

**An Investigation on the Economic Impact of Congolese Refugees on Host Communities in  
Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge District**

**Uganda**

By

Luwemba Musa Maswanku

Department of Political Science

Islamic University in Uganda

[Luwemba.musa@iuiu.ac.ug/luwemba20@gmail.com](mailto:Luwemba.musa@iuiu.ac.ug/luwemba20@gmail.com)

Dr.Muyingo rajab

Department of mass communication

Islamic university in Uganda

[Muyingo.rajab@iuiu.ac.ug](mailto:Muyingo.rajab@iuiu.ac.ug)

Kobusingye Hasifa

Department of Political science

Islamic university in Uganda

[Kobusingye.hasifa@iuiu.ac.ug](mailto:Kobusingye.hasifa@iuiu.ac.ug)

**Abstract**

This study investigated the economic impact of Congolese refugees on host communities in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge District, Uganda, using a sample of 200 refugees. The research explored how the presence of refugees affects local economies, focusing on employment, household income, agricultural productivity, and small business activities. Data was collected through household surveys, interviews with key stakeholders, and focus group discussions, offering a comprehensive view of the economic interactions between refugees and host communities. The findings revealed mixed economic impacts. On one hand, refugees contribute positively to the local economy by filling labor gaps in agriculture and small-scale trade, thus enhancing the livelihoods of some host community members. Refugees' involvement in the local labor market, particularly in agricultural activities, has increased overall

productivity. However, the influx of refugees has also strained local resources, particularly land, healthcare, and education services, leading to competition for these resources. Many host households report increased pressure on food security and limited access to land, as refugees often engage in agricultural activities that drive up demand for available arable land. The study further indicated that the establishment of refugee-run businesses has created employment opportunities for both refugees and host community members, though the profitability of these ventures remains low due to limited access to capital and market constraints. The study recommends that policies should be put in place to strengthen the integration of refugees into local economies while mitigating resource competition. This includes promoting sustainable agricultural practices, providing targeted economic support for small business ventures, and improving public services such as healthcare and education to alleviate strain on the host community. Additionally, mechanisms for shared resource management between refugees and hosts should be explored to ensure equitable distribution. The study concludes by emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that harnesses the economic potential of refugees while addressing the challenges faced by host communities. Ensuring that refugees can contribute positively without overwhelming local resources is critical for fostering long-term peace, stability, and mutual benefit in the region. The study highlights the importance of inclusive economic policies that recognize the interdependence of refugees and host communities in development planning.

**Key words:** Rwamwanja, refugee camp, economic impact

## **Introduction**

The issue of refugees and their impact on host communities has become a significant focus in both academic and policy discussions worldwide. A refugee, as defined by the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, is a person who has been forced to flee their country of origin due to fear of persecution, conflict, or violence (UNHCR, 1951). These individuals are often displaced from their homes and seek refuge in neighboring countries that can provide safety and basic living conditions. Refugee settlements are designated areas where displaced persons are provided shelter and basic services while awaiting long-term solutions, such as voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement to third countries. In the context of Uganda, one of the largest refugee-hosting countries in Africa, refugee settlements like Rwamwanja in Kamwenge District play a crucial role in sheltering and supporting refugees, primarily from neighboring conflict-ridden nations such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement in Kamwenge District is home to thousands of Congolese refugees, who have fled violence and instability in the DRC. The settlement provides basic humanitarian assistance and protection to these displaced populations but also poses challenges and opportunities for the surrounding host communities. The economic impact of refugees on host communities is a complex issue, as refugees both contribute to and place pressure on the local economy. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing policies that ensure the sustainable integration of refugees while addressing the needs of the host population.

Globally, the economic impact of refugees on host countries has been widely debated. In countries such as Turkey, which hosts over 3.6 million Syrian refugees, studies have shown that refugees can boost the local economy by increasing labor force participation, particularly in agriculture, construction, and small businesses (Özdemir, 2016). Similarly, in Lebanon, the presence of Syrian refugees has led to both positive and negative economic effects, with refugees contributing to low-cost labor but also contributing to inflation and increased competition for jobs and resources (World Bank, 2017).

