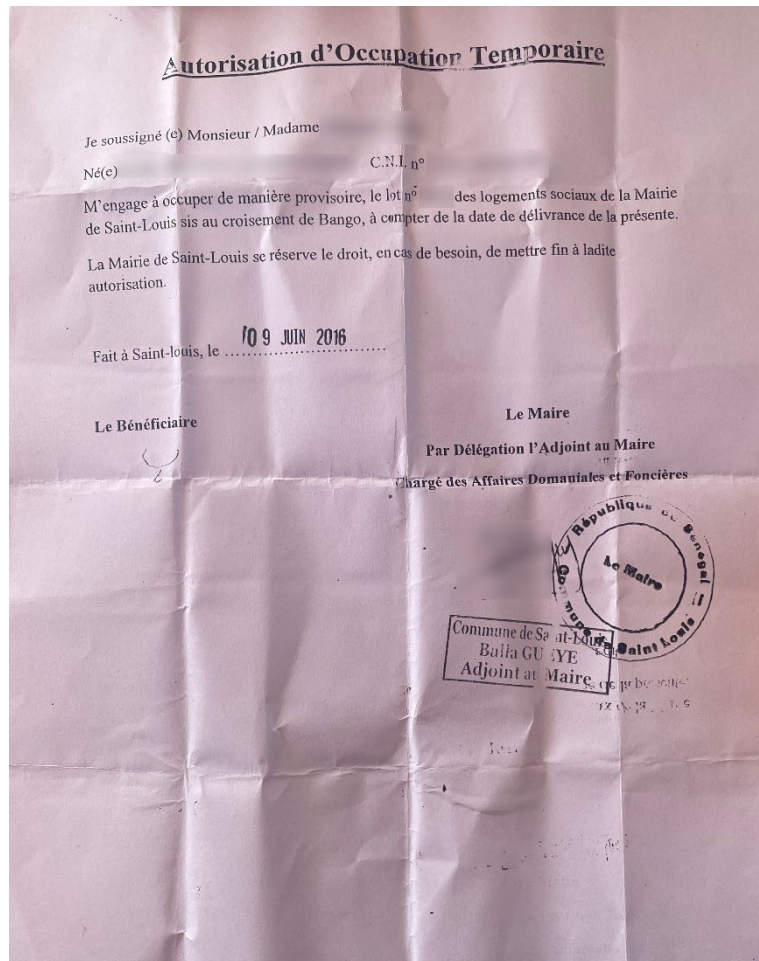
¹¹¹ RADDHO, "Situational Study Report," p. 6 ("Preserving vegetables, meat, and fish is a serious issue, especially with the lack of electricity") (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

¹¹² Human Rights Watch interviews, Khar Yalla, April 3, 5, and 9, 2025.

Insecure Housing Tenure

UN-Habitat intended that the houses in Khar Yalla would be permanent dwellings that families could “expand to fit their needs,”¹¹³ but the people in Khar Yalla are not allowed to make such improvements. The only form of tenure that the people in Khar Yalla have is the temporary occupation permits the Saint-Louis mayor’s office issued to them in 2016, which are revocable by the mayor.¹¹⁴ According to community leaders, the permits also prohibit the people in Khar Yalla from adding rooms or other features to their houses that would alleviate the severe overcrowding or other issues they face.¹¹⁵

Khar Yalla families report that local authorities have blocked their efforts to improve their living conditions. For instance,



Temporary occupation permit of one of the people in Khar Yalla (name and other identifying details redacted for privacy). The permits state, in French, that the mayor’s office reserves the right, if necessary, to terminate authorization for the holder to live in the designated house in Khar Yalla.

¹¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with UN-Habitat official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), April 21, 2025 (videoconference). The municipality of Saint-Louis and UN-Habitat also agreed during the project design phase that the inhabitants of Khar Yalla would gradually be able to buy their houses by depositing savings in a local cooperative bank, which would then act as a guarantee after a stipulated number of years. Once families paid back half of the loan on their houses, they would be able to start improving their houses, in accordance with local planning regulations and after obtaining a permit to do so. UN-Habitat and City of Saint-Louis, “Report of Findings from Socioeconomic Surveys in Guet Ndar and Diaminar,” p. 30. This was never actualized.

¹¹⁴ As seen in the photo of the permits, they state in French that the mayor’s office can revoke the permit if necessary (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025, and focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

families living in Khar Yalla asked municipal authorities for permission to increase the height of their walls to improve safety and privacy, and to plant trees to provide shade, as temperatures can approach 38° C (100° F) in Saint-Louis, and Khar Yalla lacks the sea breeze they had on the Langue de Barbarie to cool things down.¹¹⁶ But families were denied permission to take these actions.¹¹⁷ Their insecure tenure leaves them in a state of limbo. “We can’t be temporary for over ten years,” said Khady Gueye.¹¹⁸ “I don’t want to live here,” said Mbaye F., “but we should have the right to build on more rooms for our children. But we’re afraid that if we did that, we would be evicted.”¹¹⁹ One focus group participant said, “We lost everything [in the floods] and now we can’t live permanently in Khar Yalla.”¹²⁰

By contrast, many of the people in Khar Yalla owned their houses in the Langue de Barbarie that were destroyed by floods,¹²¹ and, as Khady Gueye recalled, her house and all the houses in her neighborhood had electricity and running water.¹²²



Footage from *Ndar Info* in August 2018 shows flooding around several houses in Khar Yalla.
© 2018 Ndar Info.

¹¹⁶ Climate Data, “Saint-Louis (Senegal),” <https://en.climate-data.org/africa/senegal/saint-louis/saint-louis-25336/> (accessed June 1, 2025)

¹¹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 9, 2025.

¹¹⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mbaye F., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with women in fishing sector, Langue de Barbarie, April 6, 2025.

¹²¹ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

¹²² Human Rights Watch correspondence with Khady Gueye, August 2025.

III. Khar Yalla Site Is Cut Off from Education, Health Care, Culture and Livelihoods

“Before, when we were first told about Khar Yalla, we hoped to have a better life. But I do not have access to the life I had before, to a school or a hospital. Now I think life is not better here.”¹²³

When the people in Khar Yalla lived in the Langue de Barbarie, they could walk to their work in the fishing sector, to school, and a hospital.¹²⁴ By contrast, Khar Yalla has no essential services or employment opportunities. It is five kilometers from the Langue de Barbarie, to which most adults still commute daily to maintain their livelihoods in the fishing sector.¹²⁵ The closest primary and secondary schools and health clinic that the people in Khar Yalla can access are 2.5 kilometers away in a neighborhood called Ngallèle; the nearest hospital is around five kilometers away, close to the Langue de Barbarie.¹²⁶

These distances pose greater challenges than might appear on paper. The displaced people living in Khar Yalla cannot afford cars, and they report feeling unsafe when walking after dark between Khar Yalla and the city of Saint-Louis or Ngallèle.¹²⁷ There is no public transportation in the Saint-Louis region; the private buses and taxis people must rely on are costly and “unpredictable.”¹²⁸ Due to difficulties accessing essential services and their livelihoods, many people reported being unable to access emergency or preventative health care; many breadwinners in Khar Yalla can no longer make sufficient income through their traditional fishing livelihoods to support their families; many school-age

¹²³ Human Rights Watch interview with Moussa G., Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

¹²⁴ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, July 19, 2025 (telephone); RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 5. RADDHO’s report notes that there is an elementary school in the broader Khar Yalla neighborhood, to the west of the Khar Yalla site at the focus of this report, but that it is “difficult to access” (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch). There are also secondary schools in Bango—a neighborhood near the airport, around 4 kilometers away from Khar Yalla—and in Saint-Louis. Ibid.

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

¹²⁸ RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 6 (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

children in Khar Yalla do not attend school; and all of the families in Khar Yalla have been cut off from their loved ones and centuries-old communities on the Langue de Barbarie.¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch is not aware of any steps the government has taken to facilitate access to schools, health clinics, or the Langue de Barbarie for the people in Khar Yalla, or to provide education and health care services at the site or retrain them for jobs outside the fishing sector. Indeed, in Khar Yalla, municipal authorities have impeded the community's own retraining initiatives. These actions and omissions by the government have contributed to the violations of their rights to an adequate standard of living, education, health, and to take part in cultural life.



A woman waits on the side of the highway that runs by Khar Yalla, April 2025. © 2025 Erica Bower/Human Rights Watch

¹²⁹ Human Rights Watch only conducted interviews with individuals over the age of 18, but many interviewees told us about the experiences they had had as children or that their children and grandchildren were having.

