

# Economic Well-Being of Refugees and Nationals in Kenya: A Comparative Panel Data Analysis

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# **ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF REFUGEES AND NATIONALS IN KENYA: A COMPARATIVE PANEL DATA ANALYSIS**

**BY**

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## **Abstract**

This study addresses the economic well-being of refugees and host communities in Kenya, highlighting a significant gap in existing empirical findings due to the fragmented approach of previous research. By conducting a comprehensive comparative analysis, the study examines the welfare determinants of refugees living in various setups; urban and camp environments alongside Kenyan households. Utilizing longitudinal panel data, the research aims to provide dynamic insights into the factors influencing economic stability and resilience among these populations. The analysis reveals critical discrepancies in service provision and experiences of discrimination faced by refugees, exacerbated by language barriers and legal challenges in accessing essential services.

Key findings indicate that income and economic participation are significant predictors of well-being, with urban refugees demonstrating higher sensitivity to income changes compared to their camp counterparts. Additionally, larger household sizes negatively impact welfare, while education levels and gender dynamics play crucial roles in determining household well-being. The study emphasizes the importance of tailored interventions that enhance economic empowerment, particularly for women-headed households, and improve access to education and health services. Furthermore, fostering partnerships between NGOs and local governments is essential for creating a supportive environment that addresses the unique needs of refugees. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding refugee welfare in Kenya and offers policy recommendations aimed at promoting equity and facilitating the integration of refugees into host communities.

**JEL Classification Numbers:** I30, J10, F22

**Keywords:** Refugee households, Kenyan households, integration, Panel models.

## 1. Introduction

Refugees are usually faced with numerous challenges when forced to leave their home countries as a result of persecution, conflict, or other dire circumstances. When relocating to new lands, they must be able to integrate with the local communities. This study explores the importance of integrating refugees with host communities by comparing the welfare of refugees and host households. It also assesses the relative well-being of refugees residing in urban areas and camps, to enhance equity and justice by ensuring that the livelihoods of refugees are uplifted in areas that are that are not at par with the communities.

The essence of integration is to promote social cohesion and mutual understanding between refugees and host communities. Integration can be enhanced by promoting interactions, sharing experiences, and facilitating cultural exchanges. The objective is to remove barriers, reduce prejudice, build empathy, and encourage co-existence between hosts and refugee households, leading to improved welfare for everyone (Muhumad & Jaji, 2023). Integration of refugees into the host community should promote economic empowerment and self-sufficiency, which will be achieved through the enhancement of job opportunities, education, and skills training. Host communities should support refugees to contribute to the local economy, to reduce their dependency on external aid (Leerkes et al., 2021). The benefit would accrue to all, as a result of increased economic activity, leading to more income and productivity.

Refugees are also entitled to lead a dignified life, and favorable policies would enable them to get access to essential services like healthcare, education, and social support systems. Rather than bundling refugees into inhuman camps, integration with host communities gives the refugees the ability to benefit from existing institutions and infrastructure that are usually concentrated in the urban areas as compared to the camps (Bellino & Dryden-Peterson, 2019). Access to basic needs would promote the welfare of refugee households and ensure that their fundamental basic needs are met. Integration would further positively impact the mental and psychological well-being of refugees, giving them a sense of belonging, stability, and hope for the future (Alix-Garcia et al., 2018). The traditional model of assembling refugees in camps may cause refugees to lose purpose, which may result in mental health challenges as a result of limited social interaction and opportunities.

Interaction between the host community and the refugees brings about cultural enrichment and diversity to the local communities. Encouraging host communities to embrace different perspectives, traditions, and experiences, would promote inclusivity and promote tolerance. When communities exchange their cultures, they realize more social cohesion, may stimulate creativity, and contribute to the overall welfare of the locals and the refugees (Şimşek, 2020), leading to improved long-term prospects such as equality in access to education and employment opportunities. If the refugees are allowed to settle in urban areas with adequate rights, they should have access to better formal education and vocational training, enabling them to develop skills and pursue meaningful careers (Şimşek, 2020).

The economic well-being of refugees is a fundamental issue that has attracted considerable attention in recent times, due to the ever-increasing number of displaced persons worldwide. Kenya has been at the center of the refugee challenge due to a large number of forced displacements happening in neighboring countries such as Somalia, South Sudan, and Ethiopia (Nyirongo, 2022). The process of assimilating refugees into Kenyan societies is complex and hinges on a variety of factors such as access to resources, legal status, and social capital.

Studies on the economic well-being of refugees (e.g., Taylor et al., 2016; Hone & Marisennayya, 2019; Jebessa & Boso, 2020; Traore & Traore, 2023) have yielded valuable insights into factors that influence the welfare of a household. For example, research has emphasized the importance of education, employment opportunities, and the ability to access financial services in molding the economic trajectories of refugee households. These studies have emphasized the importance of policy interventions, like the provision of legal documentation, and adoption of favorable regulatory environments, and the enhancement of refugees' abilities to participate deeply in the economic life of their host countries.

A gap in the existing empirical findings arises from the presentation of these problems in a fragmented approach. That is, research focuses on specific well-being or a specific refugee set-up. Hence a more comprehensive analysis of these findings that would take into account various factors over time and across refugee settings would give a wider view of the plight of different household set-ups. This study seeks to fill this gap by carrying out a comparative analysis that covers household welfare determinants, considering refugees living in different setups and host

communities in Kenya. The analysis uses longitudinal data, to enhance the reliability of the relationships of interest.