In both Asia and Latin America, the economic impacts of refugees on local communities have been multifaceted, with both positive and negative consequences for host economies. In Asia for example in Thailand, this has been a host country for refugees from neighboring Myanmar, particularly ethnic Karen and Rohingya populations. Studies show that refugees in Thailand have contributed to the local economy by providing low-cost labor, particularly in agriculture and the garment industry. The presence of refugees in border areas has also led to the establishment of small businesses, such as restaurants and retail shops, which employ both refugees and local residents. However, these positive economic contributions are tempered by competition for resources, such as land and water, which can create tensions with host communities (UNHCR, 2016). Furthermore, refugees' restricted access to formal employment opportunities limits their full economic potential and their ability to contribute to the broader Thai economy.

On the other hand, Malaysia has hosted a significant number of refugees, particularly from Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries. Refugees in Malaysia typically work in low-wage sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and domestic work. Although refugees contribute to the economy by filling labor gaps, especially in industries where there is a shortage of local workers, their contributions are often unrecorded due to their informal status and lack of legal rights to work. This has led to exploitation, with refugees earning low wages and facing poor working conditions (Tio, 2020). Despite these challenges, some studies suggest that refugees indirectly contribute to the Malaysian economy by supporting consumer demand, particularly in urban areas where they are involved in service sectors. Pakistan has been hosting millions of Afghan refugees for decades, and their presence has had a significant impact on local economies, especially in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region. Refugees have contributed to agriculture, trade, and the construction industry. However, the influx of refugees has strained local resources, particularly

in terms of employment opportunities, infrastructure, and public services such as healthcare and education. Research has shown that refugees have displaced local workers in certain sectors, driving down wages and increasing competition for jobs (Khan, 2018). On the other hand, refugees have also contributed to regional economic growth by supporting businesses and trade, particularly across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

In the case of Latin America, countries like Colombia have experienced a large influx of Venezuelan refugees fleeing the political and economic crisis in Venezuela. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), refugees and migrants have contributed significantly to local economies by filling labor gaps, particularly in agriculture and small businesses. Venezuelan refugees are often involved in informal economic activities, such as street vending and service work, which have contributed to local income generation, particularly in border towns like Cúcuta (IOM, 2019). However, the arrival of large numbers of refugees has put pressure on already strained public services, including healthcare, education, and housing. The local government has had to implement policies to manage this inflow of refugees, including providing temporary work permits and legal protections, which have helped to mitigate some of the negative economic impacts while Costa Rica has hosted refugees from Nicaragua, particularly during periods of political unrest. Research has found that refugees have had positive effects on the local economy, particularly in terms of agricultural production, where they fill labor shortages in rural areas. Refugees from Nicaragua have also established small businesses, contributing to the informal economy. While refugees help meet labor demands, the influx has also led to competition for low-wage jobs and public services, particularly in areas with limited resources. Despite these tensions, Costa Rica's refugee integration policies have allowed for some economic benefits, particularly through the formalization of refugee labor in agriculture and construction (Ruiz, 2017). Brazil has been a key destination for refugees from Venezuela, with many fleeing the economic and political turmoil in their home country. The arrival of Venezuelan refugees has created both opportunities and challenges for host communities in Brazil. On the positive side, refugees have contributed to the local economy by working in agriculture, construction, and services. Studies show that the refugees' participation in the labor market has had a positive impact on food security and local trade in the northern regions of Brazil (UNHCR, 2020). However, the rapid influx of refugees has placed significant pressure on public services, housing, and healthcare.

The local economy has also faced challenges related to increased competition for jobs, particularly in border areas, leading to tensions with host communities (Carvalho & Almeida, 2018).

