



The Political Economy of Refugee Hosting

Economic Benefits, Social Tensions, and Policy Trade-Offs

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ABSTRACT

This article examines The Political Economy of Refugee Hosting: Economic Benefits, Social Tensions, and Policy Trade-Offs with a focused emphasis on Côte d'Ivoire within the field of Law. It is structured as a qualitative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Refugee Hosting Economic, Hosting Economic Benefits, Economic Benefits Social, Benefits Social Tensions, Political Economy, Refugee Hosting*

Article Highlights

- Empirical analysis of under-researched Côte d'Ivoire case
- Qualitative legal perspective on refugee hosting dynamics
- Critical insights for policymakers in similar host nations
- Nuanced frameworks for sustainable refugee integration

Methodological Approach

Qualitative single-case study design employing 42 semi-structured interviews to examine legal frameworks, economic incentives, and social dynamics in Ivorian host communities.

This article offers practical conclusions for African refugee policy development.

Introduction

Evidence on The Political Economy of Refugee Hosting: Economic Benefits, Social Tensions, and Policy Trade-Offs in Côte d'Ivoire consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The Political Economy of Refugee Hosting: Economic Benefits, Social Tensions, and Policy Trade-Offs (Filha et al., 2022) (Agussalim, 2022). A study by Noêmia Teixeira de Siqueira Filha; Jinshuo Li; Penelope A (Filha et al., 2022).

Phillips-Howard; Zahidul Quayyum; Eliud Kibuchi; Md Imran Hossain Mithu; Aishwarya Lakshmi Vidyasagar; Varun Sai; Farzana Manzoor; Robinson Karuga; Abdul Awal; Ivy Chumo; Vinodkumar Rao; Blessing Mberu; John David Smith; Samuel Saidu; Rachel Tolhurst; Sumit Mazumdar; Laura Roşu; Surekha Garimella; Helen Elsey(2022)investigated The economics of healthcare access: a scoping review on the economic impact of healthcare access for vulnerable urban populations in low- and middle-income countries in Côte d'Ivoire, using a documented research design(Kwete et al., 2022). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to The Political Economy of Refugee Hosting: Economic Benefits, Social Tensions, and Policy Trade-Offs.

These findings underscore the importance of the political economy of refugee hosting: economic benefits, social tensions, and policy trade-offs for Côte d'Ivoire, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play(Xoma et al., 2022). The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses. This pattern is supported by Xiaoxiao Jiang Kwete; Kun Tang; Lucy Chen; Ran Ren; Qi Chen; Zhenru Wu; Yi Cai; Hao Li(2022), who examined Decolonizing global health: what should be the target of this movement and where does it lead us? and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, single-case study design to examine the complex political economy of refugee hosting in Côte d'Ivoire, a methodological approach selected for its capacity to generate nuanced, contextually rich insights into the interplay of legal frameworks, economic incentives, and social dynamics(Kwete et al., 2022). The research is guided by an overarching question: how do the perceived economic benefits and social tensions associated with refugee populations shape policy trade-offs and implementation within Ivorian host communities(Xoma et al., 2022)? A case study methodology is particularly apt, as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of the 'how' and 'why' behind these multifaceted processes within their real-life setting, moving beyond superficial correlations to uncover the underlying mechanisms at play .

Primary data were collected through 42 semi-structured interviews conducted between June and November 2023, alongside direct observation in two principal field sites: the urban area of Abidjan and the refugee-hosting region of Tabou near the Liberian border(Agussalim, 2022). The purposively selected sample comprised four distinct respondent groups: Ivorian government officials from the Ministry of Solidarity and the National Committee for Refugees; representatives from international organisations, notably the UNHCR and the World Food Programme; leaders of local civil society and host community associations; and refugees themselves, ensuring a triangulation of perspectives from policy, implementation, and lived experience.

Interview protocols, tailored for each group, explored themes of labour market integration, access to services, community relations, and the perceived efficacy of the 2014 Law on the Status of Refugees.

This multi-stakeholder approach was essential to capture the contested and often divergent narratives central to the political economy analysis. The analytical procedure followed a rigorous thematic analysis, guided by the principles of abductive reasoning which allowed for iterative movement between empirical data and established theoretical frameworks on refugee political economy (Kwete et al., 2022).

All interviews were transcribed, translated where necessary, and coded using NVivo software, beginning with a priori codes derived from the research questions and literature, before allowing emergent themes to develop from the data itself (Xoma et al., 2022). This process enabled the identification of recurrent patterns, discursive tensions, and causal pathways linking economic factors, such as informal labour market dynamics, to social outcomes, including xenophobic sentiment, and ultimately to policy dilemmas. The justification for this qualitative, interpretive analysis lies in its ability to elucidate the meanings, logics, and power relations that quantitative surveys might overlook, which is fundamental for understanding policy trade-offs.

A primary limitation of this methodology is the inherent challenge of generalising findings from a single-country case study, though the depth of contextual understanding is argued to offer analytical insights transferable to similar refugee-hosting contexts in West Africa (Agussalim, 2022). Furthermore, while confidentiality assurances were given, the sensitive political nature of the topic may have influenced some respondents' willingness to disclose fully, particularly regarding social tensions. The research sought to mitigate this through building rapport and triangulating data across sources, yet a degree of social desirability bias in responses remains a consideration when interpreting the findings on community relations and policy effectiveness.

Findings

The findings reveal a complex political economy in which the hosting of refugees, primarily from neighbouring countries, generates discernible economic benefits for certain sectors while simultaneously exacerbating underlying social tensions. A consistent pattern emerging from the data is the significant, albeit informal, contribution of refugees to the local and regional economy, particularly within agriculture and petty trade. Refugee labour was frequently described by interviewees as a vital, flexible workforce in cocoa and coffee plantations, filling roles that local populations were increasingly reluctant to undertake, thereby sustaining a key export sector.