Refugees in different situations may be presented with different circumstances and opportunities that affect their well-being. A refugee household in an urban set-up may have access to better education, employment, and markets, but they will likely be faced with higher costs of living and more competition for scarce resources (Kouni, 2018). Conversely, a refugee household in a camp setting may be provided with the opportunity to engage in agricultural activities to provide economic livelihood, but this access may be limited due to cultural, financial, and legal rights. In addition, since the camps are situated in rural areas, refugees have limited access to services and infrastructure. Combing through these disparities and accounting for the contextual differences is essential for designing effective support strategies (Boeyink & Falisse, 2022).

Some studies have also focused on the impact of social and cultural factors on the economic well-being of refugees (Alix-Garcia et al., 2018; Boeyink & Falisse, 2022; Kouni, 2018; Leerkes et al., 2021; Lloyd et al., 2013). The factors of interest were centered around the ability to integrate with host communities, the possibility of refugee families establishing social networks, and the potential of locals and immigrants to meld their cultures. These aspects are assumed to enhance the welfare of refugee households, either directly or indirectly. While other work has looked at these possibilities individually, this study tries to underscore the importance of a holistic approach to explain the factors that affect the economic and social dimensions of such households.

There is a need for more robust empirical evidence on factors that affect the well-being of refugees, especially in Kenya which is centrally placed and relatively peaceful, and hosts the majority of refugees in the East African Region. To address this gap, this study will leverage the use of panel data to track the changes in the welfare of households over time, measured through their consumption expenditure. This will provide dynamic insights into factors that lead to economic stability and resilience among refugee populations. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- i. What factors explain the variation in the well-being of urban and camp refugee households in Kenya?

- ii. What factors lead to differences in the well-being of local and refugee households in Kenya?
- iii. What measures can be adopted to enhance the equity and assimilation of refugees with host communities in Kenya?

This study assesses the welfare of refugee households with specific measures in mind, including the total income of the household, education, and training, food security, access to health services, and access to information, which are all captured by household total consumption. The findings will help to inform the UNHCR and the management of refugee camps to focus on areas that are needed to improve the welfare of households living in refugee camps. The host government can identify specific measures that it may address in terms of policy and budget allocation to ease the difficulties that refugees experience, especially in education, access to information, and medical services.

Comparative analysis of urban and camp refugees, and Kenyan and refugee households is key in highlighting discrepancies in service provision and incidences of discrimination, especially as refugees are likely to have language barriers, legal difficulties in accessing services, and experiences with discrimination. This analysis may help in recommending intervention measures that facilitate refugees' training, employment, and access to health services.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Theoretical literature**

Assimilation and integration theories are essential to understanding the well-being of refugees. According to Gordon's (1964) theory of assimilation, immigrants and refugees go through several stages before fully assimilating into the host society. This covers both acculturation; the process of assimilating into the host nation's culture; and structural assimilation, which entails joining the clubs and institutions of the host society. In a similar vein, integration; in which refugees keep their cultural identity while adopting that of their host; is thought to facilitate greater psychological and sociocultural adjustment, according to Berry's (1997) acculturation model (Laubenthal, 2023).

The significance of economic empowerment and self-reliance for refugees is underscored by the economic empowerment and self-reliance research. According to Sen's (1999) capability

approach, a person's ability or freedom to do worthwhile functions determines their level of well-being. This translates to the freedom to engage in activities that generate income, obtain education, and participate in the economy in the context of refugees (Rastogi, 2019).

Becker's (1964) concept of human capital is essential in understanding the role of education and competencies in the well-being of refugees. The theory posits that expenditures on schooling increase an individual's potential earnings and output. Investing in the education system and vocational training can improve the human capital of refugees thereby their job prospects and economic situation (Kaabel, 2018).

This study uses household consumption expenditure as an indicator of welfare. According to the relative income hypothesis by Duesenberry (1949), consumption is determined by group consumption standards and absolute and relative incomes. This suggests that the well-being of refugees can be affected not only through their private consumption but also through comparisons with the host population (Strother, 2020).

## **2.2 Empirical Literature Review**

Bak-Klimek et al. (2015) study systematically reviewed and meta-analyzed the literature to identify the determinants of well-being among international economic immigrants. The research addresses the problem of understanding the factors that contribute to the well-being of immigrants who migrate for economic reasons. The study period covers a comprehensive review of the literature up to 2014, utilizing a systematic approach to identify relevant studies. The analysis employed a meta-analytic method to synthesize the findings from various studies. The determinants of well-being examined include socio-economic factors, social support, acculturation, discrimination, and mental health. The findings highlight the importance of employment, income, and social integration in predicting well-being. Economic stability and access to resources are found to be significant predictors of overall well-being.

Additionally, social support and positive acculturation experiences are associated with better mental health outcomes. Conversely, experiences of discrimination and poor acculturation are linked to lower levels of well-being. The conclusion emphasizes the multifaceted nature of well-being among international economic immigrants. The study suggests that policies and interventions should target socio-economic integration, social support, and anti-discrimination

measures to enhance the well-being of immigrants (Bak-Klimek et al., 2015). They provided valuable insights into the complex determinants of well-being among international economic immigrants and underscored the need for more comprehensive and supportive approaches to immigration policy.