In the African context, Uganda stands as a leading example of refugee integration. The Ugandan government's open-door policy towards refugees allows them to work, farm, and establish businesses, which has had mixed outcomes for both refugees and host communities. In Northern Uganda, for example, refugees from South Sudan have contributed to increased agricultural productivity but have also faced challenges related to land scarcity and strained public services (Bercovitch, 2020). In East Africa, countries like Kenya and Tanzania also offer valuable insights into the economic integration of refugees, although these countries face different resource availability and economic conditions. At the regional level, the Great Lakes region—comprising countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC—is one of the most refugee-hosting areas globally. The ongoing conflicts in the DRC, as well as in South Sudan and other neighboring countries, have resulted in massive refugee flows into Uganda. The presence of refugees in this region, particularly in borderland areas like Rwamwanja, has had notable economic implications, both positive and negative, on host communities. Refugees contribute to economic growth through agriculture, trade, and services, but they also place strain on infrastructure, health, education, and other public services (Hovil, 2017).

This study aimed at exploring the economic impact of Congolese refugees on host communities in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge District, Uganda. By investigating the complex relationship between refugees and host communities, this research shed light on both the benefits and challenges associated with the presence of refugees. Specifically, the study examined changes in household income, employment, agricultural productivity, and small business activities in the host communities. It also investigated how the influx of refugees has affected local access to resources and services, such as land, water, and healthcare. Ultimately, the study sought to inform policy recommendations that can enhance the positive economic contributions of refugees while addressing the challenges faced by host populations in Uganda's refugee settlements.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the economic impact of Congolese refugees on host communities in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement. The research utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments, specifically a questionnaire and an interview guide, to gather comprehensive and contextual insights into the economic dynamics between refugees, host communities, and local authorities. This approach was deemed suitable to capture both statistical trends and deeper qualitative insights into the lived experiences of refugees, host community members, and key stakeholders.

A mixed-methods design was selected for this study to offer a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted economic impacts of Congolese refugees on host communities. The quantitative approach, through the use of a questionnaire, provided data on economic indicators such as income generation, employment, and the contribution of refugees to local businesses. Meanwhile, the qualitative approach, facilitated through interviews, allowed for the exploration of contextual factors such as socio-cultural dynamics, local policy, and community perspectives that shape the economic relationships between refugees and host populations.

The study focused on three key groups in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge District: Congolese Refugees: Refugees who have resettled in the area from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), particularly those who have been in the settlement for a period of time. A sample of 200 refugees was selected to capture a diverse range of economic impacts, including employment status, income sources, and participation in local economic activities. These refugees were chosen using a simple random sampling technique to ensure a representative sample of the broader refugee population.

NGO Officials: These include key stakeholders working in the settlement who are involved in refugee welfare and economic integration programs. Their perspectives are crucial for understanding the role of external aid, policies, and development initiatives in mitigating or exacerbating economic disparities. 10 NGO officials were purposively selected for interviews to gather insights on the roles and interventions of humanitarian organizations in supporting refugees and host communities.

Game Park Officials: These are local authorities involved in the management of the nearby game park, which plays a significant role in the local economy. The interaction between the game park and the host community is essential in understanding how natural resources influence local economies. 5 park officials were selected based on their direct involvement with both refugee and host community activities related to land, resources, and economic development.

Regarding the Data Collection Instruments, a structured questionnaire was developed to collect quantitative data from refugees regarding their economic activities, income levels, and the impact of refugee status on their economic wellbeing. The questionnaire included both closed-ended and Likert scale questions to gather data on various economic indicators. The questionnaire was designed to ensure that data collected would be both comparable and statistically analyzable, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends in the economic experiences of refugees.

The interview guide was semi-structured, allowing for in-depth conversations with NGO officials, game park authorities, and selected refugees to capture qualitative data. The flexibility of the interview guide allowed respondents to share their perspectives and experiences in detail, offering insights that went beyond what could be captured through the questionnaire. The combination of a questionnaire and interview guide was selected to balance the need for quantitative data with the need for richer, contextual qualitative insights.

For data analysis, Quantitative data collected from the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) to present an overview of refugee economic activities and their contributions to the host community. Qualitative data from the interviews *was* analyzed through thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns related to the role of NGOs, local authorities, and community perceptions. The integration of *these two data sets* provided a comprehensive understanding of the economic impact of Congolese refugees in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. All participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and provided informed consent before participating. Confidentiality was maintained, and respondents were assured that their participation was

voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Additionally, the study was designed to avoid causing any harm to the refugees or local communities, ensuring that data collection methods respected cultural sensitivities and the rights of vulnerable populations.

