

# Labor Market Outcomes among Victims of Forced Displacement in Kenya<sup>1</sup>

By

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## ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes labor market outcomes among victims of forced displacement during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya. The analyses leverage on the 2020-2022 COVID-19 Rapid Response Phone Surveys among Refugees in Kenya (RRPS). In a fixed effects (FE) model, eight RRPS waves are considered alongside two sets of covariates. Findings suggest that employment, hours worked, and earnings made differed across the waves. Despite employment, hours worked, and earnings declining at the onset, these outcomes rose as the pandemic progressed. An education penalty existed such that educated female refugees were less likely to be employed and worked fewer hours compared to uneducated male counterparts. Although interventions significantly raised earnings, the effect on hours worked and employment was intervention-specific. Hours worked and employment of refugees rose significantly in unsustainable coping strategies but declined significantly in remittances, and assistance. Testing for robustness employed fixed effects difference-in-difference estimator (D-i-D FE). D-i-D FE results for employment probability, and hours worked, are identical to those in the fixed effects model. Estimates for earnings in the two model are not identical due to inclusion of survey waves in D-i-D FE that were dropped in the FE model. The study concludes that educated female refugees are heavily penalized with respect to employment and hours worked. The study also concludes that the evolution of hours worked and employment was intervention-specific. Then the study recommends the roll out of targeted programs, e.g., social protection, that enhance refugees' labor market integration without overdependence on unsustainable coping mechanisms. This could be further reinforced by the creation of avenues like the removal of cultural biases, that enhance the employment of educated female refugees without sidelining males.

Key words: Labor market outcomes, Refugees, Victims of forced displacement, Vulnerability of VFDs

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## **1. BACKGROUND**

The past few years have evidenced a rise in forced displacement of persons and communities globally (World Bank, 2023b). This has generated two effects: the first is the displacement-induced livelihood destruction that forces victims of forced displacement (VFDs) to rely on humanitarian assistance. However, humanitarian assistance towards VFDs has declined over the years (Schuettler & Caron, 2020). Shrinking humanitarian assistance has further eroded VFDs' ability to cope with negative shocks to livelihoods. The second is forced displacements have been shown to disrupt labor markets while simultaneously affecting educational accumulation among VFDs (Wood et al, 2019). For instance, time spent in transit characterizes school time lost among child VFDs (Fiala, 2015). School time lost undermines human capital accumulation among affected children, thereby aggravating vulnerabilities that are multi-dimensional.

Globally, vulnerability of VFDs arises from their identity as VFDs, and subsequent treatment as either 'victims' or 'individuals deserving protection' (World Bank, 2023b). The World Bank (2023b) indicates that VFD vulnerability is worsened by them naively treating host communities as protection sanctuaries. That is, host communities rarely consider VFDs' well-being as a priority. Brell et al (2020) argue that VFDs experience deplorable labor market outcomes compared to non-VFDs. Related global scholarship suggests that VFD vulnerability develops from labor market non-integration within the host community (Schuettler & Caron, 2020). Verwiebe et al (2019) attribute non-integration to punitive anti-immigration policies that nourish hostility towards VFDs. Moreover, hostile labor policies such as those in Turkey exclude the incorporation of non-natives into the public service (Pinedo-Caro, 2020).

Nevertheless, treating VFDs as equally exposed to vulnerabilities is misleading. For instance, the lived experiences of internally-displaced persons (IDPs) differ substantially from that of

refugees (Verme & Schuettler, 2021). Similarly, the burden of forced displacements falls disproportionately on women, young people, and children (Borsch et al, 2019). In Kenya, VFD vulnerability is aggravated by three things as discussed below.

Kenya's economic underdevelopment has meant that improving the lives of refugees depends on the inflow of donor aid (Omata, 2021). Besides, decisions about refugees, e.g., relocation of refugee camps, are made without their input. Relocation decisions consequently affect the availability of aid. Alix-Garcia et al (2018) indicate that shifting refugee camp from Lokichoggio to Kakuma led to aid leaving Lokichoggio. As a result, refugees that couldn't emigrate from Lokichoggio missed out on aid available in Kakuma. Two, association of refugee camps with terrorism aggrandizes the already-vulnerable individuals. In 2022, Kenya closed down Dadaab Camp over suspected association with terrorism. Three, many refugees in the country lack proper documentation despite existence of legislations such as the Refugee Act of 2006 and the Refugee Act of 2021 (Pape et al, 2021). This has hindered formal employment of refugees as well as prevented them from registering enterprises (International Finance Corporation (IFC), 2018).

Relatedly, there has been a general reduction in aid financing that targets VFDs (World Bank, 2023b). Cutdowns on targeted aid-financing have meant that refugees look for alternative coping mechanisms during periods of economic turmoil (World Bank, 2023a). One such a mechanism is reliance on the labor market for livelihoods (UNHCR & World Bank, 2021). However, integration of refugees into Kenya's labor markets remains low for various reasons discussed earlier. In some refugee settlements, e.g., Kalobeyei Camp, labor markets are non-existent (Betts et al, 2018). In others, e.g., Kakuma Camp, refugees are only permitted to work within, and not outside, the camp (Alix-Garcia et al, 2018). This has subsequently limited sources of livelihood among refugees, thereby compromising their resilience towards negative shocks such as coronavirus (COVID)-19 pandemic.

Research on VFDs in Kenya falls under two regimes. The first regime covers the period from 2006 to 2021 when the Refugees Act of 2006 was in operation. The second regime begins in 2021 when the Refugees Act of 2021 was enacted. When major COVID containment

measures such as cessation of movement were put in place in early 2020, the Refugees Act of 2006 was still operational. VFDs scholarship in the first regime indicates high unemployment rate among refugees relative to the host community. Betts et al (2018) reveal high joblessness among refugees from South Sudan. Among the employed, Betts et al (2018) indicate extremely low compensation in Kakuma and Kalobeyei Camps. The second regime extends the research agenda previously developed to incorporate the political economy of labor market integration. Bhagat (2020) and Omata (2021) argue that refugees unemployment arises from forthright opposition by locals. This opposition undermines the formal employment of refugees in Kalobeyei, Kakuma, and Nairobi. As a result, many refugees are either unemployed, informally employed, or relying on ‘incentive’ employment. Incentive employment refers to work undertaken by refugees on a voluntary basis but which is similar to “official” full-time work without an “official” salary (Omata, 2021). Incentive work is almost surely compensated in terms of incentive payments that are quite low relative to official salary.