Lack of Access to Education, Health Care and Culture

“When people get sick, have to go to school, buy food ... they have to go to Saint-Louis. There’s none of that here.”¹³⁰

Education

The community runs its own religious school for young children, but there is no state-run school in Khar Yalla, and community leaders estimate that today, a third of children of primary and secondary school age do not attend secular school.¹³¹ Families cannot afford transportation fees to public schools or tuition fees to nearby private schools or need their children’s support to add to the family’s income or look after younger siblings, while their parents work all day at the Langue de Barbarie.¹³² Mbaye F. can only afford transportation fees for three of her eight children to attend school, and relies on the income her other five children earn.¹³³ “Three of my children have stopped school all together,” Thiare Fall told Human Rights Watch, adding, “two of my daughters have struggled to continue their education here because transportation is too expensive and school is very far away.”¹³⁴ “When you’re in a poor family, instead of paying the costs for one person to go to school, the parents prefer to spend it on household needs,” explained Khady Gueye.¹³⁵ Fatimata D. was about to finish high school when the floods destroyed her house and never completed her schooling, like Khady.¹³⁶ Now 26, Fatimata notes, “I always regret this, because I think education is a good thing for women. It provides opportunities that I can’t have in Khar Yalla.”¹³⁷ Ndaga Gueye, aged 27, managed to get into a local university but then had to leave after one year: “With my family’s income decreasing,” he said, “I had no choice but to abandon school and help my family earn money ... Young people feel like the government brought us here and then abandoned us.”¹³⁸

¹³⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, July 19, 2025 (telephone). In Senegal, it is mandatory for children aged 6 to 16 to attend school. See UNHCR, “Senegal – Education,” <https://help.unhcr.org/senegal/en/education/> (accessed July 10, 2025).

¹³² Human Rights Watch interviews with Ousmane T., Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025, and Mbaye F., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025; see also RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 5.

¹³³ Human Rights Watch interview with Mbaye F., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Thiare Fall, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹³⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 9, 2025.

¹³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatimata D., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Ndaga Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.



The people in Khar Yalla created and run their own ‘Dara’ – an Arabic-language, religious school for young children. There is no state-run school at the site. © 2025 Erica Bower/Human Rights Watch

Those young adults who have managed to remain in school struggle to keep up with their schoolwork because of the long commute to school. It can take Ousmane T., a 19-year-old student, hours to get to and from school, and if he is too late, his teachers refuse to let him in.¹³⁹ Because his commute leaves him with so little time for his homework, he noted, “I always dreamed of becoming a doctor, but I had to abandon that dream.”¹⁴⁰

Health Care

The closest health clinic to Khar Yalla only offers vaccinations and non-emergency care.¹⁴¹ For maternal health care, treatment of chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, and emergency services, people must travel five kilometers to the hospital in Saint-Louis. An ambulance can cost up to 25,000 CFA.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Ousmane T., Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, July 19, 2025 (telephone); see also RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” pp. 5-6.

¹⁴² RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” pp. 5-6

Human Rights Watch heard from several people in Khar Yalla about times when they or others could not access health care during emergencies or routine care. A woman with breathing problems, who did not have enough money to go to the hospital, recently died in Khar Yalla.¹⁴³ Khady Gueye's family did not have the money to take her now-deceased sister or father to the hospital for treatment for their illnesses. Of her sister, she noted, "By the time we could take her to the hospital, it was too late."¹⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch spoke to a 33-year-old woman who had to give birth in the three-room house she shares with 28 people, without privacy or medical help.¹⁴⁵ She went into labor at night, when transportation is hardest to access, and while her husband and relatives were away working. The mother and baby survived, but her experience was harrowing. One 68-year-old woman with diabetes, reported that when they lived in Goxu Mbacc, she would routinely go to the doctor to get her blood sugar monitored and receive medications, but she has no access to health care in Khar Yalla and now she cannot afford the transportation fees to access treatment in other areas.¹⁴⁶ RADDHO has documented that there are no proactive efforts by the authorities to fill the gap by providing basic health care such as vaccinations for children or prenatal care in Khar Yalla.¹⁴⁷

Dislocated from Communities and Culture

The Langue de Barbarie communities from which the people in Khar Yalla originate have a historic, unique culture based on fishing, their physical location, family and community structure, solidarity, and other elements. Guet Ndar, Goxu Mbacc, Santhiaba, and Ndar Toute have been inhabited by fisherfolk for hundreds of years.¹⁴⁸ Their communities are tightly knit and feel profound connection to the sea and the peninsula. Residents generally live with or within walking distance of their extended families, in houses passed down through the generations.¹⁴⁹ One older man from Guet Ndar told Human Rights Watch that the neighborhood "is our heritage. Our parents lived facing the sea, and we want the same

¹⁴³ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, July 19, 2025 (telephone).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Aminata F., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mariama D., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁴⁷ RADDHO, "Situational Study Report," pp. 5-6

¹⁴⁸ Monika Pronczuk, "How the 'Venice of Africa' Is Losing Its Battle Against the Rising Ocean," *The Guardian*, January 28, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/28/how-the-venice-of-africa-is-losing-its-battle-against-the-rising-ocean> (accessed January 2, 2025); Söderbergh, "Senegal: the impact of the climate crisis on the fisher community of St. Louis."

¹⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews, Saint-Louis, April 2025; see also Zickgraf, "The Fish Must Migrate and So Must We," p. 16.

for our children.”¹⁵⁰ “We don’t just live here,” said a local imam, whose mosque is near the ocean on the Langue de Barbarie, and who explained that the peninsula’s communities have spiritual beliefs and practices tied to living so close to the sea.¹⁵¹ The communities also have strong governance structures and mutual aid systems that are tied to place and fishing. Neighborhood councils for Goxu Mbacc, Santhiaba, Ndar Toute, and Guet Ndar, and labor associations for different specialties in the artisanal fishing sector liaise between the Senegalese authorities and the communities.¹⁵² Community members rely on each other when they are in need. As Faly Dioup Sarr, a 50-year-old manager of a fleet of fishing boats, describes, “If you don’t have money to buy fish, you can just go and take fish from another fisherman,” with the expectation that he could do the same by you if he needed help.¹⁵³



Two fisherman relax in a shelter on the beach on the Langue de Barbarie, April 2025. © 2025 Charlotte Finegold/Human Rights Watch

¹⁵⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Babacar F. Langue de Barbarie, April 4, 2025.

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch focus group with Moussa D., Langue de Barbarie, April 4, 2025.

¹⁵² Human Rights Watch interviews with Elhadj Dousse Fall, president of *APALSL* fishing association, Langue de Barbarie, April 5, 2025, and Iba Diagne, Goxu Mabcc Neighborhood Council President, Langue de Barbarie, April 8, 2025.

¹⁵³ Human Rights Watch interview with Faly Dioup Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 5, 2025.

The protracted displacement of the families in Khar Yalla and the practical difficulties of returning regularly to the sea have dislocated them from their communities and their culture in the Langue de Barbarie. A Red Cross Foundation paper noted that on top of the trauma of losing their homes, the IDPs are suffering from “flight from their ... community.”¹⁵⁴ In an interview with Human Rights Watch, Thiare Fall, explained, “We have a very bad feeling [in Khar Yalla], because we don’t have all the members of our family here.”¹⁵⁵ She described that their families were “split up,” first the 2015 and 2016 floods, and then their displacement to Khar Yalla.¹⁵⁶ Many people in Khar Yalla shared with Human Rights Watch that they still feel rooted in the Langue de Barbarie but are struggling to maintain their relationships with loved ones there, given the practical difficulties of visiting regularly.¹⁵⁷ Multiple interviewees also expressed that they intensely miss intangible aspects of living proximate to the sea, such as their connections to spirits associated with the sea.¹⁵⁸ “We are [in Khar Yalla] in our bodies. But our minds, our lives, are still in Guet Ndar,” shared Fatimata D.¹⁵⁹

Disruption of Livelihoods

Struggle to Maintain Traditional Fishing Livelihoods

For most people from the Langue de Barbarie, fishing is the only profession they know, and it has vital economic and cultural importance for the whole peninsula. Most interviewees in Khar Yalla reported that when they still lived in the Langue de Barbarie, they could make enough money from their jobs in the fishing sector to sustain their families.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, fishing is a way of life for their communities: members “self-identif[y] with their ... occupation (‘mol’ or fisherfolk)” above their religion (Islam) or other attributes.¹⁶¹ In the Langue de Barbarie communities, “Everything is based on fishing—marriages, vacation, family, celebrations,” Aly Tandian, a professor at the University of Gaston-Berger and an

¹⁵⁴ Ndiaye and Toure, “Perception of health risk and adaptation to climate change,” p.20.