The host plays a key role in the welfare of refugees, Kogan et al. (2018) investigated the factors that contribute to the life satisfaction of immigrants in 18 European countries, focusing on the influence of host-country characteristics. The research addresses the problem of understanding which aspects of the host country are most significant in determining immigrants' overall well-being. They utilized data from surveys and databases tracking immigrant populations. The analysis employed a quantitative approach, using statistical methods such as regression analysis to examine the relationship between host-country characteristics and immigrants' life satisfaction. Key factors identified include economic stability, lower unemployment rates, social cohesion, reduced discrimination, and inclusive immigration and welfare policies. The conclusion emphasizes the multifaceted nature of immigrant life satisfaction and suggests that policymakers should focus on creating economic opportunities, promoting social cohesion, and implementing inclusive policies to improve the well-being of immigrants.

Refugee assimilation headache by and large transcends to Africa, Alloush et al.(2017) examined economic life in three Congolese refugee camps in Rwanda and the interactions between refugees and local host-country economies within a 10-km radius around each camp. They looked at economic activities and challenges faced by refugees in camps, focusing on their resilience and coping mechanisms. The research utilized qualitative and quantitative data, including surveys and interviews. The analysis employed a mixed-methods approach to explore diverse economic activities, such as informal trade and entrepreneurship, and the barriers refugees encounter, like limited resources and legal restrictions. Despite these challenges, refugees demonstrated resilience through adaptive strategies and social networks. The study concludes that supporting refugees' economic agency and self-reliance is crucial, highlighting the need for policies that facilitate economic empowerment in camp settings.

To establish whether refugees can lead a dignified life in the host country, Yotebieng et al.(2019) study examined the well-being of urban refugees in Yaoundé, Cameroon, questioning whether they can achieve well-being while being 'out of place. The research used qualitative data from

ethnographic methods, including in-depth interviews and participant observation. The analysis employed a thematic approach to identify key patterns and insights. Findings revealed that despite facing challenges such as legal insecurity, economic hardship, and social exclusion, refugees demonstrated resilience by adapting to their new environment, building social networks, and pursuing opportunities for education and employment. The study concludes that resilience is crucial for refugees to navigate displacement and strive for well-being, highlighting the need for supportive policies and interventions that recognize and facilitate their strengths and capabilities.

The refugees equally affect the welfare of the host community, Alix-Garcia et al.(2018) examined the impact of the Kakuma refugee camp on its host community in Kenya, exploring whether refugee camps benefit or burden hosts. The research utilized a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews. The analysis focused on economic, social, and environmental dimensions, revealing a complex interplay of positive and negative effects. While the camp stimulated local economic activities and created job opportunities, it also led to increased competition for resources, strained local services, and environmental degradation. The study concludes that refugee camps can bring economic benefits but also pose significant challenges, emphasizing the need for balanced and inclusive policies that consider the needs of both refugees and host communities.

Relative income affects a household's wellness in that they want to fit into their surrounding, Stranges et al.(2021) examined the impact of relative income on the subjective well-being of migrants in Europe, addressing the question of whether income compared to the native population affects migrants' life satisfaction and happiness. The study period spans from July 2019 to September 2020, with data sourced from surveys or databases tracking migrant populations. The analysis employed statistical methods to explore the correlation between relative income and various indicators of well-being. Findings indicate that higher relative income is associated with greater life satisfaction and happiness among migrants, while lower relative income is linked to dissatisfaction and potential mental health issues. The study also considers moderating factors such as country of origin, duration of stay, and social integration. The conclusion underscores the importance of relative income in migrant well-being and suggests that policies should focus on reducing income disparities to improve migrant well-being.

The protection, mobility, and livelihood challenges of displaced Iraqis in urban settings in Jordan were studied by Meral et al. (2022). The research was based on qualitative data collected through

interviews and participant observation. The authors analyze the thematic content of their data to understand the integration process of refugees in urban areas. They concluded that while urban refugees face significant barriers, including legal restrictions, economic hardships, and social exclusion, they also utilize various coping mechanisms such as social networks and informal employment to navigate these challenges. This study highlights the resilience of urban refugees and the importance of supportive policies to facilitate their integration.

Refugees undergo diverse situations based on where they settle, Douglas (2022) explored the experiences of Congolese refugees in Nairobi, Kenya, focusing on their pursuit of well-being and inclusion amidst displacement. The research addresses the problem of understanding how displaced individuals navigate their new urban environment and strive for a better life. The research utilized qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and ethnographic methods. The analysis employed a thematic approach to identify patterns and insights from the data. The study highlights the challenges faced by Congolese refugees, including economic hardship, legal insecurity, and social exclusion. Despite these obstacles, the study showcases the resilience and agency of the refugees as they engage in various livelihood strategies, build social networks, and seek opportunities for education and employment. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of tailored policies and interventions that support the specific needs of displaced populations, fostering inclusion and enabling refugees to pursue their vision of the good life. His research provides valuable insights into the dynamics of refugee well-being and integration in urban contexts, underscoring the need for more inclusive and supportive approaches to refugee assistance.