Absence of refugees’ full integration into Kenya’s labor markets necessitates an analysis of labor market dynamics among refugees during COVID-19 pandemic period. The dynamics broadly considered are employment status, hours worked, and earnings made during the pandemic. This analysis is important since there were various refugee-specific interventions targeting their integration before and during the pandemic. However, these interventions were not considered in previous scholarship in Kenya, e.g., Vintar et al (2022), and Pape et al (2021).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

This subsection presents various concepts as captured in the literature before narrowing down to the paper’s conceptual framework. Scholars on labor market outcomes among VFDs and related vulnerabilities consider at least three dimensions. The first dimension conceptualizes vulnerability as an outcome of labor market non-integration, job formality, and job quality (Verme & Schuettler, 2019, 2021; Becker, 2022; Pinedo-Caro, 2020; Vintar et al, 2022; World Bank, 2023; Demirci & Kirdar, 2023). Here, vulnerability depends on access to

economic opportunities among VFDs. The second strand of scholarship builds on the political economy and the sociology of work (Morrar & Rios-Avila, 2020; Brell et al, 2020; Arendt, 2022; Lerner & Turner, 2019; World Bank, 2023). This dimension emphasizes extant socio-political hierarchies that hold back full integration of VFDs. Such hierarchies are offset by identity (VFD versus non-VFD, and VFD community versus host community) (Alix-Garcia et al, 2018), and the competing interests among political actors vis-à-vis VFDs (World Bank, 2023a, b). The third strand of literature recognizes vulnerability as heterogenous across VFD communities and individuals (Brell et al, 2020; World Bank, 2023a, b; IFC, 2018; Demirci & Kirdar, 2023; Arendt, 2022). Characteristic of this categorization is that women and children VFDs experience vulnerability differently from men and adult counterparts. Similarly, vulnerability is non-uniform between IDPs and VFDs, employed and unemployed, or rural/ camp and urban refugees.

Refugees/ VFDs are distinguishable from general migrants. Migrant analysis in McKenzie & Yang (2022) treats migrants as a homogenous group. According to McKenzie & Yang (2022), individuals migrate for economic reasons that can be deciphered beforehand. When net perceived benefits from migration exceed the cost of migration, McKenzie & Yang (2022) indicate that individuals emigrate. McKenzie & Yang (2022), thus, assume that migrants have an array of alternatives at their disposal, including opting to refrain from migration. However, as revealed in the World Development Report 2023, the precarity of forced displacements limits available alternatives to VFDs (World Bank, 2023a). Suggestively, decisions made by general migrants do not always sync with choices available to VFDs. In particular, VFDs either migrate for asylum and survival or stay back and perish. Besides, time and resources available for non-VFD migrants to compute cons and pros of migration is limited among VFDs (Brell et al, 2020).

Although the labor market offers livelihoods to a great majority of the people, labor market gains among VFDs are largely missed due to their non-integration. Extant literature indicates that non-integration arises from various factors. Brell et al (2020) argue that incentives to integrate tend to be low when VFDs perceive the host community as an intermediate destination. That is, VFDs fail to fully participate on the host community's labor market as

well as educating their children when they believe that their stay is temporary. However, by conceiving host communities as refugee sanctuaries or labor markets, refugees fail to recognize that these countries have interests of their own, and which would inevitably be pursued (World Bank, 2023a). Relatedly, viewing refugees as ‘victims to protect’ disincentivizes host countries from tapping into the human capital they embody (Lenner & Turner, 2019). In some circumstances, refugees embody human capital that may be inapplicable in the host community’s labor market, e.g., language (Arendt, 2022). Besides, foreign academic credentials may be unrecognizable in the host country (Pinedo-Caro, 2020). These factors act jointly to undermine labor market integration and increase vulnerability among VFDs.

With one (1) in every two (2) job hires being sourced from referrals (Pieper et al, 2019; Glitz & Vejlin, 2021), the extent to which individuals integrate on the labor market is affected by social networks. Brell et al (2020) argue that social networks form the first reference point in communicating job opportunities. Since building one’s social networks takes time (Meyer et al, 2020), networks that refugees forge with the host community tend to be low during the first few weeks of settling down and acclimatizing. Thus, unemployment rates among refugees tend to be very high immediately after arrival in the destination country (Brell et al, 2020). As refugees acclimatize, it is expected that their social networks increase leading to an increase in job opportunities that are shared. Sometimes, refugees encounter social exclusion instead of building up social networks with the host community. Social exclusion originates from refugees being targeted and persecuted for ‘taking up jobs’ supposedly meant for the host community (Alix-Garcia et al, 2018). Morrar & Rios-Avila (2020) reveal that social exclusion paves way for discrimination of refugees on the labor market. Thus, weak social networks and network depravity further exacerbate labor market non-integration and widen vulnerability among refugees.