¹⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Thiare Fall, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

¹⁵⁸ One such belief is that when someone dies on the Langue de Barbarie, a *génie*—spirits that tend to be associated with different natural features of Senegal—carries their soul out to the sea. “We have certain areas of our house for *genies* [that] protect our family ... In our culture, we must be close to that space of protection,” explained one fisherman. Human Rights Watch interview with Mame Mousse Ndiaye, Langue de Barbarie, April 5, 2025.

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatimata D., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

¹⁶¹ Maren Larsen, “The Twenty Meter Margin: Re-location and Resistance in Saint-Louis, Senegal” (paper presented at Swiss Geoscience Meeting, Basel, Switzerland, November 9, 2024).

expert on migration and local fishing communities, told Human Rights Watch.¹⁶² “[Fishing] is our whole life,” said one older man in Khar Yalla.¹⁶³ “The activity we do as fishermen is our heritage—all of our ancestors and parents did it, and it’s the legacy I leave to my sons,” said Faly Dioup Sarr.¹⁶⁴ Most men and women from the Langue de Barbarie join the fishing sector as teenagers: men work as fishermen; women’s roles in the fishing sector include cleaning, selling, and smoking fish. Older and younger fisherfolk, alike, who are having trouble maintaining their livelihoods after being displaced from the Langue de Barbarie, voiced that they cannot see futures for themselves outside the fishing sector. “The only work we can do is fish work,” said one older fisherman in Khar Yalla.¹⁶⁵ A 22-year-old fisherman told Human Rights Watch, “It’s too late to do anything else.”¹⁶⁶

Many interviewees in Khar Yalla told Human Rights Watch that the lack of affordable, reliable transportation between Khar Yalla and the Langue de Barbarie has made it much harder, if not impossible, to maintain their fishing livelihoods, for a few reasons. First, people in Khar Yalla are missing out on opportunities to work that are already becoming less lucrative due to the previously described climate and man-made impacts on the fishing sector.¹⁶⁷ Fishing boats tend to depart the Langue de Barbarie in the middle of the night or very early in the morning, when it is hardest to find transportation from Khar Yalla to the sea.¹⁶⁸ Thus, men living in Khar Yalla often literally miss the boat, and women from Khar Yalla may arrive too late to claim fish they can buy or process.¹⁶⁹ Second, those living in Khar Yalla have to spend large proportions of their earnings on transportation. Every day, Inda Diaw, makes at most 10,000 CFA (US\$17) as a fish processor, and must spend at least 4,000 CFA (\$7) of that on transportation.¹⁷⁰ Mbaye F., who has been sole provider to eight children since her husband migrated to Europe a few years ago and lost contact with her, has the same daily transportation expenses and earns just 5,000-6,000 CFA (\$8.50-

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch interview with Sociology Professor Aly Tandian, University of Gaston-Berger, April 7, 2025.

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview with Oumar D., Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview with Faly Dioup Sarr, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Oumar D., Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Assane S., Djougop, April 9, 2025.

¹⁶⁷ See above, Background.

¹⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch interviews with Anna Niang and Inda Diaw, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025, and Ibrahima D., Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025 (“Some fisherman work at night and come back in the morning. At 1 a.m. there is no bus for transport so have to spend 3,000 on taxi to LDB ... There are so many risks at night.”)

¹⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025, and women in fishing sector, Langue de Barbarie, April 6, 2025. In the Langue de Barbarie, *transformatrice* is the word in French used to describe a woman who cleans, guts, and otherwise processes fish to be sold. Women also are fish sellers: they buy freshly caught fish from men and then sell it to vendors.

¹⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Inda Diaw, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

10.50) per day preparing and selling couscous for fisherfolks' meals.¹⁷¹ Third, fisherfolk in Khar Yalla who continue to commute also have to worry about their boats and equipment getting stolen, since they now must leave them near the sea without the ability to stand watch at night.¹⁷²

The community in Khar Yalla has tried to support its members to keep working in the fishing sector, in the absence of government support. Community leaders partnered with a group of foreign university students studying abroad in Senegal to crowd-fund fees for a bus and driver to transport people to the Langue de Barbarie for a year.¹⁷³ But this effort has encountered challenges.¹⁷⁴

The barriers to accessing the fishing sector have forced multiple people in Khar Yalla to abandon their traditional livelihoods. For instance, Fatou Fall Teuw, a 64-year-old woman in Khar Yalla, shared that she had to stop working as a fish processor when they were moved to Khar Yalla.¹⁷⁵ "The way is too far and it's too expensive," she explained.¹⁷⁶ Several older men and women also reported that they stopped working as fishermen after being moved to Khar Yalla, because it was too difficult for them to travel to the Langue de Barbarie.¹⁷⁷ "As an older person, I cannot keep up my job of going to the sea to sell fish every day," said Thiare Fall.¹⁷⁸

Authorities Thwarted Community's Attempts to Retrain for New Livelihoods

People in Khar Yalla have also attempted to find alternative employment opportunities to fishing. No such options are available in Khar Yalla itself.¹⁷⁹ A number of young people have taken menial agricultural jobs outside Khar Yalla that pay just \$5 per day, because

¹⁷¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mbaye F., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

¹⁷³ "Help the Community of Khar Yalla Reclaim Their Livelihood," Gofundme, <https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-the-community-of-khar-yalla-reclaim-their-livelihood> (accessed March 20, 2025); Human Rights Watch interview with Lucas Souza, Project Jàmm, Dakar, April 1, 2025.

¹⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch correspondence with Lucas Souza, Project Jàmm, July 2025.

¹⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatou Fall Teuw, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men, Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025, and interview with Khady Gueye, July 19, 2025 (telephone).

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Thiare Fall, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

¹⁷⁹ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

they do not see other opportunities for themselves.¹⁸⁰ The Khar Yalla women’s association, led by Khady Gueye, helps young women who left school to financially support their families train for professions that do not rely on the fishing sector.¹⁸¹ Two NGOs, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and WIN Senegal, donated 12 sewing machines to the association so that women could learn tailoring skills.¹⁸² The foundation also raised funds to construct a concrete center in Khar Yalla to give women a more permanent, sanitary place to learn trades such as processing couscous, tailoring, and hairdressing.¹⁸³

However, authorities have thwarted such initiatives and have made no effort to help people in Khar Yalla retrain for professions outside the fishing sector. Given that the municipality has still not provided electricity in the houses in Khar Yalla, people have been unable to use the sewing machines.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, Khady and staff at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation report that the mayor’s office refused to meet with them when they tried to secure authorization to build the training center.¹⁸⁵ The community then began construction, until municipal public works officials—including an official who had previously refused to meet with them—arrived and ordered them to stop construction, on the grounds that they did not have authorization.¹⁸⁶ It now stands, partially built, in the center of the site.

¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews with Oussmane T., Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025, Amina S., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025, and Khady Gueye, July 19, 2025 (telephone).

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch interview with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025. Fama Sarr works with the Khar Yalla women’s association to organize these trainings.

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch interviews with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 7, 2025, Moudou Cissé, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, May 1, 2025 (videoconference), and (name withheld) at WIN Senegal, May 8, 2025 (videoconference).

¹⁸³ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 7, 2025.

¹⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch interviews with Lucas Souza, Project Jàmm, Dakar, April 1, 2025, Moudou Cissé, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, May 1, 2025 (videoconference), and (name withheld) at WIN Senegal, May 8, 2025 (videoconference).

¹⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interviews with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 7, 2025, and Moudou Cissé, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, May 1, 2025 (videoconference).

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 4, 2025, and Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 7, 2025.