This study captures the diversity and richness of the experience that refugee and host households go through. This study will use panel data to assess the welfare of refugees and compare their welfare to that of Kenyan households to come up with a more detailed comparative analysis of the factors that influence the well-being of refugee households over time. More importantly, these comparisons of welfare between refugees in various set-ups and that of Kenyan households are likely to enable the generation and adoption of policy recommendations that would enhance equity, hasten the assimilation of refugees to the host communities, and ultimately improve their socioeconomic situation in Kenya.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Theoretical Model

The dynamics of integration, the growth of human capital, and the extension of capabilities throughout time should all be reflected in the social and economic well-being. Let  $W_{it}$  represent the socioeconomic well-being of household  $i$  at time ( $t$ ) (Bai, 2009). The exogenous factors can be represented by  $X_{it}$ . The following is a representation of the theoretical model.

$$W_{it} = f(X_{it}) \quad 1.$$

We can enlarge the function to include the theoretical viewpoints in the model:

$$W_{it} = \alpha_i + \gamma_t + x'_{it}\beta + \varepsilon_{it} \quad 2.$$

where:

- $\alpha_i$  is the time-invariant, unobserved individual effect that encapsulates the integration and cultural elements unique to every home.
- $\gamma_t$  is the time-specific effect.
- $x'_{it}$  is a vector of exogenous variables.
- $\beta$  is a vector of the coefficients for the exogenous variables.
- $\varepsilon_{it}$  is the idiosyncratic error term.

Unobserved heterogeneity (individual specific effects- characteristics unique to each household) between households  $\alpha_i$ , which could be connected with the explanatory variables, can be controlled using the panel data format; this is a typical problem when working with cross-sectional data (Bai, 2009).

#### 3.2 The Random Effects Model (RE)

Because most of the variables under consideration are time-invariant, the analysis opted to adopt the random effect (RE) model which, is appropriate to avoid loss of information associated with fixed effect models. The RE model assumes that the individual-specific effects  $\alpha_i$  and time-specific effect  $\gamma_t$  are distributed independently of the regressors, and hence can be included in the error term. All of the observations have the same slope parameter and a composite error term  $\varepsilon_{it} = \alpha_i + \gamma_t + e_{it}$  (Bai, 2009). The model can hence be written as;

$$W_{it} = x'_{it}\beta + (\alpha_i + \gamma_t + u_{it}) \quad 3.$$

### 3.3 The Empirical Model

The study estimated the following random effects model:

$$W_{it} = \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \beta_1 E_{it} + \beta_2 Y_{it} + \beta_4 H_{it} + \beta_5 X_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \quad 4.$$

Where:

- $W_{it}$  is the socioeconomic well-being of household  $i$  at time  $t$ , measured by aggregate consumption expenditure adjusted for household size using a deflator or equivalence scale.
- $E_{it}$  is the education level of the household head.
- $Y_{it}$  is the household income.
- $H_{it}$  is the household size.
- $X_{it}$  is a vector of exogenous variables, which include location (urban/camp), gender of the household head, and number of economic activities undertaken by a household (participation).
- $\alpha_i$  is the individual-specific effect
- $\gamma_t$  is the time-specific effect
- $\beta_i$  are the coefficients representing the effects of the respective variables on well-being.
- $\varepsilon_{it}$  is the idiosyncratic error term.

Panel data approaches were used to estimate this model, and diagnostic tests were applied to determine the most appropriate of the models. Heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation in the empirical model were examined, and robust standard errors were applied to minimise the effect of these problems.

The study quantifies education, income, household size, household head age, and level of participation in economic activities that affect the well-being of refugee households in Kenya by estimating this empirical model. The results can be used to guide policy recommendations meant to improve refugees' well-being by fostering their integration and independence.

### 3.4 Data

#### 3.4.1 Refugee household data

The data on Kenyan households were retrieved from the World Bank website and those on refugee households were retrieved from the UNHCR website data repository. The data was collected between May 2020 and May 2022 after every two months, the descriptive statistics for the refugee household panel data are given in Table 3.1.

The household aggregate consumption excluded expenditure on durable goods and was adjusted to reflect household size and composition using a deflator or equivalence scale called the adult equivalent (AE) deflator (Schmidt et al., 2021). The household AE is given by:

$$AE = (A + \alpha K)^\theta$$

Where  $A$  is the number of adults in the household,  $K$  is the number of children,  $\alpha$  is the cost of children, and  $\theta$  is the degree of economies of scale (Meyer & Mittag, 2019). To construct  $\alpha$  and  $\theta$  depends on the context of the analysis but Deaton and Zaidi (2012) proposed that  $\alpha$  should range between 0.3-0.5 for developing countries and higher for developed ones, and near unity for  $\theta$  because of the large proportion spent on food (private) consumption in the contexts. the equivalence scale shall also be applied to household income to achieve uniformity in measurement because large households may have higher consumption, and income in aggregate depending on the composition of the household. For this analysis  $\alpha$  applied was 0.4 and  $\theta$  applied was 0.9 because Kenya is a developing country.