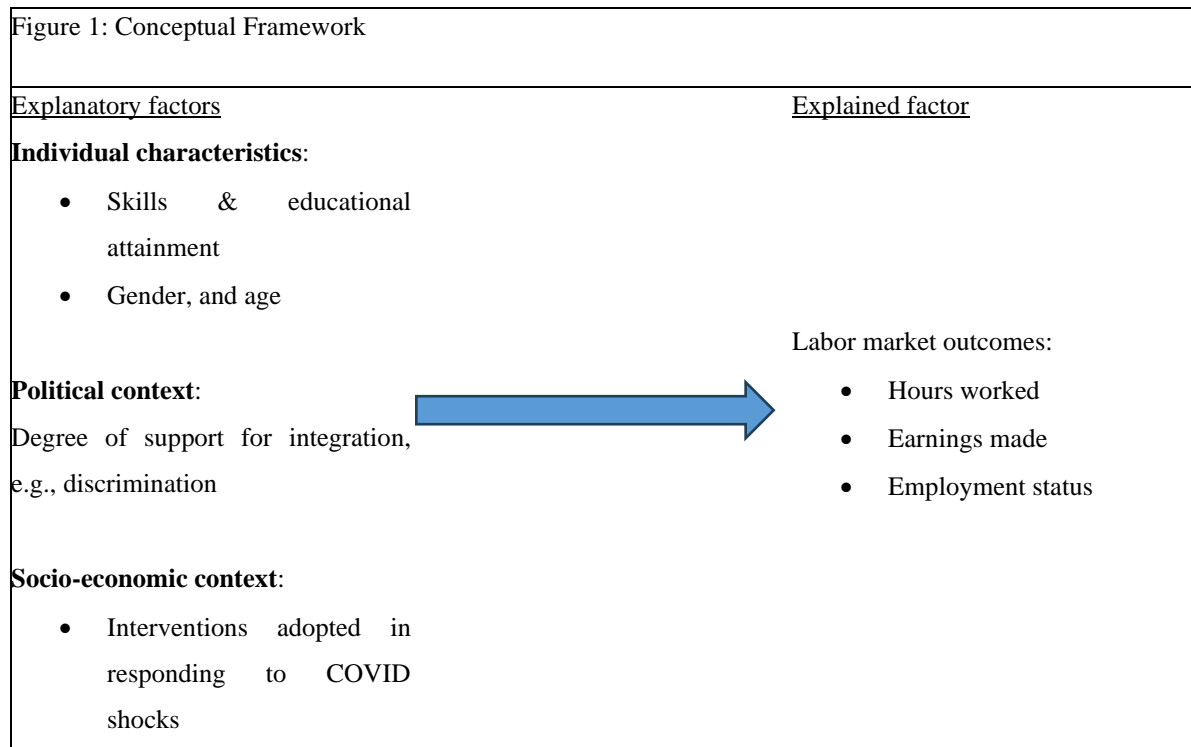
The political economy dictates the extent to which VFDs integrate as well as their respective labor market outcomes. For instance, informal employment of refugees rises in host countries that have strong interest groups benefiting from informal labor (Lenner & Turner, 2019). Informally-employed refugees, in turn, forego opportunities otherwise availed in the formal

sector. Informality is further exacerbated by absence of trade unions that lobby for better jobs for refugees. Thus, informality creates additional informality. Besides, refugees often take up informal jobs left behind when locals transition to the formal sector (Demirci & Kirdar, 2023). Sometimes, refugee unemployment, or employment in low-wage informal sectors, arises from work environments that disadvantage refugees. Such environments include a train-first environment that mandates investment in human capital prior to employment (Arendt, 2022). A train-first work environment, therefore, delays the employment of refugees without requisite skills. Other policies, e.g., linking government cash transfer schemes with formal employment contribute to work precarity. Demirci & Kirdar (2023) indicate that formal employment of refugees in Turkey requires refugees to forego refugee benefits.

Treating VFDs as a homogenous group ignores their lived realities that vary between gender and across age (World Bank, 2023b). Female refugees and young adults experience labor market challenges and vulnerabilities differently from male and older adult refugees, respectively. These differences are shaped by social norms, culture, differences in educational attainment, and employer bias. In a refugee survey within Kakuma town in Kenya, women from some nationalities could not open/ run butcheries due to cultural constraints (IFC, 2018). Broadly considered, gendered labor market heterogeneities among refugees reveal the following: one, unemployment rate among female refugees tends to be high relative to their male counterparts in paid work (Brell et al, 2020). In unpaid work, e.g., unpaid family work, the proportion of employed female refugees outstrips that of males (Demirci & Kirdar, 2023). Two, female employed refugees receive low wages, on average, compared to their male counterparts (Brell et al, 2020). Three, policy interventions that target VFDs may work for one gender and not the other (Arendt, 2022). Arendt (2022) shows that this is true for the case of Denmark's work-first policy. According to Arendt (2022), the work-first policy significantly raised employment rate, hours worked, and wages for male refugees. Among female refugees, work-first policy insignificantly affected labor market outcomes.

This paper derives its conceptual framework from World Bank (2023a, b) that narrow down to refugees. World Bank (2023a, b) is preferred because it contextualizes refugee integration on the labor market at a time when the global economy was just recovering from COVID-19

pandemic. The idea is that the host community’s labor markets demand certain skills. Refugees with these sought-after skills easily secure employment; i.e., skilled refugees are strongly matched to the host community’s labor market. However, this happens only when migration costs are outweighed by related benefits (McKenzie & Yang, 2022; World Bank, 2023a, b), and opposition to refugees’ labor market integration is low, or non-existent (Alix-Garcia et al, 2018). Besides, labor market outcomes among refugees are shaped by other factors. These include: age, gender, nationality, and educational attainment. This relationship is presented in Figure 1.



## 2.2 RELATED EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Hoseini & Dideh (2022) consider VFDs’ vulnerability as an outcome of precarious work environment. The authors utilize both refugees and nationals’ data in Iran, and employ ordinary least squares (OLS) estimation. The estimates suggest that Afghan refugees in Iran experienced short unemployment durations compared to Iran nationals. The findings further indicate long work week hours among refugees relative to Iran nationals. In an alternative specification that employs logit regression, the findings suggest that layoffs were less common among Afghan refugees in comparison to Iran nationals. Similarly, in the presence of shocks, the average work week among Iranian nationals was significantly short compared



to that for Afghan refugees. 'shocks' was proxied by nominal appreciation of Iranian rial against United States (US) dollar (\$) on a year-on-year basis.

According to Hoseini & Dideh (2022), economic turmoil made labor incomes attractive among refugees which then incentivized them towards working more. Nevertheless, it is very likely that refugees found it less beneficial not exerting extra effort even when it went uncompensated. This is because the authors indicate high replacement probability among refugees relative to natives. Furthermore, the authors document absence of employment discrimination through layoffs during bad economic times. This could be driven by refugees being used as buffers during bad economic times. Besides, Afghan refugees tolerated working over extended durations for less compensation in comparison to Iranian nationals.