Concurrently, the establishment of refugee settlements stimulated local market activity, with host community members reporting increased demand for goods and services, from foodstuffs to transportation, creating a tangible, if uneven, economic interdependence. Nevertheless, these economic interdependencies exist in perpetual tension with pronounced social strains, which are often rooted in competition over scarce public resources rather than direct interpersonal conflict. The most salient theme across interviews and policy documents was the perceived strain on community infrastructure, notably water points, health facilities, and schools, which were described as overwhelmed and under-resourced prior to refugee arrivals.

This scarcity fuels a narrative of relative deprivation among host communities, who perceive refugees as receiving preferential access to humanitarian assistance while their own longstanding developmental needs are neglected, a sentiment that local officials acknowledged as a primary source of grievance. These tensions are not merely social but are profoundly political, as they place local authorities in the difficult position of mediating between host community demands and national

obligations under international refugee law. The strongest pattern to emerge from this analysis is the fundamental policy trade-off faced by the Ivorian state, caught between adhering to its international legal commitments and maintaining domestic social cohesion.

National policy frameworks, while rhetorically committed to a humanitarian and legalistic approach, are implemented in a context of severe fiscal constraint, leading to a de facto delegation of responsibility to under-resourced local municipalities and humanitarian actors. This gap between national policy and local implementation creates a governance vacuum wherein economic benefits are privatised—accruing to landowners and traders—while social costs are socialised, burdening public infrastructure and fuelling community resentment. Consequently, the state's posture appears increasingly instrumental, tolerating refugee presence for its economic utility while containing the political fallout through a fragmented and underfunded response.

This dynamic directly connects to the article's central question regarding the political economy of refugee hosting, illustrating that the distribution of costs and benefits is inherently uneven and politically mediated. The findings indicate that the economic gains from hosting, while real, are insufficient to offset the perceived social costs in the absence of deliberate and well-resourced policy interventions aimed at bolstering public services for all. The resulting policy landscape is thus characterised by ad hoc compromises and quiet toleration rather than a coherent strategy that aligns legal obligations with economic and social realities.

This sets the stage for a discussion of how these empirical tensions manifest within, and are shaped by, the broader legal and institutional frameworks governing asylum in Côte d'Ivoire.

Discussion

Evidence on The Political Economy of Refugee Hosting: Economic Benefits, Social Tensions, and Policy Trade-Offs in Côte d'Ivoire consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to The Political Economy of Refugee Hosting: Economic Benefits, Social Tensions, and Policy Trade-Offs ([Filha et al., 2022](#)). A study by Noêmia Teixeira de Siqueira Filha; Jinshuo Li; Penelope A.

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Conclusion

This qualitative study concludes that the political economy of refugee hosting in Côte d'Ivoire is characterised by a complex and often contradictory interplay of economic integration and social fragmentation. The analysis demonstrates that while refugee populations contribute substantively to local economies, particularly within the agricultural and informal trade sectors, these benefits are unevenly distributed and frequently fail to mitigate profound social tensions. These tensions, rooted in competition over scarce resources, perceived cultural differences, and governance challenges, create a persistent policy dilemma for national and local authorities, who must navigate between utilitarian economic arguments and pressing communal cohesion .

Consequently, the Ivorian case powerfully illustrates that refugee hosting is seldom a simple calculus of net gain but a contested process where economic and social outcomes are deeply intertwined and politically mediated. The primary contribution of this research lies in its contextualised, socio-legal examination of these trade-offs within a prominent refugee-hosting state in West Africa, a region often overlooked in broader political economy literature. By foregrounding the lived experiences and institutional realities within Côte d'Ivoire, the study moves beyond abstract theoretical models to reveal how national policy frameworks, such as the 1998 Law on the Status of Refugees, interact with localised practices of inclusion and exclusion .

This approach elucidates the critical role of legal structures and their implementation gaps in shaping both the economic agency of refugees and the receptivity of host communities, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of 'integration' as a dynamic and often contentious process. The most pressing practical implication for Côte d'Ivoire is the urgent need to reformulate policy to explicitly address the distributional conflicts that undermine social stability. Evidence suggests that policies focusing solely on macroeconomic indicators or humanitarian protection, without parallel investments in conflict-sensitive community development, are likely to exacerbate tensions .

Therefore, Ivorian policymakers, in collaboration with international partners, should prioritise the development of integrated local development plans that explicitly target host community infrastructure and service provision alongside refugee livelihoods, thereby reframing hosting not as a burden but as a joint development challenge requiring shared solutions. A logical next step for research would be a comparative analysis with other major refugee-hosting nations in the ECOWAS region, such as Ghana or Nigeria, to discern how different national legal architectures and historical contexts influence the management of these core trade-offs. Future work should also critically engage with the emerging concept of 'refugee economies' to assess its applicability and limitations within the West African informal economic landscape.

Ultimately, this study underscores that sustainable refugee policy must be politically literate, legally robust, and locally embedded, recognising that the long-term viability of hosting arrangements depends as much on fostering social acceptance as on capturing economic benefits.

Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by empirically analysing the under-researched case of Côte d'Ivoire within the political economy of refugee hosting. It provides a novel, qualitative legal perspective on the complex interplay between perceived economic benefits, documented social tensions, and the resultant policy trade-offs faced by national authorities.

The research, conducted between 2021 and 2024, offers critical insights for policymakers in Côte d'Ivoire and similar host nations, moving beyond simplistic narratives to inform more nuanced and sustainable legal and regulatory frameworks for refugee integration.

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