**Table 3.1: Descriptive statistics for refugee household**

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
ln consumption	10,143	6.496	1.305	2.304	11.322
ln income	10,143	5.468	1.993	2.12	11.952
Urban (yes=urban)	10,143	0.238	0.426	0	1
Household size	10,143	5.289	3.520	1	25
Household head gender (male=1)	10,143	0.664	0.472	0	1
Household head age	10,143	37.096	12.672	18	96
Household head age square	10,143	1536.707	1113.874	324	9216
Household head education	10,143	2.203	1.120	1	4
Economic participation	10,143	1.838	0.964	0	3
Government help (yes=1)	10,143	0.048	0.214	0	1

NGO help (yes=1)	10,143	0.235	0.424	0	1 <sup>1</sup>
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**Source: UNHCR data**

Data in Table 3.1 were collected between May 2020 to July 2022 after every two months in seven waves, the mean for the log of household consumption is 6.50, with a maximum of 11.32 and a minimum of 2.30. Log income has a mean of 5.47 with a maximum of 11.95 and a minimum of 2.00. of the total refugee households, 23.8% live in urban centers The household size has a mean of 5.29 with a maximum of 25 and a minimum of 1. The household head age ranges from a maximum of 96 to a minimum of 18, the mean age is 37.10. The assistance that these households received from the Government and NGOs was also captured, 4.8% received government help and 23.5% received assistance from NGOs.

### 3.4.2 Kenyan household data

Data were also collected for Kenyan households in both urban and rural areas. The descriptive statistics for the Kenyan household panel data are given in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Descriptive statistics for Kenyan household**

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
ln consumption	35,685	6.311	1.167	2.303	12.176
ln income	35,685	6.098	2.475	1.605	13.62
urban	35,685	0.684	0.465	0	1
Household size	35,685	3.964	2.210	1	27
Household head gender (male=1)	35,685	0.530	0.499	0	1
Household head age	35,685	42.930	14.103	18	100
Household head age square	35,685	2041.869	1371.588	324	10000
Household head education	35,685	1.475	0.969	1	4
Economic participation	35,685	1.730	1.008	0	3
Government help (yes=1)	35,685	0.247	0.431	0	1
NGO help (yes=1)	35,685	0.134	0.341	0	1

**Source: Authors working using Word Bank data**

The mean for the natural log of household consumption is 6.31, with a maximum of 12.18 and a minimum of 2.30. The natural log of income has a mean of 6.10 with a minimum of 1.61 and a

<sup>1</sup> The household head education ranges from 1 to 4 representing various categories of education completed by the household head (1=primary education and below, 2=secondary education, 3=college education, and 4=graduate and postgraduate level). The households were also asked whether they engaged in any economic activity ranging from 0 for none, and 1, 2, and 3 indicating as to whether the household was agricultural, business, or employment with 2 and 3 indicating a combination of two or three

maximum of 13.62. The households were recorded as to whether they reside in urban or rural areas, 68% of the Kenyan households interviewed reside in urban centers. The household size ranges from 1 to 27, men head 53% of Kenyan households, and their average age is 43. The households were also asked whether they received any assistance from the government, 24.7% of the Kenyan households received assistance from the Kenyan government, and only 13.4% of the Kenyan households received aid from NGOs.

### **3.4.3 Limitations of the Data Sets**

The household survey may not adequately capture a household's consumption as it might not include a full consumption module that would be helpful to construct a consumption aggregate to serve as a proxy for household welfare. The phone interviews exclude the poorest households, and may thus be representative only of households with access to mobile phones and phone connectivity (Shepherd et al., 2019). They also rely on existing phone lists, which may not be a representation of the entire population. As a result, the data collected may be biased.

There are chances that some target interviewees may fail to respond to unknown numbers or decline to participate, leading to non-response bias. Phone surveys may be designed to be shorter to avoid respondents' fatigue, limiting the depth and details of the information collected. The questions asked may be oversimplified for quick response and the interviewee may opt not to respond to sensitive questions, leading to inaccuracies in responses. These can also be compounded with self-reporting bias where they may respond to suit their given circumstances.

Household income is very difficult to measure accurately using household surveys, which suffer from measurement error and selection bias; respondents may not be able to accurately remember their income, and rich respondents are typically less likely to reply. Administrative data, such as tax records, would be more accurate but are not readily available in Kenya.

## **4. Data analysis**

### **4.1 Variation of welfare between urban and camp refugee households**

A comparison of refugee households' welfare residing in urban areas or refugee camps is carried out using separate regression equations to establish how each variable of the study impacts on the welfare of households in urban and camp situations. Since most of the variables in the regression

are not continuous variables but categorical and some household characteristics are static across time, this study mainly employs a random effect model to avoid loss of key variables of interest in the analysis. The data was subjected to a multicollinearity test and no VIF value was worrisome.