Morrar & Rios-Avila (2020) analyze labor market outcomes between refugees and non-refugees in Palestine based on age, gender, and educational attainment. Employing the recentered influence function (RIF)-OLS, the authors reveal refugees in the 50<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> quantile gaining more from an additional year of schooling compared to non-refugee counterparts. Focusing on gender, the findings suggest significantly higher hourly wages for males [refugees and non-refugees] in comparison to females. Cross-group analysis indicate refugee wages that are significantly low relative to earnings among non-refugees. Lastly, the findings suggest hourly wages rising significantly during a worker's (refugee and non-refugee) early stages of life but later flatten out before declining. However, there were no statistically significant differences in the hourly wages between the two groups in the 90<sup>th</sup> quantile of the wage distribution.

The authors argue that gendered differences in hourly wages arose from differences in bargaining power between males and females. That is, inferiority among females lowered their bargaining power. Since the authors omitted the strength of labor unions and union membership, the claim of low bargaining power among females appears superficial and subjective. The wage gap between refugees and non-refugees is attributed to discrimination against refugees. Discrimination was offset by weak social networks among refugees in the median- and low-wage jobs.

Pinedo-Caro (2020) analyzes labor market outcomes among Syrian refugees in Turkey within the context of labor law and legislations. The author leverages on the 2017 Household Survey of the Labor Force in Turkey. The inter-group comparison suggests that longer work hours among refugees relative to non-refugees. Wage-wise, refugee wages were less than half the wages received by Turkish counterparts. Within-group analysis reveals adult refugees (30-65-year-olds) and male refugees earning high average wages relative to young refugees (15-29-year-olds) and females, respectively. In the survey, wages among 68.7% of female refugees and 76.8% of male refugees were below the minimum wage. The author argues that greater job informality among refugees led to the observed wage wedge between refugees and non-refugees. Informality was offset by non-compliance to work permit requirements.

Relatedly, Demirci & Kirdar (2023) leverage upon the 2018 Turkey Demographic and Health Survey. In the linear probability model (LPM), the authors control for region of residence effects. The authors indicate Syrian refugees (male and female) were significantly less likely to be in paid employment relative to Turkish nationals. The paid employment gap between refugees and natives declined when education, age, region of residence, and household composition were controlled for. Lastly, the authors reveal that refugees were more likely to be out of the labor force in comparison to native Turks. These findings were attributed to refugees being less educated and younger on average/ inexperienced which, in turn, disincentivized employers from hiring them. Moreover, the authors argue that refugees tended to reside in provinces within the southeastern and the southern part of Turkey. These regions generally have limited opportunities for paid employment to non-natives.

Olivieri et al (2021) focus on 15-70-year-old Venezuelan refugees in Ecuador. The authors employ canton-level fixed effects estimation on a modified Mincer equation. The findings suggest that, compared to Ecuadoran workers, Venezuelan-born refugees earned significantly lower wages and were more likely to work informally. Based on job formality, informal wages were significantly below formal wages. Informality declined in educational attainment whereas wages rose in educational attainment. In the gendered analysis, the authors document female refugees earning significantly less hourly wages compared to male refugees.

However, uptake of informal employment was insignificantly affected by gender. These findings were attributed to occupational downgrading among refugees. The downgrading led to skills embodied by refugees being deployed less productively. This is because refugees took up jobs to which they were overqualified. Even then, fewer than 2.5% of Venezuelan refugees were hired in well-paying jobs. Suggestively, the availability of decent/ well-paying job opportunities was skewed.

Hallaq (2019) analyzes labor market outcomes between refugees and natives in West Bank and Gaza. The author employs the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition on a dataset from 1999 to 2012. The findings indicate refugees earning significantly low wages relative to Israeli natives in West Bank. In Gaza, refugees earned significantly high wages relative to natives. The author argues that harsher treatment of refugees in West Bank by the Israeli government depressed refugee wages. Since refugees in West Bank were vulnerable to absenteeism-induced replacement with non-refugee foreign workers, they accepted low wages. Refugee absenteeism from the workplace was catapulted by restricted refugee movement. Educated refugees in Gaza, however, could access Israeli labor market without restrictions. This subsequently raised wages for educated refugees relative to less-educated non-refugee foreign nationals.

Baum et al (2020) analyze the wage gap between refugees and Swedish nationals in routine versus non-routine occupations. The authors employ the Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition on a dataset from 2003 to 2013. The decomposition was preceded by coarsened exact matching and the correlated random effects (RE) estimation. The findings suggest that Swedish nationals earned significantly high wages relative to refugees in routine jobs. Native wages were 30% and 8% above refugee wages for male and female, respectively. This was attributed to differences in experience accumulated while on the job. In particular, a four-year experience gap was established in favor of Swedish nationals. In non-routine manual jobs, earnings among refugees exceeded those of comparable natives. This was true irrespective of the refugee entry cohort.

Arendt (2022) analyzes how labor market outcomes among refugees in Denmark under the train-first and the work-first policy. The author leverages on a quasi-experiment, and employs FE-OLS. The findings suggest that the work-first policy significantly raised hours worked and earnings made in the 9<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> month relative to the train-first policy. Work-first policy also raised employment in the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> month after arrival in Denmark, and raised hourly wages among male refugees in the 15<sup>th</sup> month. It was also evident that male refugees gained an additional two work weeks in a year as a result of job-training under the work-first policy. Female refugees gained only a day in a year. The author argues that matching among unemployed refugees and employers for job-training was biased against females.