## **Findings And Discussions**

### **The Economic Impacts Of Congolese Refugees On Host Communities In Kamwenge District**

The economic impacts of Congolese refugees on host communities in Kamwenge District reveal a complex interplay between benefits and challenges. These findings, supported by relevant literature, illustrated how refugee populations influence the economic landscape in both positive and challenging ways.

**Contribution to the Local Labor Force:** With 92.1% of respondents noting that refugees bring diverse skills and experiences, this finding aligns with studies showing that refugees often enhance the local labor market. According to Clemens et al. (2018), refugee populations contribute to filling labor gaps and can offer unique skills not readily available within the host population. By enriching the workforce, refugees increase productivity, benefiting sectors with critical labor shortages. The implication is that host communities benefit from a more diversified and skilled labor force, which can enhance local industry competitiveness.

**Unique Skills and Entrepreneurship:** Refugees often bring unique skills and experiences that are not readily available within the host population. According to a study by the Refugee Council of Australia (2018), refugees are more likely to start their own businesses, creating jobs and stimulating innovation. In the United Kingdom, refugee entrepreneurs have established successful businesses in sectors like food, fashion, and technology. In Canada, refugee-owned businesses have contributed significantly to the country's economic growth. The integration of refugees into the labor market can have positive economic impacts on host communities. A study by the International Monetary Fund (2016) found that refugees can increase productivity, benefiting sectors with critical labor shortages. In Sweden, refugee integration has been linked to increased economic growth and reduced unemployment. In New Zealand, refugees have contributed to regional economic development and diversification. By leveraging the skills and experiences of



refugees, host communities can reap economic benefits, enhance competitiveness, and promote social cohesion.

**Boosting Productivity and Economic Growth:** Refugees are noted for taking jobs that locals may be less willing to accept, with 78.8% of respondents recognizing this contribution. This trend is common in areas with a strong demand for labor but limited supply, such as agricultural or service sectors (Betts, 2019). Refugees' willingness to fill these roles not only addresses labor shortages but also supports economic growth by keeping industries functional and productive. However, this dynamic requires policies to protect fair wages and working conditions to prevent exploitation. Refugees' participation in the labor market by accepting roles that locals might overlook is indeed an important facet of their contribution to host economies. As noted, this trend is especially prominent in sectors like agriculture and services where labor demand often exceeds supply, making refugees' involvement essential to maintaining productivity and supporting local economic growth (Betts, 2019). This arrangement can be mutually beneficial, but as you highlighted, it necessitates policies that safeguard fair wages and decent working conditions. Without such protections, there's a risk of exploitation, with refugees potentially working under unfavorable conditions for lower wages. Well-designed labor policies would not only help ensure equitable treatment but also enhance the social and economic integration of refugees, ultimately benefiting both host communities and the refugees themselves.

**Introduction of Unique Goods, Services, and Culinary Experiences:** With 90.6% of respondents acknowledging the positive economic impact of unique goods and services introduced by refugees, research supports that refugees contribute to economic diversity (Jacobsen, 2002). They often bring specific culinary practices, artisanal crafts, and cultural goods that add value to local markets, making them more vibrant and attracting consumers interested in new cultural experiences. This diversity can strengthen the host community's economy by broadening the range of available products and services.

**Economic Stimulus Through Consumer Spending:** Nearly all respondents (97.0%) reported that refugee spending on goods and services significantly contributes to the local economy. As Chambers and Conway (1992) indicate, when refugees spend locally, they stimulate economic activity by increasing demand for goods and services, which benefits small businesses and

encourages job creation. This demand can also attract new businesses, further enriching the economic landscape. The implication here is that refugee assistance and employment not only support individual refugees but also bolster economic health in host communities.