The partially constructed training center in Khar Yalla, with “Stop” painted on it in French by municipal officials, April 2025. © 2025 Erica Bower/Human Rights Watch

Through its inaction and interference, authorities have prevented the people in Khar Yalla from being able to provide for themselves through fishing or by retraining in other livelihoods and have thereby failed to ensure their right to an adequate standard of living. The families in Khar Yalla have seen a reduction in their incomes since they moved to the site.¹⁸⁷ RADDHO found that few households in Khar Yalla make more than approximately \$90 per month.¹⁸⁸ This is well below the international poverty line for a lower-middle income country like Senegal.¹⁸⁹ Families cannot afford to rent accommodation closer to the Langue de Barbarie or in other surrounding areas with better living conditions.¹⁹⁰ And multiple interviewees noted that they are experiencing food insecurity in Khar Yalla that they never had in the Langue de Barbarie, not just because of their reduced income, but also because they cannot benefit as much from the mutual aid system in the Langue de

¹⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

¹⁸⁸ RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 6 (“It is very rare to find a head of household with an income higher than 50,000 CFA” [roughly equivalent to \$90]) (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

¹⁸⁹ According to the World Bank, the international poverty line for a lower-middle income country including Senegal is \$3.65 per day, which is approximately \$113 per month per person. See World Bank Group, “Poverty and Inequality,” <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/themes/poverty-and-inequality.html> (accessed July 1, 2025). Senegal has one of the largest average household sizes in the world, with most households including between eight and nine people. See World Population Review, “Family Size by Country,” <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/family-size-by-country> (accessed August 4, 2025). For a conservative estimate of a family of 8 with one breadwinner, \$90 per month is far below the international poverty line (\$904 per month per household of 8 persons). Finally, \$90 per month is also well below the World Bank’s more progressive “prosperity standard” of \$25 per day per person. See World Bank Group “A New Distribution Sensitive Index for Measuring Welfare, Poverty, and Inequality,” <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099934305302318791/lduo325015fcoa4d6046420afe405cb6b6a87bob> (accessed August 4, 2025).

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch interviews, Khar Yalla, April 3, 5, and 9, 2025.

Barbarie.¹⁹¹ For instance, Cheikh Sere, the religious school teacher in Khar Yalla, said, “When we lived in front of the sea and we had trouble affording food, we could get fish or exchange it for rice or other food from our neighbors. We cannot do that here. Sometimes we have trouble eating.”¹⁹² Human Rights Watch is not aware of any efforts taken by the authorities to help the people in Khar Yalla with other access to income or direct provision of essentials such as food to ensure an adequate standard of living.

¹⁹¹ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

¹⁹² Human Rights Watch interview with Cheikh Sere, Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

IV. Khar Yalla Families Are Left Behind

“The local authorities forgot the people who’d been displaced first.”¹⁹³

The Senegalese government failed to include the Khar Yalla families in the permanent, planned relocation for households on the Langue de Barbarie that it is undertaking through SERRP, even though they were displaced by the same type of climate hazard as SERRP’s beneficiaries and have endured many of the same conditions in Khar Yalla that motivated the project. The Senegalese government should urgently remedy its failure to include the IDPs in Khar Yalla in SERRP, make policy reforms to ameliorate the present situation of the people living in Khar Yalla, and develop policies to prevent such oversights from happening again.

2017 and 2018 Flood Victims Temporarily Housed in Khar Yalla

Coastal floods in August 2017 and February 2018 displaced 199 families and 59 families, respectively, who lived in tents in Khar Yalla before being relocated to Djougop as part of SERRP.¹⁹⁴ Their tents were next to the houses inhabited by the displaced families who were moved there in 2016.¹⁹⁵ The Senegalese government provided some emergency relief to the 2017 and 2018 flood victims.¹⁹⁶ The Municipal Development Agency (ADM), which coordinates SERRP’s implementation, managed a census of those who would be moved on from Khar Yalla to Djougop as part of SERRP.¹⁹⁷ The officials carrying out the census spoke to and counted the families in tents, who were displaced by the 2017 and 2018 floods, but not those in houses.¹⁹⁸ By September 2019, authorities had relocated all the families living

¹⁹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Iba Diagne, Langue de Barbarie, April 8, 2025.

¹⁹⁴ World Bank “IDA Project Appraisal Document,” p. 10.

¹⁹⁵ Satellite imagery and online videos analyzed by Human Rights Watch show that tents for families displaced in 2017 were placed in late September 2017 adjacent to the houses inhabited by the 2015 and 2016 IDPs, in an area where the soil is slightly elevated compared to the floodplain. Tents for the families displaced in 2018 were established in early May 2018 directly in the floodplain, on circular mounds of earth that were completely flooded the next rainy season.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Prefect of Saint-Louis, Saint-Louis, April 8, 2025. According to the World Bank, 692 people were relocated from Khar Yalla to Djougop. See World Bank, “Implementation Status & Results Report, SERRP,” September 26, 2024, <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099092624193513277> (accessed January 12, 2024), p. 5. See also Annex 2.

¹⁹⁸ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

in tents in Khar Yalla to Djougop, and eventually gave them new houses.¹⁹⁹ Meanwhile, government officials have offered the additional 11,000 people who fall into the scope of SERRP—who have not yet been displaced but live in the 20-meter band on the Langue de Barbarie designated as high-risk of future flood damage—the choice of taking compensation for their house and finding accommodation elsewhere, or being relocated to Djougop.²⁰⁰ The families in the houses in Khar Yalla reported that authorities have never approached them about being relocated to Djougop or offered them compensation for their destroyed homes or income lost since the floods.²⁰¹

2015 and 2016 IDPs Left Behind Despite Similar Experiences

From SERRP's inception, one of the project's primary purposes was to get households displaced by floods out of Khar Yalla, which the project implementors did not consider appropriate for a permanent relocation site. In the World Bank's 2018 appraisal document for SERRP for the first International Development Assistance (IDA) loan the Senegalese government requested for SERRP (US\$30 million), it described the conditions in Khar Yalla as "extremely challenging and precarious," due to overcrowding in the site and the lack of "sanitation services and inadequate access to water, electricity and transport."²⁰² The first component of SERRP— 'Meeting Immediate Needs of the Disaster Affected Population'—involved relocating the households in tents in Khar Yalla to a site "in an area not prone to flooding" and improving their living conditions in the interim.²⁰³ The appraisal document emphasized, "there is an urgent need to move the displaced population out of the hazard prone area before the 2018 rainy season."²⁰⁴ This was not just because those placed in Khar Yalla "face significant health and flood risk," but because they "may also experience considerable long term negative impacts since livelihood activities have been disrupted

¹⁹⁹ ADM confirmed in a letter to Human Rights Watch that the relocation of the flood victims in Khar Yalla to Djougop was completed in 2019. See Annex 2. The families relocated to Djougop from Khar Yalla did not immediately move into houses: they lived in shelters provided by the United Nations Office for Project Service (UNOPS), until their houses were completed, starting in late 2023 and early 2024. Human Rights Watch focus group interviews with men and women, Djougop, April 4, 2025; see also World Bank, "Implementation Status & Results Report, SERRP," August 2, 2023, <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099080323142542769> (accessed January 12, 2024), pp. 1-2, and March 20, 2024, <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099032024180527602> (accessed January 12, 2024), p. 2.

²⁰⁰ ADM, "Resettlement Action Plan," p. 59.

²⁰¹ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

²⁰² World Bank "IDA Project Appraisal Document," pp. 10-11.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

and many children have dropped out of school.”²⁰⁵ As the World Bank explained in a letter to Human Rights Watch, Khar Yalla was rejected as an option for a permanent relocation site for those displaced by floods, because it “was already identified as a flood prone risk area” and failed to meet site selection criteria, such as “feasibility to connect the site to electricity and water network.”²⁰⁶ The relocation site for SERRP, Djougop, was selected in part because it is not prone to flooding.²⁰⁷ Echoing this conclusion, an ADM engineer noted that he and his colleagues were “shocked” to find that any houses had ever been built in Khar Yalla: because of the site’s exposure to flooding, he explained, it is “not a place where it is appropriate to build a permanent home.”²⁰⁸

The families displaced by the 2015 and 2016 floods were left out of the planned relocation to Djougop despite facing all these conditions in Khar Yalla. Their houses offer more protection than tents but still flood regularly in the rainy season. At SERRP’s inception, all the IDPs living in Khar Yalla had inadequate sanitation services, no water, no electricity, no transportation to schools, and no access to other essential services; all residents lost access to their traditional livelihoods; children living in houses and in tents alike were forced to drop out of school.²⁰⁹ Since SERRP was launched, the only improvement for the families living in houses is that they finally received pipe-borne water in their houses several years ago.²¹⁰

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ See Annex 1.

²⁰⁷ See, e.g., ADM, “Resettlement Action Plan,” April 2020, p. 106; Ndiaye, “EIES Update,” p. 83.

²⁰⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with ADM officials (names and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Dakar, April 11, 2025. Reine Dasyva, an environmental scientist, told Human Rights Watch that “Khar Yalla is not an environmentally safe zone” because of its propensity to flood. Human Rights Watch interview with Reine Dasyva, Dakar, April 1, 2025.

²⁰⁹ See Sections II and III, above.