Alix-Garcia et al (2018) analyze economic activities and labor market shocks in 648 villages within Turkana County, Kenya. The authors leverage on the 2005-2006 Kenya integrated Household Budget Survey (KIHBS) and the 2015 Hunger Safety Net Program (HSNP) dataset. HSNP data was collected from October 2012 to June 2013. The inverse hyperbolic sine function and LPM were employed. The findings suggest that the closer a village was to a Kakuma Refugee campsite, the greater the economic activities. Economic activities were proxied by night light intensity. Economic activities also rose significantly in refugee population. The authors argue that population influx was followed by aid inflow, and hence refugees served as a positive market shock. The findings also suggest within-camp returns to education exceeding educational returns in local towns. Secondary education more than doubled the chances of a refugee being wage-employed relative to lower educational attainments. The seemingly advantageous position of refugees in the labor market arose from within-camp employment opportunities. Nevertheless, it was unclear what disincentivized locals from seeking employment within the camp. This is because the authors indicate a majority of locals believing that refugee camps had better employment opportunities.

Relatedly, Betts et al (2018) reveal an almost non-existent labor market in Kalobeyei Refugee Camp, Kenya. As a result, refugees relied only on 'incentive employment', and the exchange of in-kind food aid with locals for cash. Incentive employment is, however, not unique to Kalobeyei Camp. Omata (2021) analyzes refugees' employment in Kakuma Camp and Nairobi. The author reveals 'incentive wages' being significantly low in comparison to wages

accrued to locals. Since incentive wages are quite low, it would be expected that refugees look out for better job opportunities. In practice, such endeavors may be infeasible. Bhagat (2020) analyzes the political economy of refugee employment in Nairobi. The author reveals mounting opposition directed at the formalization of refugee employment. Consequently, affected refugees were pushed towards informal employment.

A major setback in Bhagat (2020), Omata (2021), Alix-Garcia et al (2018), and Betts et al (2018) is that the datasets used do not systematically report outcomes for refugees and locals. This problem arises from national surveys that previously did not systematically include refugees (Pape et al, 2021). Recent survey developments, e.g., RRPS, systematically capture data on refugees and Kenyan nationals (UNHCR & the World Bank, 2021; Vintar et al, 2022; Sinha, 2022). These developments serve as an empirical breakthrough in VFDs' analyses in Kenya. Vintar et al (2022) leverage on RRPS to estimate labor market outcomes among Kenyan urban nationals and refugees during COVID-19 pandemic. The authors employ county-level FE. The findings suggest the rate of employment gap between nationals and urban refugees widening from wave 1 (May-June 2020) to wave 4 (January-March 2021). As the pandemic progressed, hours worked and household incomes by nationals increased by significantly large amounts relative to refugees. Thus, the differences in the hours worked and earnings made in the first four waves widened. The authors argue that nationals and urban refugees took up more jobs, although of lower quality, as a way of coping during the pandemic. Besides, the proportion of individuals working in multiple jobs doubled during the pandemic. Work restrictions targeting refugees inclined them towards services sector. However, nationals worked in any sector they desired.

In a nutshell, labor market outcomes (hours worked, labor income, and employment probability) among VFDs are affected by various factors. These factors include: educational attainment, labor laws, age, gender, and residence. Reviewed literature indicates other factors, e.g., country of origin/ birth, year of arrival, marital status, health, available refugee work capacity, and language. Vintar et al (2022) is closely related to this study. However, the authors utilize only the first five waves of RRPS. The present research leverages on eight waves of RRPS, and hence fills a gap in population and time coverage.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the study is based on researches by Vintar et al (2022), Arendt (2022), World Bank (2023b), and McKenzie & Yang (2022). Vintar et al (2022) analyze differences in labor market outcomes between nationals and refugees. The authors employed static panel to control for geographical and wave fixed effects. Our departure from Vintar et al (2022) is in the incorporation of the constant term, employment of one wave as reference for wave fixed effects, and the exclusion of the term for ‘nationals’. This is because our focus is explicitly on refugees, and one term is omitted from the time (wave) dummies. Other controls, e.g., gender and age, included in Vintar et al (2022) feature in other studies (e.g., Arendt, 2022). Similarly, Arendt (2022) control for calendar effects, and geographical variations, in analyzing labor market outcomes under two policy environments, i.e., train-first, and work-first. The author considers the pre-2016 period as control, and post-2016 when work-first policy was fully operational as treatment period. We extend this trajectory by incorporating policies that affect labor market outcomes, e.g., government assistance. However, we do not control for economic improvement, as in Arendt (2022), due to data needs.

World Bank (2023b) indicates labor market disruptions being offset by the pandemic. It is natural that individuals and households adopted various coping strategies. These strategies could potentially have affected labor market outcomes. Lastly, McKenzie & Yang (2022) discuss the estimation of refugee labor market outcomes, conditional on plausible exogeneity. The authors indicate that static panel estimation yields consistent results when plausible exogeneity assumption is not invalidated. This is also true for shift-share analysis or the difference-in-difference (D-i-D) estimator (McKenzie & Yang, 2022). Based on the aforementioned, we estimate a static panel model given by:

$$V_{k,t} = \alpha_0 + \sum_{j=1}^b \theta_j t + \alpha_1 COV_{l,k,t} + \alpha_2 P_{k,t} + \gamma Z_{k,t} + \varepsilon_{k,t}$$

Where  $V$  captures labor market outcome of interest for individual  $k$  in wave  $t$ .  $COV$  is a dummy variable that is assigned 1 for an individual whose household adopted coping strategy, 1, and 0 otherwise. Coping strategies are broadly categorized as either sustainable or unsustainable following Barron et al (2023).  $Z$  is a vector of other individual attributes (e.g., age, educational attainment, and gender). Other interventions (policy-based) are reflected in

P. P is assigned 1 if k’s household was directly affected by an external intervention, and 0 otherwise. The error term  $\varepsilon$  is assumed to be white noise.  $\alpha$ ,  $\theta$ , and  $\gamma$  are regression parameters. Policy-based interventions include: remittances and assistance from the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and faith-based organizations (FBOs). Our analyses are restricted to 18-64-year-old refugees.