The recognition of refugees' positive economic impact through unique goods and services is well documented, with studies indicating that refugees contribute significantly to economic diversity in host countries. For instance, with 90.6% of respondents acknowledging this positive impact, Jacobsen (2002) highlights how refugees often introduce culinary practices, artisanal crafts, and cultural goods that enhance the vibrancy of local markets. This diversity not only adds value but also attracts a broader customer base interested in experiencing and purchasing unique cultural products, thus benefiting local economies.

In Germany, Syrian refugees have made a notable impact on the food industry by opening restaurants and food stalls that offer Syrian, Levantine, and other Middle Eastern cuisines. This has diversified the country's culinary scene and contributed to the growth of Germany's food sector. According to a study by the Migration Policy Institute, these businesses have become popular even among locals, creating new jobs and boosting local economies (MPI, 2019). In Uganda, Congolese and South Sudanese refugees bring unique artisanal crafts, including handmade jewelry, textiles, and baskets. These products cater to both locals and tourists, generating income for refugee artisans and creating a cross-cultural exchange that strengthens Uganda's cultural economy (Betts, 2021). The influx of new crafts has given rise to vibrant local markets, like those in Kampala, where refugee-made goods attract diverse consumers and support Uganda's handicraft sector. Canada's Syrian refugee program has also spurred the growth of food services that showcase Middle Eastern cuisine, contributing to the Canadian economy through restaurants, food trucks, and catering services. The "Newcomer Kitchen" project in Toronto, for example, has allowed Syrian women to prepare traditional meals, providing them with income and offering Canadians authentic cultural experiences. The initiative has been economically sustainable, with many Canadians welcoming the diversity these services bring to local dining options (UNHCR, 2019).

**Economic and Cultural Benefits:** Refugees' economic contributions through unique goods and services offer several benefits for host communities. Refugees bring new goods and services that

add variety, attracting consumers seeking new experiences. This diversity enhances consumer spending and promotes economic growth. By introducing local populations to new foods, arts, and services, refugee entrepreneurs facilitate cultural exchange, which fosters greater social cohesion and acceptance within communities (Vathi & King, 2011). Many refugees establish SMEs, which are crucial for economic growth and job creation, particularly in sectors that support local tourism and cultural industries (OECD, 2018).

**Costs of Providing Services:** Providing essential services like education, healthcare, and social support incurs costs, acknowledged by 91.6% of respondents. These services are necessary to ensure refugees' well-being and integration, but they place additional financial strain on local governments (Betts & Collier, 2017). Addressing these needs can require significant investment, but there is also an opportunity for development agencies and international organizations to step in, which could offset the financial burden on local authorities. Providing essential services such as education, healthcare, and social support to refugees presents substantial costs, a reality recognized by 91.6% of respondents in related studies. These services are critical for the well-being and integration of refugees into host communities, yet they often impose financial burdens on local governments. Betts and Collier (2017) note that the costs associated with these services are substantial, especially when refugee populations are large or concentrated in economically strained areas. However, with appropriate support from international organizations and development agencies, some of this financial pressure can be alleviated, fostering a more sustainable model for both host communities and refugees.

Jordan, a major host of Syrian refugees, has incurred significant costs in providing healthcare and education services. The influx of refugees has increased demand on Jordan's healthcare system, leading to overcrowding in hospitals and clinics. In education, thousands of refugee children have been integrated into the school system, straining resources and teacher availability. To mitigate this burden, the European Union and the World Bank have provided substantial aid, supporting Jordan in expanding its healthcare facilities and increasing its educational capacity (World Bank, 2018). However, despite this assistance, Jordanian communities continue to face challenges due to the financial strain these services impose.

Germany's commitment to supporting refugees includes social support programs such as language courses, vocational training, and housing assistance. While these programs aid in refugees' social and economic integration, they require significant government investment. For instance, in 2015-2016, Germany allocated billions of euros for social services to refugees, which led to public debate on the sustainability of such expenditures. However, international agencies like the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the European Union have played a role in offsetting costs by funding specific programs aimed at faster integration, allowing Germany to focus on long-term benefits despite the initial financial strain (UNHCR, 2017). Uganda has implemented a unique model by providing refugees with access to public healthcare and allowing them to live in settlements rather than camps. While this approach promotes social integration, it also increases healthcare costs for the Ugandan government. To address these expenses, the United Nations and various NGOs have stepped in, providing funding, medical supplies, and personnel to support Uganda's health sector. This international assistance has helped alleviate some of the financial pressure on Uganda, though gaps in service availability remain due to resource limitations (Betts, 2021).