²¹⁰ Human Rights Watch interview with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025; see also RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 4.



Khar Yalla site in August 2018. In the foreground are tents for families displaced by the 2017 and 2018 floods; the houses inhabited by families displaced in the 2015 and 2016 floods are in the background. © 2018 Ndar Info

Moreover, the IDPs from the 2015 and 2016 floods were displaced in the same circumstances and from the same neighborhoods as those displaced in the 2017 and 2018 floods who have benefitted from SERRP. An ADM official coordinating SERRP told Human Rights Watch that one of the project’s purposes is to ensure that those from the Langue de Barbarie “who lost everything could get a new home and restore their living conditions.”²¹¹ Yet even though the families still living in Khar Yalla lost their houses and possessions in coastal floods, they were given permits to temporarily occupy houses in a site where, many report, their living conditions are worse than they were in the Langue de Barbarie.²¹²

In some cases, families are now divided between Khar Yalla and Djougop, which has created tensions. For instance, a 22-year-old fisherman living in Djougop shared that his family was moved on from Khar Yalla to Djougop while his aunt’s family, who lost their home first, was left in Khar Yalla.²¹³ He recounted, “She asked if she could have a room here” in his family’s new house in Djougop, “but my mom had to say that we’re full. We don’t have the space to offer her.”²¹⁴

²¹¹ Human Rights Watch interview with ADM official (names and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Dakar, April 11, 2025.

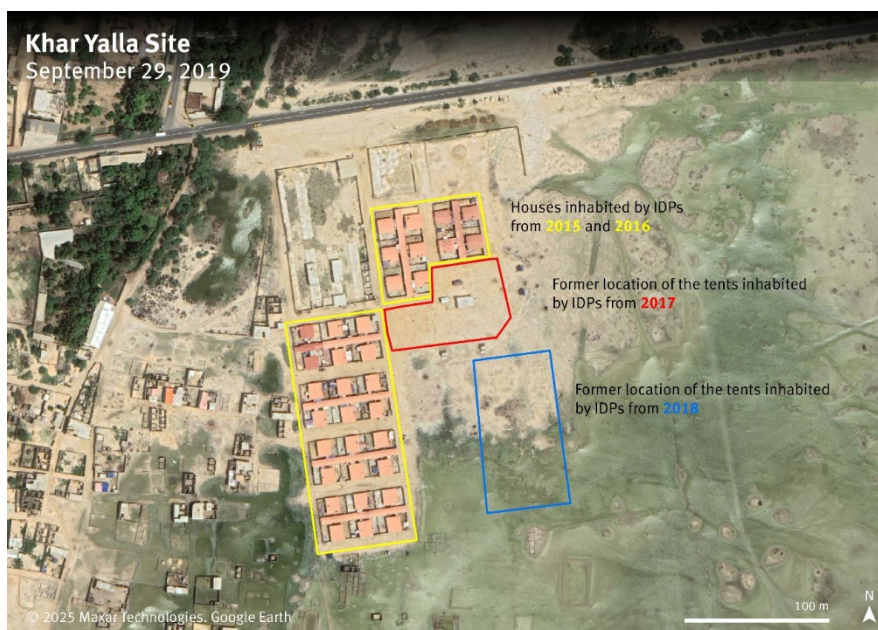
²¹² Human Rights Watch focus group interview with men and women, Khar Yalla, April 3 and 5, 2025.

²¹³ Human Rights Watch interview with Malick S., Djougop, April 9, 2025.

²¹⁴ Ibid.



Satellite imagery from November 19, 2018, shows the tents established for the 2017 and 2018 flood victims in the Khar Yalla site, as well as the remaining footprints of the tents that were built directly in the floodplain in May 2018 and already dismantled by October 2018. Image © 2025 Maxar Technologies. Google Earth. Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch



Satellite imagery from September 29, 2019 shows that all the tents established in 2017 and 2018 appeared to have been removed. The families who lived in these tents have been relocated to the Djougop site. Meanwhile, the people who were moved to the houses in 2016 were left out of SERRP and are still living in Khar Yalla, even though they suffer from ongoing flooding and other dangerous conditions at the site and were displaced by coastal floods. Image © 2025 Maxar Technologies. Google Earth. Graphic © 2025 Human Rights Watch.

2015 and 2016 IDPs Receive Less Support for Housing, Essential Services, and Livelihoods than SERRP Beneficiaries

Authorities' neglect and interference in Khar Yalla contrasts to the efforts authorities have taken for those relocated to Djougop, through SERRP. Djougop is designed to offer residents a new house, access to essential services, and livelihoods training.²¹⁵ Each household in Djougop receives a new house with electricity, the size of which is meant to correlate with the size of their house on the Langue de Barbarie.²¹⁶ A health clinic and school are under construction at the site; in the meantime, the state is running a makeshift school for children in Djougop.²¹⁷ The World Bank donated a vehicle and processing equipment to enable women in Djougop to transport fish from the Langue de Barbarie and keep their livelihoods in the fishing sector.²¹⁸ ADM officials told Human Rights Watch that they have tried—albeit unsuccessfully—to convince private transportation operators to better help Djougop, the SERRP relocation site.²¹⁹ Additionally, in Djougop, World Bank-funded programs to retrain people in professions such as hairdressing and tailoring have launched.²²⁰ Residents of Djougop told Human Rights Watch that these programs were flawed, and described ongoing issues with some of the infrastructure in Djougop, such as the electricity.²²¹ Nevertheless, the programs still demonstrate commitment to support those displaced from the Langue de Barbarie not seen in Khar Yalla. Fama Sarr, president of a union of women in the informal fishing sector, expressed outrage at this differential treatment. “Those in Djougop have already benefitted from many more opportunities than

²¹⁵ See, e.g., ADM, “Resettlement Action Plan”; ADM, “SERRP: Description of the Project.”

²¹⁶ ADM, “Resettlement Action Plan”

²¹⁷ Ibid.; Human Rights Watch focus group interview with Djougop residents, Djougop, April 4 and 9, 2025; see also UNOPS, “After the Storms,” <https://www.unops.org/news-and-stories/stories/after-the-storms> (accessed August 3, 2025); RADDHO, “Situational Study Report,” p. 5.

²¹⁸ “Empowering displaced women in Djougop: Saint-Louis Emergency and Resilience Recovery Project donates utility vehicle and processing equipment,” West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program, <https://www.wacaprogram.org/article/empowering-displaced-women-djougop-saint-louis-emergency-and-resilience-recovery-project> (accessed July 2, 2025).

²¹⁹ Human Rights Watch interviews with ADM officials (names and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Dakar, April 11, 2025.

²²⁰ Sokhna Ba, Lorenzo Carrera, and Isabelle Celine Kane, “Strengthening coastal resilience in Senegal: a vital issue for the people of Saint-Louis,” World Bank Group, October 2, 2024, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/african/afw-strengthening-coastal-resilience-in-senegal> (accessed July 1, 2025).

²²¹ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with Djougop residents, Djougop, April 4 and 9, 2025, interview with Cole F., Djougop, April 4, 2025; see, e.g., “Unstable electricity in Djougop: people raise the alarm” (“Électricité instable à Diougop : le cri d’alarme des populations”), Ndar Info, July 21, 2025, https://www.ndarinfo.com/Electricite-instable-a-Diougop-le-cri-d-alarme-des-populations_a41262.html (accessed July 2, 2025).

those still in Khar Yalla,” she noted.²²² As one focus group participant in Khar Yalla said, “[We] came here first, before the people who moved to Djougop, and yet we don’t have a house [there], even though we lost our houses for the same reasons, because of the floods.”²²³

The families in Khar Yalla are demanding an explanation for this differential treatment, as well as compensation and inclusion in SERRP or an equivalent solution. Community leaders in Khar Yalla, the Langue de Barbarie, and their civil society partners reported multiple, unsuccessful attempts to get an explanation from the mayor’s office and other local authorities about why the government left them out of SERRP.²²⁴ “There are a lot of things that we’ve lost – our rights, our income ... and we want compensation,” said Cheikh Sere.²²⁵ The overwhelming majority of Khar Yalla residents want the government to relocate them elsewhere, because they can no longer withstand the terrible living conditions in Khar Yalla. “They’re asking for a second SERRP,” said Mouhamadou Lamine Tall, who directs Forum Civil and Aar Sunu Aalam, which are advocating for improved government transparency and for marginalized residents of Saint-Louis and convene a civil society working group that has lobbied municipal authorities to improve conditions in Khar Yalla.²²⁶ “We just want to have a good space to live with good conditions,” said Khady Gueye, “If there is no space in Djougop, we’ll find somewhere else. We just want to live somewhere in dignity.”²²⁷ “I am ready to go any place better than Khar Yalla,” said Fatou Fall Teuw.²²⁸ “The people of Khar Yalla are so tired. It’s time to support us,” said Mariama D.²²⁹

²²² Human Rights Watch interview with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025.