Static panel is chosen over dynamic panel for efficiency reasons since our dataset has large cross-sections, and small time periods (i.e.,  $T < N$ ), and T is smaller than 20 (i.e.,  $T=8 < 20$ ). Static panel models often employ either fixed effects (FE) or random effects (RE) model (Bell et al, 2019). FE assumes correlation between covariates and the error term. In the RE, this correlation is assumed to be non-existent. A choice between FE and RE follows from the Hausman test. This test’s null states that:

$$\pi_{RE} = \pi_{FE}$$

Where  $\pi$  is the regression parameter. Non-rejection of the hypothesis warrants the employment of random effects model. This is because RE will precisely estimate  $\pi$ . i.e.,  $\pi$  has a smaller standard error in the RE compared to FE when Hausman test’s null is validated (Bell et al, 2019). Otherwise, fixed effects estimator is adopted. We conduct robustness checks using D-i-D FE estimator. McKenzie & Yang (2022) and Sant’Anna & Zhao (2020) indicate that D-i-D FE estimator yields results that are similar to FE estimator under certain specifications.

## 4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

### 4.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

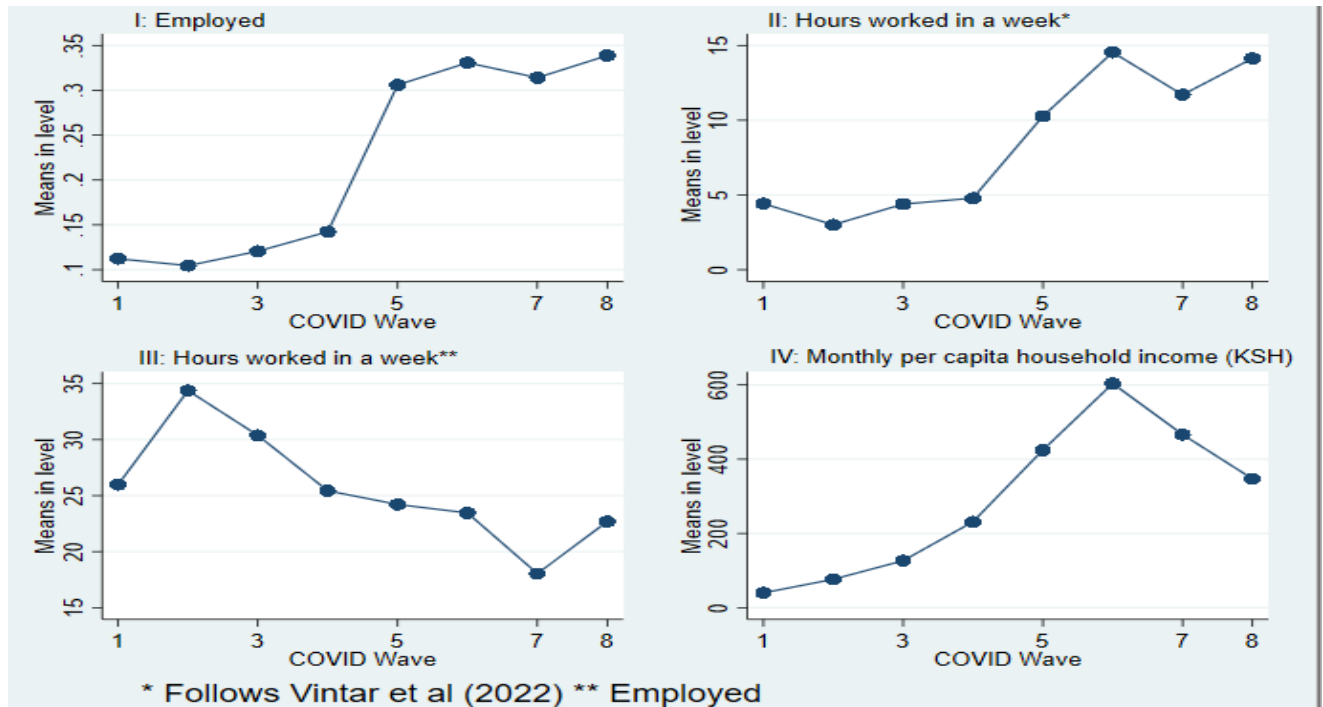
Share of employed refugees alongside hours worked in a week, and labor earnings during COVID are captured in Figure 2. Refugees’ employment slightly declined in wave 2 (July-September 2020) before recovering in waves 3 and 4 (October-November 2020 and January-March 2021). In wave 5 (April-June 2021), employment of refugees doubled the level in wave 4, and maintained an upward trajectory to wave 6 (July-October 2021). This was followed by a decline in employment in wave 7 (November 2021-March 2022) before recovering in wave 8 (June 2022). Hours worked in a week followed a similar pattern<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Panel II sets hours worked to zero for those not employed, similar to Vintar et al (2022).

Restricting the sample to those employed, average hours worked rose in wave 2 relative to wave 1. This was followed by a decline from wave 2 to wave 7 before recovering in wave 8. The decline in hours worked in wave 7 was quite sharp. Lastly, monthly per capita household labor income rose from wave 1 to wave 6 but declined thereafter.

Figure 2: Evolution of Labor Market Outcomes among Refugees in Kenya during COVID