Bangladesh, hosting nearly a million Rohingya refugees, has faced substantial costs in providing educational and health services in refugee camps. With limited national resources, the Bangladeshi government has relied on international organizations such as UNICEF, which has funded educational initiatives for refugee children. While this support has enabled many refugee children to access education, the financial responsibility has still been challenging for Bangladesh, especially as demands for long-term education and vocational education rise up. While providing essential services to refugees is costly, strategic partnerships with international organizations and targeted funding can make these services sustainable. This collaborative approach enables host governments to balance their budgets while ensuring that refugees receive the necessary support for successful integration. Policies focused on long-term capacity-building can further aid host countries by creating service systems that are resilient and capable of meeting the needs of both local and refugee populations.

**Contribution to Government Finances:** Approximately 81.8% of respondents noted that refugees become net contributors to government finances through taxes and other contributions over time. Refugees who find stable employment contribute through taxes, which can help offset initial

settlement costs (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2018). These contributions mean that, over time, refugees can have a net positive fiscal impact on host communities, underscoring the importance of enabling refugees to work legally and integrate into the tax base. Research increasingly shows that refugees, once integrated into the workforce, become net contributors to host countries' finances through taxes and other economic contributions. Approximately 81.8% of respondents in related studies noted this positive fiscal impact, as refugees who secure stable employment contribute through income taxes, consumption taxes, and other forms of revenue. These contributions can help offset the initial costs of resettlement and even provide a surplus, given the right conditions for legal work and economic integration (Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2018).

Turkey, hosting millions of Syrian refugees, has seen an increase in tax revenues linked to refugees who engage in formal employment and entrepreneurship. By 2019, roughly 14% of Syrians of working age had legal employment permits, with others involved in formalized small businesses. Research from the Turkish Statistical Institute suggests that the integration of Syrian refugees into the workforce has added to local tax bases, particularly through consumption taxes on goods and services. This fiscal contribution has helped offset some of the government's costs for refugee support (Del Carpio & Wagner, 2015). Switzerland has long taken a structured approach to integrating refugees into the labor market through vocational training and employment programs. Eritrean and Somali refugees, for example, participate in mandatory language and skills training to prepare them for local jobs. A study by the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration found that, over time, refugees contribute positively to the economy through taxes once they find stable employment. This outcome highlights how integration initiatives can transition refugees into tax-contributing roles, gradually reducing the initial settlement expenses borne by the government (Edo et al., 2018).

**Increased Demand for Housing and Rising Prices:** The research also found that increased demand for housing, acknowledged by 85.7% of respondents, can drive up rents and home prices. This phenomenon is well-documented in refugee-hosting communities, where a rapid influx of people can strain housing supply, impacting affordability for both locals and refugees (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2016). This situation calls for careful urban planning and possibly expanded housing programs to ensure fair and accessible housing. Increased demand for housing in communities hosting refugees has a measurable effect on rents and home prices, a phenomenon confirmed by 85.7% of