²²³ Human Rights Watch focus group interview with women, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

²²⁴ Civil society leaders reported that the mayor’s office has repeatedly refused to meet with them, answer questions about Khar Yalla in public forums, or respond to their requests for assistance for the community. Human Rights Watch interviews with Fama Sarr, Langue de Barbarie, April 7, 2025, Mouhamadou Lamine Tall, University of Gaston Berger, April 7, 2025, Papa Fara Diallo, University of Gaston Berger, April 7, 2025. Community leaders noted that one issue they have faced in their advocacy is the rapid turnover of local government officials—for instance, the fact that there have been four different prefects in the last five years. “When they change, we have to start all over in our advocacy,” noted Goxu Mbacc neighborhood president, Iba Diagne. Human Rights Watch interview with Iba Diagne, Langue de Barbarie, April 8, 2025.

²²⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Cheikh Sere, Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

²²⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mouhamadou Lamine Tall, University of Gaston Berger, April 7, 2025.

²²⁷ Human Rights Watch interview with Khady Gueye, Khar Yalla, April 3, 2025.

²²⁸ Human Rights Watch interview with Fatou Fall Teuw, Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.

²²⁹ Human Rights Watch interview with Mariama D., Khar Yalla, April 5, 2025.



Completed (left) and under-construction (right) houses in the Djougop relocation site, April 2025. © 2025 Erica Bower/Human Rights Watch

Responsibility for Failure to Include 2015 and 2016 IDPs in SERRP

The explanations officials gave Human Rights Watch for why the families still living in Khar Yalla were not included in the planned relocation to Djougop are not justifiable. Even though it was the Saint-Louis municipal government who moved the families living in Khar Yalla today to the site in 2016, multiple local government officials maintained to Human Rights Watch that the families living in the houses in Khar Yalla were not displaced by coastal floods, and thus were not relevant for inclusion in SERRP.²³⁰ This misconception is disproved by the previous sections of this report, and by statements from other community leaders and members from the Langue de Barbarie who insist that the families in Khar

²³⁰ For instance, an official in Saint-Louis local government stated that anyone remaining in the Khar Yalla site had not been affected by floods in the Langue de Barbarie. Human Rights Watch interviews with Saint-Louis municipal government official (name and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Saint-Louis, April 8, 2025, and Prefect of Saint-Louis, Saint-Louis, April 9, 2025. The Prefect suggested that perhaps the households in Khar Yalla were living there informally, without authorization, and was not aware that they had temporary occupation permits. He had been in his role for just six months at the time of the interview with Human Rights Watch and acknowledged that he did not have full context on the floods and the SERRP project's history.

Yalla came from Goxu Mbacc and Guet Ndar and lost their homes in floods.²³¹ Even officials outside the municipality, from ADM and the World Bank, acknowledge that the houses in Khar Yalla were occupied by people displaced by the 2015 and 2016 floods.²³² Meanwhile, in a letter to Human Rights Watch, ADM maintained that the Khar Yalla families were not included in SERRP because they “were considered as having been permanently relocated” and “had already benefited from social housing.”²³³ For this reason, ADM explained, the Senegalese government limited the scope of the planned relocation to the 259 families displaced by the 2017 and 2018 coastal floods and the 11,000 people in the 20-meter zone demarcated as high-risk in the Langue de Barbarie.²³⁴ Such reasoning is based on flawed logic. As already described, at the time SERRP was launched, the families living in the houses in Khar Yalla could not live there permanently.²³⁵ They were only given temporary occupation permits, and moreover, the flood-prone site—with no water, electricity, or other essential services—was uninhabitable.

The flawed scoping process of SERRP highlights the need to conduct comprehensive vulnerability and needs assessments before a climate-related planned relocation begins, in order to identify which individuals and communities most need to be relocated. The authorities’ assessments undertaken for SERRP—the census of the 2017 and 2018 flood victims and studies demarcating the 20-meter zone in the Langue de Barbarie—fell short. The authorities failed to consult with the people who had already been displaced by the climate impacts that motivated SERRP, and who needed the kind of protection SERRP offered even more imminently than the approximately 11,000 people living in the 20-meter zone who have not yet been displaced.

²³¹ See, e.g., Human Rights Watch interview with Iba Diagne, Langue de Barbarie, April 8, 2025, and Abdou M., Djougop, April 9, 2025.

²³² Annex 1 (“During a preparation mission, the local authorities informed the [World] Bank team that 68 households whose homes were destroyed by the 2015/2016 flood had been relocated to the Khar Yalla site. They were informed that 68 concrete houses were built several years prior by UN-HABITAT and financed by the Japanese government”); Annex 2 (“[ADM] found in Khar Yalla people who had been rehoused in the social housing (concrete houses) built to host the victims of floods that occurred before 2017”) (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

²³³ Annex 2 (“These populations [living in the houses built by UN-Habitat] were considered as having been permanently rehoused. For that reason, the question of whether they should be included in SERRP was never entertained. Consequently, this point was never discussed with the World Bank...the IDPs from 2015 and 2016 were already social housing beneficiaries”) (unofficial translation by Human Rights Watch).

²³⁴ Annex 2.

²³⁵ See Section II, above.

It is urgent that the national, regional, and local agencies that implement SERRP promptly include the people displaced by the 2015 and 2016 floods in SERRP or another planned relocation. Action from regional and national actors is particularly urgent, given the municipal government's inaction for nearly a decade. And as Mouhamadou Lamine Tall emphasized, the process for finding a solution for Khar Yalla should be consultative and involve multiple stakeholders: "We need an inclusive team—of NGOs, municipal authorities, and politicians—to work with the community on a durable solution."²³⁶

Learning from Mistakes

Saint Louis is not alone: other communities in Senegal are facing climate displacement and planned relocation, including Pikine and Wakhinane-Nimzatt in Dakar, and Palmarin commune in the Fatick region.²³⁷ The need for last-resort planned relocations is projected to become greater as climate change accelerates.²³⁸ Existing national and regional guidance on climate adaptation and internal displacement, including the Kampala Convention, does not adequately address anticipatory, community-wide planned relocation in the context of coastal floods and sea level rise. It is therefore imperative that the Senegalese government adopt a national policy that explicitly focuses on protecting the rights of people displaced by climate-related hazards and involved in a planned relocation.²³⁹ In particular, the policy should include mechanisms for climate displaced communities to request relocation support, prioritize meaningful consultation, and establish criteria for site selection to ensure beneficiaries' rights are fulfilled in the relocation site.

By adopting such a policy, Senegal would become the first African country to follow governments such as Fiji and Solomon Islands that have developed human rights-based

²³⁶ Human Rights Watch interview with Mouhamadou Lamine Tall, University of Gaston Berger, April 7, 2025.

²³⁷ Oumoul Khairy Coulibaly Tandian and Pape Sakho, "Impact of Climate Change on Human Migration. Case Study: Senegal and Ivory Coast" ("Impact des changements environnementaux sur les migrations humaines. Étude de cas : Sénégal et Côte d'Ivoire"), UNESCO, June 2014, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Papa-Sakho-2/publication/296061051_Impacts_des_changements_environnementaux_sur_les_migrations_humaines_cas_du_Senegal/links/59ff89dfof7e9b9968c6ce6c/Impacts-des-changements-environnementaux-sur-les-migrations-humaines-cas-du-Senegal.pdf (accessed July 15, 2025).

²³⁸ Hans Pörtner et al., "IPCC Sixth Assessment Report," p. 65.

²³⁹ Officials at ADM said that they were not aware of any existing efforts to develop such a policy. Human Rights Watch interview with ADM officials (names and details withheld by Human Rights Watch), Dakar, April 11, 2025.

national guidelines for planned relocation.²⁴⁰ Creating a policy to help the government navigate future planned relocations that may become necessary as climate change accelerates would help make Senegal a regional leader in climate adaptation.