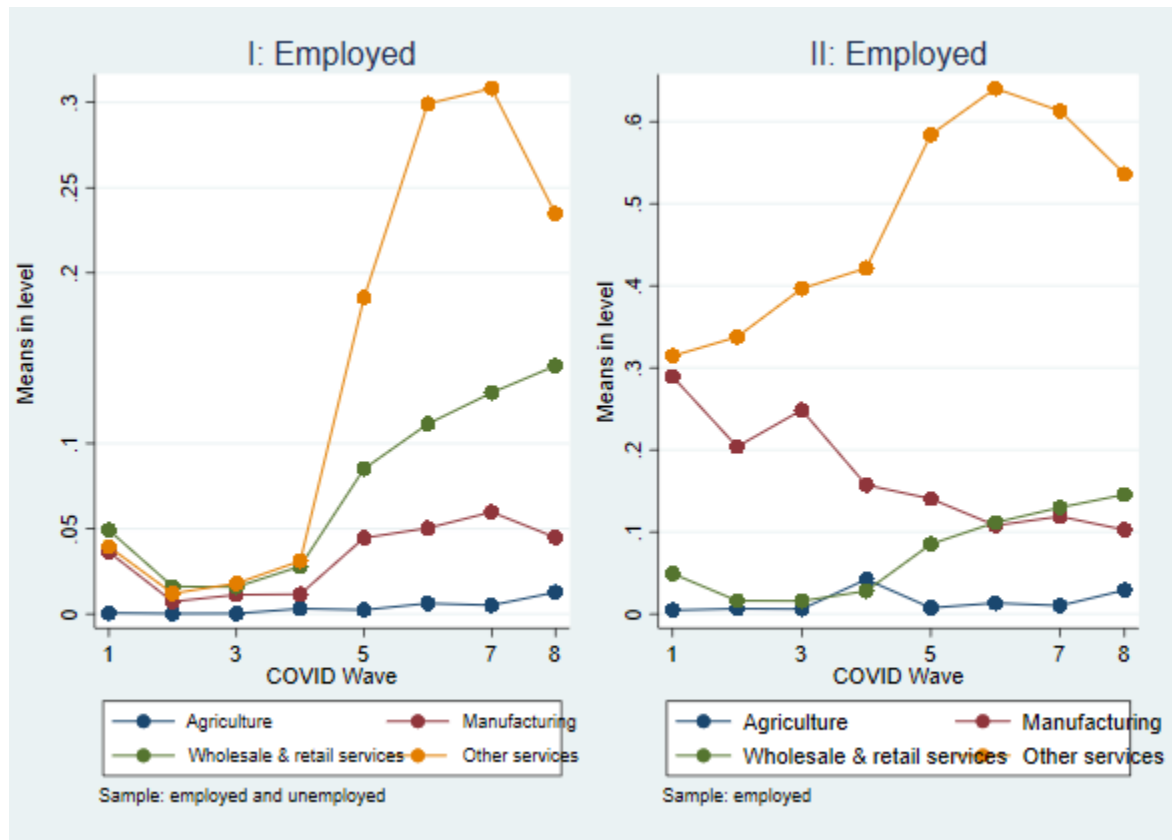
The initial decline in employment in wave 2 was offset by nationwide lockdowns that severely restricted labor market access among refugees (Vintar et al, 2022). Despite employment of refugees rising in subsequent waves, it remains low. This is consistent with Vintar et al (2022) that indicate one-third of refugees being in employment. Similarly, hours worked in wave 1 (May-June 2020) were quite low, falling below 5 hours a week for all refugees. This is attributed to only a small proportion of refugees being in employment. Lastly, rising earnings could be attributed to refugees working multiple jobs as well as an increase in employment rate (Vintar et al, 2022).

In terms of sectoral composition of refugee employment, approximately 9 in every 10 refugee jobs were within the services sector. Figure 3 shows that employment of refugees in various sectors declined in the first two waves of the pandemic but rose from waves 3 to 6. This



employment was pronounced within other services, and followed sequentially by wholesale and retail services, and manufacturing sector. Employment within agriculture sector stagnated throughout the pandemic. Other services accounted for an ever-increasing employment share of refugees from wave 1 to wave 6. Manufacturing employment share declined generally. Employment share within wholesale and retail services declined in waves 2 and 3, recovered in wave 4, and rose steadily from wave 4 to wave 8.

Figure 3: Sectoral Employment of Refugees during COVID



## 4.2 MODEL ESTIMATION

Survey wave was incorporated to capture the evolution of labor market outcomes during the pandemic. Results from the estimation are presented in Table 1. The results from the Hausman test suggested that the model's covariates were related to the error term. Hence, fixed effects estimator was employed. We clustered standard errors at the household level, and adopted appropriate weights. Our findings suggest that the proportion of refugees employed in July-September 2020 (wave 2) was similar to the level in wave 1 (May-June 2020). In subsequent

waves (October-November 2020 to June 2022), employment among refugees rose significantly relative to the employment level in wave 1.

Hours worked in a week differed across the survey waves. Refugees worked 1.02 hours less in July-September 2020 compared to wave 1. However, hours worked rose significantly in waves 5-8. In wave 5 (April-June 2021), refugees worked 6.10hours more on average than they did in wave 1 (May-June 2020). The work week lengthened further to an additional 10.66hours in wave 6 (July-October 2021), declined slightly to 8.51hours in wave 7 (November 2021-March 2022), before peaking at 11.09hours in wave 8 (June 2022).

Table 1: Fixed Effects Estimates			
VARIABLES	(1) Employed	(2) Hours worked in a week	(3) Earnings
May-Jun 2020 (rf)	-	-	
Jul-Sep 2020	0.00991 (0.00716)	-1.017*** (0.381)	
Oct-Nov 2020	0.0195** (0.00858)	0.117 (0.423)	
Jan-Mar 2021	0.0461*** (0.0112)	-0.172 (0.533)	
Apr-Jun 2021	0.226*** (0.0113)	6.100*** (0.524)	
Jul-Oct 2021	0.270*** (0.0119)	10.66*** (0.572)	
Nov 2021-Mar 2022	0.265*** (0.0123)	8.508*** (0.577)	
Jun 2022	0.256*** (0.0106)	11.09*** (0.511)	
Gender	0.0469 (0.0618)	-0.459 (2.608)	-48.84 (56.69)
Education	0.0667*** (0.0208)	2.014** (0.970)	8.776 (9.166)
Gender*education	-0.0900** (0.0366)	-2.971* (1.549)	13.43 (17.20)
Age	0.0337*** (0.00948)	1.555*** (0.506)	21.31*** (6.048)
Age squared	-0.000400*** (0.000125)	-0.0192*** (0.00681)	-0.169** (0.0795)
Sustainable	0.00931 (0.0102)	0.510 (0.447)	97.59*** (6.166)
Unsustainable	0.0172** (0.00868)	2.558*** (0.367)	91.02*** (6.190)
Remittances	-0.0630*** (0.00889)	-1.686*** (0.382)	156.0*** (5.241)
Policy	-0.0658*** (0.00761)	-3.173*** (0.321)	57.62*** (4.889)
Constant	-0.536***	-23.21***	-241.0**

	(0.170)	(8.693)	(105.7)
Pooled observations	28,331	28,331	28,363
R-squared	0.116	0.109	0.407
Number of panel ID	6,059	6,059	6,060

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Policy captures interventions including assistance from the government, NGOs, and FBOs. Gender is assigned 1 for female, and 0 otherwise. Education is assigned 1 for college/ university, and 0 otherwise. Remittances equal 1 for domestic and overseas remittances, and 0 otherwise. Sustainable coping strategies involve asset sale, engaging in additional income generating activities, assistance from close ties (family, friends, and neighbors), borrowing from close ties, taking up an institutional loan, credit purchase, reducing nonfood consumption spending, relying on savings, and advancing payment from employer (Barron et al, 2023). Unsustainable coping strategies include delaying payment obligations, advance harvest sale, and reducing food consumption spending (Barron et al, 2023).