respondents in studies focused on refugee-hosting areas. The rapid arrival of refugees can strain the local housing supply, causing rent increases and making housing less affordable for both locals and refugees alike. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2016) underscores this trend, noting that without adequate urban planning or expanded housing initiatives, the pressure on housing can deepen socioeconomic disparities and limit access to stable living conditions. Below are examples illustrating these dynamics in various countries. On the other hand, Lebanon, one of the primary hosts for Syrian refugees, has experienced significant increases in rental prices, especially in areas with high concentrations of refugees, such as the Bekaa Valley and the northern region. With a large population influx, existing housing stocks quickly became insufficient, and landlords raised rents in response to increased demand. This rise in rents has not only affected refugees but also low-income Lebanese households, who have struggled to afford housing due to the competition for limited accommodations (World Bank, 2017). The Lebanese government, in collaboration with NGOs, has attempted to mitigate this pressure by subsidizing rental costs and promoting community housing projects, although challenges remain due to limited resources. Uganda, known for its progressive refugee policies, has faced housing pressures in districts with refugee settlements, such as Arua and Kyangwali. Rapidly increasing demand has led to rent hikes and scarcity in nearby towns, impacting local Ugandans and refugees alike. A study by the Refugee Studies Centre found that this strain on housing also created social tensions between refugee and host communities, exacerbated by the scarcity of affordable options (Betts, 2021). In response, Uganda has partnered with the UNHCR to explore solutions such as building low-cost housing to accommodate both refugees and local low-income families.

**Social Cohesion and Community Building:** Refugees are also recognized as contributing to social cohesion through strong networks, with 97.5% of respondents observing that they enrich the social fabric. Research shows that refugee communities often create supportive social structures that promote trust and collaboration, which are valuable for social and economic integration (Hynie, 2018). Such networks facilitate both cultural exchange and community resilience, providing a foundation for innovation and cooperation in various initiatives, from business to social projects. Refugees contribute significantly to social cohesion by building strong community networks that support social integration and enrich the social fabric of host communities. Approximately 97.5% of respondents in relevant studies have noted this impact, highlighting how these networks foster

trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding. Research shows that the social structures refugees develop create a sense of solidarity, promote resilience, and often inspire cultural exchange and cooperation, all of which are vital for building inclusive societies (Hynie, 2018). These networks have proven beneficial in multiple contexts, from supporting small businesses to facilitating intercultural dialogue.

Syrian refugees in Canada have been recognized for establishing strong community networks that support newcomers and promote social integration. Through community-led associations and initiatives, Syrian refugees have organized language classes, cultural events, and mentorship programs that benefit both refugees and the wider Canadian public. Research by Hynie (2018) highlights that these efforts have fostered intercultural understanding and trust, helping Syrians become active members of Canadian society. By creating inclusive spaces for cultural exchange, they have strengthened social ties between refugees and locals, making communities more resilient and cohesive. Afghan refugees in Pakistan have maintained close-knit community networks, with mutual support structures that are integral to their social and economic well-being. These networks, primarily organized around family ties and community elders, have helped Afghan refugees support each other in securing jobs, housing, and education. A study by Schmeidl and Maley (2018) highlights that Afghan refugee networks in Pakistan not only provide social support but also enable community-led solutions to challenges, such as addressing disputes and organizing communal resources. These social bonds have fostered resilience and social cohesion, especially in areas with limited government assistance. In Sweden, Eritrean and Somali refugee communities have established social networks that not only support their own members but also engage with local Swedish organizations in cultural and educational exchanges. Research by Hedefalk and Malmberg (2019) shows that these networks have become a foundation for various social initiatives, such as cultural heritage events, interfaith dialogues, and mentorship programs for youth. These interactions promote intercultural understanding and help reduce prejudices, enriching Sweden's social fabric and enhancing social cohesion through shared activities and goals.

**Challenges in Integration and Economic Success:** Despite these benefits, language barriers, cultural differences, and limited job training pose challenges for refugees, as noted by 41.4% of respondents. These obstacles can hinder full economic integration, reducing productivity and

leading to social exclusion if unaddressed (Krahn et al., 2000). Offering language and skills training, as well as cultural orientation programs, can mitigate these issues and enable refugees to maximize their economic contributions. The economic impact of Congolese refugees in Kamwenge District offers valuable insights. Refugees contribute to the labor force, support local economies through spending, and introduce economic diversity through unique goods and services. Their presence also fosters community cohesion and resilience, but it simultaneously imposes costs on services and increases demand for housing. Policymakers and local authorities need to balance these dynamics by investing in support structures that facilitate integration while expanding services to accommodate the increased population. Addressing integration challenges, such as language barriers and job training, will maximize refugees' economic potential and foster sustainable economic growth for both refugees and host communities.



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