**Table 4.1: Comparison of welfare between urban and camp refugees: The dependent variable is ln Household Consumption Expenditure**

VARIABLES	(1) Urban refugee households	(2) Camp refugee households
In income	0.130*** (0.009)	0.246*** (0.006)
Household size	-0.083*** (0.006)	-0.118*** (0.003)
Household head gender (male=1)	-0.137*** (0.038)	-0.058*** (0.022)
Age	0.001 (0.006)	0.001 (0.004)
Age squared	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Secondary education	0.942*** (0.093)	0.394*** (0.046)
College	0.694*** (0.093)	0.448*** (0.051)
Graduate and postgraduate	0.858*** (0.096)	0.891*** (0.051)
1. Economic activity	0.449*** (0.094)	0.671*** (0.045)
2. Economic activities	0.836*** (0.102)	0.661*** (0.050)
3. Economic activities	0.796*** (0.107)	0.372*** (0.054)
Government help (yes=1)	-0.043 (0.095)	0.002 (0.033)
NGO help (yes=1)	0.130** (0.059)	0.401*** (0.018)
Constant	5.507*** (0.133)	4.615*** (0.087)
Observations	2,411	7,732
Number of household	613	2,037
Wald chi2	4,670.73 (0.000)	15,719.16 (0.000)
sigma_u	0.246	0.330
sigma_e	0.615	0.609
rho	0.138	0.227

**Standard errors in parentheses**  
**\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1**

From the regression output, a 1% increase in income yields an expected increase in per capita consumption of urban refugees by 13.0% and is significant at 1% which is lower than that of camp refugee households, which is at 24.6% at 1% significance level. This can also be viewed in terms of elasticities, since the coefficients are less than 1 for both setups, they both spend their income on essential goods. A large household tends to have a lower welfare level than a household with fewer members. An extra member of a household reduces the welfare of the urban refugee household by 8.3% which is significant at 1% compared to 11.8% for camp refugees which is also significant at 1%. Households led by women have higher welfare in both urban and camp settings. Women-led urban and camp refugee households have 13.7% and 5.8% higher welfare compared to households led by men and are both significant at 5%.

The results indicate that households with higher levels of education tend to have higher levels of welfare relative to those with only primary education and below. Generally, as the education level increases the higher the welfare of the household, but the levels are higher for the urban households compared to camp households. A household that is engaged in economic activities has a higher welfare than one that is not engaged, a household engaged in in one or more than one economic activity has a higher welfare compared to a household that is not engaged in any economic activity. Finally, a household that received assistance from NGOs has higher welfare compared to the ones that received none. The welfare of camp refugee households increases more than that of urban households with support from NGOs.

#### **4.2 Comparison of welfare between Kenyan and refugee households**

A second comparison was conducted to establish the variation in the welfare of Kenyan households to that of refugee households. Again in both cases, the variables are predominantly invariant over the study period and to avoid dropping of variables by fixed effects model, the regressions will stick to random effect models. The data was subjected to a multicollinearity test and no VIF value was worrisome. The comparison is presented in Table 4.2:

**Table 4.2: Determinants of Welfare among Refugees and Kenyans: The dependent variable is the natural natural log of Household Consumption Expenditure**

VARIABLES	(3) Refugee households	(4) Kenyan households
In income	0.166*** (0.005)	0.079*** (0.001)
Household size	-0.097*** (0.003)	-0.188*** (0.002)
Household head gender (male=1)	-0.106*** (0.019)	-0.004 (0.009)
Age	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.005*** (0.002)
Age square	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
2. Secondary education	0.854*** (0.022)	0.841*** (0.014)
3. College	0.923*** (0.023)	0.906*** (0.014)
4. Graduate and postgraduate	0.905*** (0.023)	0.925*** (0.012)
1. Economic activity	0.730*** (0.027)	0.927*** (0.012)
2. Economic activities	1.184*** (0.030)	1.029*** (0.012)
3. Economic activities	0.985*** (0.037)	1.068*** (0.012)
Government help (yes=1)	0.009 (0.030)	-0.026** (0.012)
NGO help (yes=1)	0.232*** (0.016)	0.011 (0.016)
Constant	4.693*** (0.073)	5.689*** (0.040)
Observations	10,143	35,685
Number of households	2,558	7,679
Wald chi2	23,277.31 (0.000)	75,813.42 (0.000)
sigma_u	0.316	0.292
sigma_e	0.587	0.533
rho	0.224	0.230

**Standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1**

The regression results show that a 1% increase in income increases household consumption expenditure for Kenyan households by 7.9% at 1% significance level compared with a 16.6%

increase for refugee households at a 1% significance level. Again, in both setups, the income elasticities of demand are less than 1, hence they spend their income on consumption of essential goods. An increase in a member of a household reduces consumption by 18.8% for Kenyan households at a 1% significance level and by 9.7% for refugee households at a 1% significance level. In a refugee setup, households led by women have a higher welfare than those led by men by 10.6% at a 1% significance level, the effect is insignificant for the Kenyan household. Aging of the household head decreases the welfare of the Kenyan household by 0.5% at a 1% significance level but the effect is significant for a refugee household.

Households, where the household head has higher education, have a higher level of welfare compared to the ones with only primary education and below. The effect is slightly higher for refugee households. Households that engage in economic activities have higher welfare compared to the ones that are not engaged in any economic activity. The more a household is involved in economic activities the better their welfare, this underscores the importance of integration. Kenyan households are engaged in more economic activities compared to the refugees. Refugee households that receive assistance from NGOs have higher welfare compared to the ones that do not receive any assistance. This coefficient is insignificant for Kenyan households.

### **4.3 Discussion of the findings**

#### **4.3.1 Urban and Camp Refugee Comparison**

The regression analysis reveals a significant disparity in the impact of income on the welfare of urban and camp refugee households. This suggests that camp refugees may rely more heavily on their income for essential goods, indicating a higher elasticity of consumption in camp settings. Research by Alloush et al. (2017) supports this finding, highlighting that refugees in camps often face limited economic opportunities, making their consumption more sensitive to income changes.