The World Bank should also replace or update the policies that currently govern the climate-related relocation projects it funds. In SERRP, the World Bank applied Operational Policy (OP) 4.12, which was designed for resettlements of populations displaced by new development projects, such as dams or national roads.²⁴¹ But development-related and climate-related relocations have fundamentally different goals and approaches to beneficiary identification. The former aims to enable a greater social good, often at the expense of those relocated who reside within a demarcated area to be vacated for the development project. The latter is about protection and aims to be a durable solution for those already displaced by climate hazards and an anticipatory strategy to prevent future climate displacement. The World Bank needs a policy tailored to the unique nature of climate-related planned relocation, ensuring that such projects are driven by needs of impacted communities, based on comprehensive censuses, and anchored around the goal of protecting people from climate displacement. At a minimum, the World Bank should add provisions to its involuntary resettlement policy ESS5 or OP 4.12, which would require its grantees designing a climate-related planned relocation to conduct a comprehensive census of all displaced people who could be beneficiaries and assess their vulnerability and needs.

The World Bank has already begun articulating an approach to climate-related planned relocation that, on paper, is promising. An obscure annex to a World Bank West Africa Coastal Areas (WACA) resilience investment project appraisal document emphasizes the need to “ensure that communities are meaningfully engaged in the decision-making process” around planned relocations, and stresses, “[a]ffected households should ...

²⁴⁰ See, e.g., “Planned Relocation Guidelines 2022,” Solomon Islands Government, <https://roasiapacific.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl671/files/documents/2023-03/Solomon%20Islands%20Planned%20Relocation%20Guidelines.pdf> (accessed September 2, 2024); “Fiji: Planned Relocation Guidelines – A framework to undertake climate change related relocation,” <https://www.refworld.org/legal/decrees/natlegbod/2018/en/122437>.

²⁴¹ Senegal agreed to be bound by OP 4.12 in implementing SERRP. See ADM, “Resettlement Action Plan,” pp. 66-74. The World Bank has since replaced OP 4.12 with Environmental & Social Safety Standard (ESS) 5. World Bank Group, “World Bank Environmental and Social Policy for Investment Project Financing,” *The World Bank Environmental and Social Framework*, 2017, <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/837721522762050108-0290022018/original/ESFFramework.pdf#page=17> (accessed July 15, 2025).

ultimately take the decision on adaptation options, as they are the ones facing the direct risks and consequences related to coastal erosion and climate change.”²⁴²

Now, the World Bank should mainstream these community-driven decision-making principles in a new climate-related planned relocation policy. With this step, and by taking new approaches to census-taking and beneficiary identification to ensure such projects prioritize the needs of those living in climate displacement, the World Bank can help ensure that more populations like the people in Khar Yalla are meaningfully consulted and included in planned relocation projects that restore or improve their living conditions. As climate change accelerates, more governments like Senegal will come to the World Bank and other development banks for support on climate-related planned relocations. It is therefore urgent that the World Bank develops a new policy aimed at making climate-related planned relocations truly durable solutions for climate-displaced persons.

²⁴² World Bank Group, “International Development Association Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit in the Amount of Euro 24.1 million (US\$30 million equivalent) to the Republic of Senegal for a West Africa Coastal Areas Resilience Investment Project,” Annex 9 (‘Community Development, Resilience, And Decision Making’), March 16, 2018, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/280421523498466209/pdf/PAD2454-REVISED-PUBLIC-PAD-WACA-FINAL-05012018.pdf> (accessed July 1, 2025), p. 151.

V. Senegal's Legal Obligations

Senegal derives its human rights obligations from its constitution, customary international law, as well as a number of African regional and international human rights treaties to which it is party. These include the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR),²⁴³ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),²⁴⁴ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),²⁴⁵ the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC),²⁴⁶ and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).²⁴⁷ Senegal's obligations under international climate instruments such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Paris Agreement²⁴⁸ should be informed by its obligations under international human rights law, and vice versa.²⁴⁹

Rights in Climate Adaptation

Like all governments, Senegal has international human rights obligations to address climate change, including by adopting and implementing robust and rights-respecting climate adaptation policies that are consistent with the best available science, as

²⁴³ African Charter on Human and People's Rights (ACHPR), OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5, 21 I.L.M. 58, October 21, 1986, Senegal has been a party since August 13, 1982.

²⁴⁴ UN General Assembly, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 993, p. 3, December 16, 1966, Senegal has been a party since February 13, 1978.

²⁴⁵ UN General Assembly, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13, December 18, 1979, Senegal has been a party since February 5, 1985.

²⁴⁶ UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3, November 20, 1989, Senegal has been a party since July 31, 1990.

²⁴⁷ UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, A/RES/61/106, Annex I, 13 December 2006, Solomon Islands has been a party since September 7, 2010.

²⁴⁸ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, May 9, 1992, S. Treaty Doc No. 102-38, 1771 U.N.T.S. 107 and Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, December 12, 2015, T.I.A.S. No. 16-1104.

²⁴⁹ Treaties should be interpreted in light of "any relevant rules of international law applicable in the relations between the parties." Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, adopted May 23, 1969, 1155 UNTS 331, entered into force January 27, 1980, art. 31(3). As several human rights bodies have affirmed, human rights law relevant for treaty-based adaptation obligations, and vice versa—in part because climate change profoundly affects a wide variety of human rights. See Lauren Nishimura, "Adaptation and Anticipatory Action: Integrating Human Rights Duties into the Climate Change Regime," *Climate Law* 12 (2022), pp. 103-104, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4023503> (accessed July 17, 2023) Nishimura, "Adaptation and Anticipatory Action"; Daniel Billy and others v. Australia, "Views adopted by the Committee under article 5 (4) of the Optional Protocol, concerning communication No. 3624/2019," UN Doc. CCPR/C/135/D/3624/2019, UN Human Rights Committee, September 18, 2023, p. 3, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CCPR%2F3624%2F2019&Lang=en (accessed October 20, 2024).

emphasized by the International Court of Justice in a 2025 advisory opinion.²⁵⁰ International guidance stresses that planned relocation to protect persons or communities may be a necessary measure for states to “prevent and reduce disaster risk and exposure to it, and to address the negative impacts of environmental change, including climate change.”²⁵¹ But upholding these obligations cannot come at the expense of human rights protection. As a state party to the Paris Agreement, ICCPR, and ICESCR, Senegal has to ensure adequate adaptation for its people and has acknowledged the need to “respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights ... the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities ... and people in vulnerable situations.”²⁵² States’ existing human rights obligations require them to uphold the rights of those harmed by climate change, including all their economic, social and cultural rights, such as the rights to an adequate standard of living and culture. This includes obligations to dedicate the maximum available resources toward the progressive realization of economic, social, and cultural rights.²⁵³

Rights of Internally Displaced People

The Senegalese government’s obligations to respect and fulfill its people’s social, economic, and cultural rights under its Constitution and African regional and international human rights law apply to everyone in the country, including IDPs. The Senegalese Constitution guarantees all citizens “fundamental individual freedoms, the economic and social rights as well as [] collective rights,” which include cultural freedoms and the rights to health and education.²⁵⁴ National governments bear primary responsibility to ensure protection and assistance during displacement, and to facilitate durable solutions for

²⁵⁰ *Obligations of States in respect of Climate Change*, International Court of Justice, Advisory Opinion, July 23, 2025, para. 255-259.

²⁵¹ UNHCR, “Guidance on Protecting People from Disasters and Environmental Change through Planned Relocation,” p. 11. This may include establishing an adequate legal framework governing planned relocation processes in accordance with international and regional human rights standards, defining the corresponding institutional responsibilities and establishing adequate mechanisms to provide comprehensive reparations to those affected. *Advisory Opinion on the Climate Emergency and Human Rights*, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, OC-32/25, July 3, 2025, para. 429.

²⁵² UNFCCC, Paris Agreement, 2015. This point is also emphasized by bodies including the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) and International Law Association. See CESCR, “Climate change and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights,” October 8, 2018, para. 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2018/10/committee-releases-statement-climate-change-and-covenant> (accessed October 1, 2024); “Final Report,” International Law Association Athens Conference on International Law and Sea Level Rise (2024), pp. 26-29, https://www.ila-hq.org/en_GB/documents/01-final-report-committee-on-international-law-and-sea-level-rise (accessed October 24, 2024).

²⁵³ ICESCR, art. 2.

²⁵⁴ Senegal Constitution, Title II, arts. 8, 21-22.

IDPs. This is emphasized in the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, an authoritative restatement of existing international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law as it relates to the protection of internally displaced persons.²⁵⁵ Similarly, the legally binding Kampala Convention, which Senegal has signed but not yet ratified,²⁵⁶ requires State Parties to ensure assistance to IDPs by meeting their basic needs in a non-discriminatory manner, and to facilitate durable solutions to displacement by promoting satisfactory conditions for voluntary return, local integration, or relocation on a sustainable basis and in circumstances of safety and dignity.²⁵⁷

Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

As a state that has ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the AHCPR, and other treaties, the Government of Senegal has accepted the obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights to an adequate standard of living,²⁵⁸ which includes the rights to adequate housing and electricity. These obligations require Senegal to create conditions to ensure individuals can meet their own basic needs.