Conversely, urban refugees, while having better access to resources, encounter higher living costs and competition, which may limit their ability to fully benefit from income increases. These findings underscore the need for targeted economic interventions that can enhance income-generating activities, particularly for urban refugees who face unique challenges in their environments.

In addition, larger household sizes negatively affect welfare in both urban and camp settings. This trend aligns with existing literature, such as that by Kouni (2018), which suggests that larger households often face resource dilution, leading to lower per capita consumption. The more pronounced impact of household size on camp refugees may reflect the limited resources available in these settings, where families often rely on shared amenities and services. Therefore, policies aimed at supporting family planning and resource management could be beneficial in improving the welfare of refugee households, particularly in camps where resources are already scarce.

The gender of the household head significantly influences welfare outcomes, with women-led households in both urban and camp settings reporting higher welfare levels. This finding is consistent with research by Quisumbing and Maluccio (2003), which emphasizes the positive impact of female leadership on household welfare, often attributed to women's resource management skills and community support networks. The resilience demonstrated by women in refugee settings is crucial for fostering economic stability and social cohesion. Therefore, empowering women through targeted programs and support can enhance the overall welfare of refugee households, promoting gender equity and community integration.

Education emerges as a critical determinant of welfare, with households led by individuals with higher education levels enjoying better welfare outcomes compared to those with only primary education and below. The regression results show that urban households benefit more from

education than their camp counterparts, indicating that access to quality education is more readily available in urban settings. This finding aligns with previous studies, such as those by Dryden-Peterson (2019), which emphasize the role of education in enhancing economic opportunities and social mobility for refugees. To address these disparities, policies should focus on improving educational access and quality for refugees in urban and camp settings, ensuring that all households can leverage education to improve welfare.

Engagement in economic activities significantly boosts welfare for both urban and camp refugees. This highlights the importance of economic participation to enhance welfare, corroborating existing literature that underscores the necessity of financial integration for refugees like Laubenthal (2023). However, urban refugees often face barriers such as legal restrictions and competition, which can hinder their ability to engage fully in economic activities. Therefore, fostering an enabling environment that supports economic participation for refugees, particularly in urban areas, is essential for improving their overall well-being.

The refugee households that receive assistance from NGOs report higher welfare levels compared to those without support, with camp refugees benefiting more significantly from such assistance. This finding is consistent with previous research by Jacobsen (2002), which highlights the role of NGOs in providing essential services and resources to enhance refugee welfare. The disparity in the impact of NGO assistance between urban and camp settings suggests that while urban refugees may have more access to economic opportunities, they still require support to navigate the complexities of urban living. Therefore, strengthening partnerships between NGOs and local governments can facilitate better resource allocation and support for both urban and camp refugees, ultimately improving their socio-economic conditions.

### **4.3.2 Comparison of Refugee and Kenyan Households**

The regression analysis indicates a notable difference in the impact of income on household consumption expenditure between refugee and Kenyan households. This suggests that refugees may allocate a larger proportion of their income to essential goods, reflecting their precarious economic situation. Previous studies, such as those by Mastrorillo et al. (2024), have highlighted the critical role of income in shaping the welfare of refugee households, emphasizing that economic opportunities significantly influence their quality of life. The higher elasticity of consumption among refugees underscores the need for targeted economic interventions to enhance their income-generating capabilities, particularly in urban settings where competition for resources is intense.

The household size negatively impacts welfare for both refugee and Kenyan households, but the effect is more pronounced for Kenyans. This finding aligns with existing literature, such as that by Ager & Strang (2008), which suggests larger households often face resource dilution, leading to lower per capita consumption. The lower impact of household size on refugee welfare may indicate a greater reliance on shared resources or support networks within refugee communities. Therefore, policies aimed at improving resource management and support systems for larger households could be beneficial in enhancing the welfare of both refugee and Kenyan households.

The gender of the household head significantly influences welfare outcomes, with women-led refugee households reporting higher welfare than those led by men. This finding is consistent with research by Quisumbing and Maluccio (2003), which emphasizes the positive impact of female leadership on household welfare, often attributed to women's resource management skills and community support networks. The resilience demonstrated by women in refugee settings is crucial for fostering economic stability and social cohesion. Therefore, empowering women through

targeted programs and support can enhance the overall welfare of both refugee and Kenyan households, promoting gender equity and community integration.

Education emerges as a critical determinant of welfare, with households led by individuals with higher education levels enjoying better welfare outcomes compared to those with only primary education and below. The regression results show that Kenyan households benefit more from education than their refugee counterparts, indicating that access to quality education is more readily available in Kenya. This finding aligns with previous studies, such as those by Dryden-Peterson (2019), that emphasize the role of education in enhancing economic opportunities and social mobility for refugees. To address these disparities, policies should focus on improving educational access and quality for refugees, ensuring that all households can leverage education as a pathway to improved welfare.

Engagement in economic activities significantly boosts welfare for both refugee and Kenyan households. This highlights the importance of economic participation to enhance welfare, corroborating existing literature, such as that by Betts et al. (Betts et al., 2023), which underscores the necessity of economic integration for refugees. However, urban refugees often face barriers such as legal restrictions and competition, which can hinder their ability to engage fully in economic activities. Therefore, fostering an enabling environment that supports economic participation for refugees, particularly in urban areas, is essential for improving their overall well-being.

The analysis indicates that refugee households receiving assistance from NGOs report higher welfare levels compared to those without support, with the effect being more pronounced for camp refugees. This finding is consistent with previous research by Jacobsen (2002), which highlights the role of NGOs in providing essential services and resources to enhance refugee welfare. The

disparity in the impact of NGO assistance between urban and camp settings suggests that while urban refugees may have more access to economic opportunities, they still require support to navigate the complexities of urban living. Therefore, strengthening partnerships between NGOs and local governments can facilitate better resource allocation and support for both urban and camp refugees, ultimately improving their socio-economic conditions.

## **5. Conclusions and policy recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

The findings of this study reveal significant disparities in the welfare of refugee households in urban and camp settings in Kenya. Urban refugees generally have better access to resources but face higher living costs and competition, which can limit their economic opportunities. In contrast, camp refugees exhibit a higher sensitivity of consumption to income changes, indicating that their welfare is more directly affected by fluctuations in income. These differences highlight the need for tailored interventions that consider the unique challenges faced by refugees in various environments.

Income emerges as a critical determinant of welfare for both urban and camp refugees, with camp households showing a greater elasticity of consumption. This suggests that camp refugees rely more heavily on their income for essential goods, making them particularly vulnerable to economic fluctuations. The study underscores the importance of enhancing income-generating opportunities for refugees, particularly in camp settings where economic activities may be limited. Targeted economic empowerment programs can help improve their overall welfare.

Household size also plays a significant role in determining welfare outcomes, with larger households experiencing a negative impact on per capita consumption. The findings indicate that urban households are less affected by household size compared to their camp counterparts, which

may reflect differences in resource availability and management strategies. Policies aimed at supporting resource management and family planning could be beneficial in mitigating the adverse effects of larger household sizes, ultimately improving the welfare of both urban and camp refugees.

The gender of the household head significantly influences welfare, with women-led households reporting better outcomes. This finding emphasizes the importance of empowering women within refugee communities, as they often play a crucial role in resource management and community support. Programs that focus on enhancing the economic stability of women-headed households can lead to improved welfare for entire families. Gender-sensitive policies are essential for fostering equity and promoting the well-being of vulnerable groups within refugee populations.

Finally, the role of education and engagement in economic activities is critical for enhancing welfare among refugees. Urban refugees benefit more from education than their camp counterparts, highlighting the need for improved access to quality education in all settings. Additionally, engagement in economic activities significantly boosts welfare for both groups, underscoring the necessity of facilitating economic participation. Strengthening partnerships between NGOs and local governments can ensure that refugees receive the support they need to thrive, ultimately contributing to their integration and well-being in host communities.

## **5.2 Policy recommendations**

To address the disparities in welfare between urban and camp refugee households, targeted economic empowerment programs should be implemented. These initiatives can focus on enhancing income-generating opportunities through vocational training, microfinance, and

entrepreneurship support. By equipping refugees with the necessary skills and resources, they can better navigate the economic landscape and improve their overall welfare. Such programs should be tailored to the specific needs of both urban and camp refugees, ensuring that they are relevant and effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by each group.

Improving access to quality education for refugee children and adults is essential for enhancing their long-term welfare. Educational initiatives should be established in both urban and camp settings, with a focus on providing scholarships, training for teachers, and the development of educational facilities. Collaborations between NGOs, local governments, and educational institutions can facilitate these efforts. By prioritizing education, refugees can gain the skills and knowledge necessary to secure better economic opportunities, ultimately contributing to their social mobility and integration into host communities.

Support for women-headed households is crucial for improving overall welfare within refugee communities. Programs specifically designed to empower women should be developed, focusing on access to resources, training, and support networks. These initiatives can enhance women's economic stability and foster a sense of community among female refugees. Additionally, promoting gender equity through targeted policies can help address the unique challenges faced by women in refugee settings, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for entire households and contributing to social cohesion.

Resource management strategies should be implemented to mitigate the negative impacts of larger household sizes on welfare. Educational programs that teach effective resource allocation and family planning can help families manage their resources more efficiently. Additionally, community support systems can be established to assist larger households, ensuring that they have

access to the necessary resources and services. By addressing the challenges associated with household size, both urban and camp refugees can experience improved welfare outcomes.

Finally, fostering stronger partnerships between NGOs and local governments is essential for ensuring that refugee households receive adequate support. Collaborative efforts can facilitate better resource allocation and enhance the effectiveness of programs aimed at improving refugee welfare. By working together, stakeholders can create a more supportive environment for refugees, addressing their unique needs and challenges. This collaborative approach can ultimately lead to greater integration and well-being for refugees in both urban and camp settings.

Despite the insights gained from this study, several research gaps remain that warrant further investigation. Longitudinal studies tracking the welfare of refugee households over time could provide valuable insights into the long-term impacts of various interventions. Comparative studies between different refugee populations in various countries may identify best practices for improving welfare. Additionally, exploring the impact of legal status on economic participation and welfare could uncover barriers to integration. Researching the mental health and psychosocial well-being of refugees concerning their economic conditions would provide a more holistic understanding of their challenges. Finally, examining the role of technology in enhancing economic opportunities for refugees could uncover innovative solutions to improve their welfare.

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