Housing

The right to adequate housing is about “the right to live somewhere in security, peace, and dignity,” not just “having a roof over one’s head,” according to the United Nations Committee on Social, Economic & Cultural Rights (CESCR).²⁵⁹ To be adequate, housing must meet certain minimum criteria.²⁶⁰ First, there must be security of tenure, such that

²⁵⁵ See Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/39, Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, UN Commission on Human Rights, 11 February 1998, Section III, <https://www.refworld.org/legal/otherinstr/unchr/1998/en/18487> (accessed May 15, 2025), Principles 18-23. By drawing heavily on existing law and standards, the Guiding Principles are intended to provide practical guidance to governments, the UN, and other intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations in their work with IDPs.

²⁵⁶ African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), UNTS v. 3014, October 23, 2009, Senegal signed on July 12, 2011.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, arts. III(1)(j) and XI(1).

²⁵⁸ ICESCR, art. 11 (“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right ...”)

²⁵⁹ CESCR, General Comment No. 4, The Right to Adequate Housing, U.N. Doc. E/1992/23 (1991), <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/cescr/1991/en/53157>, para. 7.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 8. In addition to the criteria discussed in this report, housing must be affordable, accessible to marginalized groups, and culturally adequate. ACHPR, art. 14 (“The right to property shall be guaranteed”). See African Commission on Human and People’s Rights, “Resolution on the right to adequate housing and protection from forced evictions,” Resolution 231(LII) 2012, <https://achpr.au.int/en/adopted-resolutions/231-resolution-right-adequate-housing-and-protection-forced-eviction> (accessed May 20, 2025).

occupants have protection against forced evictions, harassment, or other threats.²⁶¹ Second, there must be available services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, including adequate sanitation, energy for cooking, heating, lighting, food storage, refuse disposal, and access to emergency services.²⁶² Third, housing must be habitable: it must guarantee physical safety and adequate space, and protect residents from the weather, threats to health, and structural hazards.²⁶³ Fourth, the location of housing must not be cut off from essential services—e.g., health care, schools—and employment opportunities.²⁶⁴ The CESCR has noted that access to such services must be made possible including in areas “where the temporal and financial costs of getting to and from the place of work can place excessive demands upon the budgets of poor households.”²⁶⁵

Electricity

Human Rights Watch recognizes that the right to an adequate standard of living includes the right of everyone, without discrimination, to sufficient, reliable, safe, clean, accessible, and affordable electricity. Access to electricity is critical to ensuring other basic rights, such as the rights to health, housing, water, and education.

Right to Education

Senegal’s obligations under the CRC and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child include providing free, compulsory primary education and ensuring that secondary education is available and accessible to all without discrimination.²⁶⁶ In implementing their obligations on education, governments should be guided by four essential criteria: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability.²⁶⁷ Education should be available throughout the country, including by guaranteeing adequate and quality school infrastructure, and should be accessible to everyone on an equal basis.²⁶⁸

²⁶¹ CESCR, Gen. Comm. No. 4, para. 8(a).

²⁶² *Ibid.*, para. 8(b).

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, para. 8(d).

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 8(f).

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ CRC., art. 28; African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/24.9/49 (1990), July 11, 1990, art. 11, Senegal ratified the Charter on September 29, 1998.

²⁶⁷ CESCR, General Comment No. 13, “The Right to Education (Art. 13), U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/10 (1999), https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/CESCR_General_Comment_13_en.pdf, para. 6.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Right to Health

Under the ICESCR and ACHPR, Senegal is obligated to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.²⁶⁹ The CESCR has emphasized that upholding these obligations entails ensuring the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of health facilities, goods and services.²⁷⁰ This includes the duty to ensure that access to these healthcare resources is accessible without discrimination, especially for the most marginalized sections of the population, and without cost-based barriers.²⁷¹

Right to Take Part in Cultural Life

The ICESCR protects the right to enjoy one's culture and take part in cultural life, which can include traditional fishing activities.²⁷² The CESCR has defined culture broadly to include "ways of life," "methods of production," and "customs and traditions through which individuals, groups of individual and communities express their humanity ..." ²⁷³ Moreover, guidance from the UN Human Rights Committee, which monitors compliance with the ICCPR, states that traditional fishing practices of minority groups can constitute cultural rights that are protected under the ICCPR.²⁷⁴ The Committee stresses that cultural rights, while individual, "depend on the ability of the minority group to maintain its culture," and that states may therefore need to take measure to protect a minority group's identity and ability to "enjoy and develop their culture ... in community with the other members of the group."²⁷⁵ The ACHPR similarly recognizes that cultural rights are fundamental to human

²⁶⁹ ICESCR, art. 12 ("The State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health"); ACHPR, art. 16 ("Every individual shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health").

²⁷⁰ CESCR, General Comment No. 14, "The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health," U.N. Doc. E/C.12/2000/4 (2000), <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/cescr/2000/en/36991>, para. 12.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² ICESCR, art. 15 ("The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone: (a) To take part in cultural life").

²⁷³ CESCR, General Comment No. 21, "Right of everyone to take part in cultural life," U.N. Doc. E/C.12/GC/21 (2009), <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/cescr/2009/en/83710>, para. 13.

²⁷⁴ The UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) defines a minority group as one whose members "share in common a culture, a religion and/or a language." UN HRC, General Comment No. 23, "Article 27 (Rights of Minorities)," U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.5 (1994), <https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/hrc/1994/en/26900>, paras. 5.1, 7 ("With regard to the exercise of the cultural rights protected under article 27, the Committee observes that culture manifests itself in many forms, including a particular way of life associated with the use of land resources ... That right may include such traditional activities as fishing or hunting and the right to live in reserves protected by law").

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 6.2.

dignity and development, and member states have obligations to ensure the enjoyment of these rights by all individuals and peoples.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ For instance, ACHPR, art. 17 states, “Every individual may freely take part in the cultural life of his community.”

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Annex

Documents available online at: <https://www.hrw.org/node/391931>

1. Human Rights Watch Correspondence with the World Bank
2. Human Rights Watch Correspondence with the Municipal Development Agency of Senegal
3. Human Rights Watch Correspondence with the Ministry of the Environment of Senegal
4. Human Rights Watch Correspondence with the Mayor of Saint-Louis
5. Human Rights Watch Correspondence with the Prefect of Saint-Louis
6. Human Rights Watch Correspondence with the Governor of Saint-Louis
7. Human Rights Watch Correspondence with the Saint-Louis Municipal Development Agency
8. Human Rights Watch Correspondence with the Ministry of Localities and Territorial Management of Senegal
9. Human Rights Watch Correspondence with the Regional Environmental Ministry of Saint-Louis



“Waiting for God”

Flood Displacement and Planned Relocation of Fisherfolk in Saint-Louis, Senegal

The approximately 1,000 Senegalese people living in Khar Yalla (“waiting for God” in Wolof) were internally displaced in 2015 and 2016 when coastal floods destroyed their homes in historic fishing communities on the Langue de Barbarie peninsula in Saint-Louis. They were moved to Khar Yalla, believing they would find temporary safety while the authorities found them a durable solution. But almost a decade later, they continue to live in limbo. Because of government neglect and poor conditions in Khar Yalla, they suffer ongoing violations of their right to an adequate standard of living—adequate housing in particular—and their rights to education, health, and to take part in cultural life. The Senegalese government also left them out of an ongoing, World Bank-funded planned relocation of 15,000 others from the Langue de Barbarie who similarly lost or are at risk of losing their homes in tidal surges, which are intensifying as the climate crisis accelerates. It is laudable that Senegal has taken proactive measures to protect climate-displaced people. But some are falling through the cracks, as Khar Yalla’s story demonstrates. To prevent future government neglect and rights violations like in Khar Yalla, Senegal and the World Bank should build rights-respecting governance structures that prioritize protection of climate displaced communities.

(above) Khar Yalla site, Senegal, where families displaced by 2015 and 2016 floods have remained in limbo for nearly a decade. Photo taken in April 2025. © 2025 Erica Bower/Human Rights Watch

(cover) Fisherfolk working in Saint-Louis, located about 250 kilometers north of Senegal’s capital, Dakar, on January 8, 2025. © 2025 Andres Gutierrez/Anadolu via Getty Images