Our second objective entails the incorporation of gender, age, and educational attainment into the model. There are no material differences in employment, hours worked, and earnings between male and female refugees. This suggests non-discrimination against female refugees on the labor market. There is a noticeable college penalty against female refugees<sup>1</sup>. College and university-educated (hereafter, educated) males had 6.67 higher chances of being employed and worked 2.014hours more compared to uneducated males. Educated females, however, were 2.33% less likely to be in employment compared to uneducated male counterparts. Educated females also worked fewer hours relative to uneducated males. The findings further reveal earnings being insignificantly affected by gender and educational attainment. This implies absence of wage premium arising from differences in educational attainment or gender.

The positive sign and negative sign on the coefficient of age and age squared, respectively, suggest that refugees' employment, hours worked, and earnings made per capita are quadratic in age. In our sample, 18 marks the year of entry into the labor force (hereafter, entry). Thus, a 19-year-old refugee is 3.37% likelier to be employed compared to an 18-year-old counterpart. Extending this line of thought, moving from year 9 to 10 after entry raises

<sup>1</sup>

	Employed	Hours worked
Male, no college (rf)	0	0
Male, college	0.0667	2.014
Female, no college	0	0
Female, college	0.0667-0.0900=-0.0233	2.014-2.971=-0.957

employment chances by 2.65%. Similarly, a 36-year-old refugee works 0.9022hours less compared to a 35-year-old counterpart. However, a 38-year-old refugee works 0.8254hours less compared to a 37-year-old counterpart. Whereas a refugee earns an additional Kenya Shilling (KSH) 21.31 in the first year, he/she makes an additional KSH 18.27 in moving from year 9 to 10 in the labor force. These indicate employment, hours worked, and earnings increasing but at a decreasing rate in age, peaking up, and declining thereafter.

Our final objective focuses on how interventions affected labor market outcomes. These interventions fall under two broad categories; endogenous (adopted by refugee households), and exogenous (without the input of refugee households). Endogenous interventions were either unsustainable or sustainable coping strategies. Exogenous interventions involved remittances and policy-based assistance (e.g., from government, NGOs, and FBOs). The findings indicate household per capita earnings rising significantly among households that relied upon any intervention compared to respective counterparts. Reliance on sustainable coping strategies insignificantly affected employment probability and hours worked. However, unsustainable coping strategies significantly raised employment probability and hours worked. Lastly, reliance on remittances and policy-based assistance significantly reduced both employment probability and hours worked.

#### 4.2.1 ROBUSTNESS CHECK

In checking the robustness of the results, we employ the fixed effects difference-in-difference (D-i-D FE) estimator on regression in Table 1. Table 2 reveals results for probability of being employed and hours worked that are identical to the fixed effects estimates reported in Table 1. Suggestively, the results for hours worked and employment probability are robust. Earnings’ estimates in the D-i-D FE model, however, are not identical to those in the FE model. This discrepancy arises from inclusion of survey waves in the D-i-D FE that were dropped in the FE model.

VARIABLES	(4) Employed	(5)	(6) Hours worked in a week	(7)	(8)	(9) Income
Gender		0.0469 (0.0618)		-0.459 (2.608)		-0 (0)
Age		0.0337*** (0.00948)		1.555*** (0.506)		0*** (0)
Age squared		-		-		-0***

		0.000400***		0.0192***		(0)
		(0.000125)		(0.00681)		(0)
Unsustainable		0.0172**		2.558***		0***
		(0.00868)		(0.367)		(0)
Remittances		-0.0630***		-1.686***		5.56e-11***
		(0.00889)		(0.382)		(0)
Policy		-0.0658***		-3.173***		0***
		(0.00761)		(0.321)		(0)
Education		0.0667***		2.014**		-0
		(0.0208)		(0.970)		(0)
Gender*education		-0.0900**		-2.971*		0
		(0.0366)		(1.549)		(0)
May-Jun 2020 (rf)		-		-		-
Jul-Sep 2020		0.00991		-1.017***		36.60***
		(0.00716)		(0.381)		(0)
Oct-Nov 2020		0.0195**		0.117		86.62***
		(0.00858)		(0.423)		(0)
Jan-Mar 2021		0.0461***		-0.172		191.5***
		(0.0112)		(0.533)		(0)
Apr-Jun 2021		0.226***		6.100***		384.5***
		(0.0113)		(0.524)		(0)
Jul-Oct 2021		0.270***		10.66***		563.7***
		(0.0119)		(0.572)		(0)
Nov 2021-Mar 2022		0.265***		8.508***		426.5***
		(0.0123)		(0.577)		(0)
Jun 2022		0.256***		11.09***		307.1***
		(0.0106)		(0.511)		(0)
Sustainable <sup>+</sup>	0.00931		0.510		0***	
	(0.010)		(0.447)		(0)	
Constant		-0.536***		-23.21***		39.93***
		(0.170)		(8.693)		(0)
Observations	28,331	28,331	28,331	28,331	28,363	28,363

Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Note: <sup>+</sup> In the D-i-D FE, individuals whose households adopted any sustainable coping strategy are assigned to the treatment group.

## 4.2.2 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

We analyzed labor market outcomes among VFDs by narrowing down on refugees in Kenya. These outcomes were the likelihood of being employed, hours worked, and earnings. The analyses involved the evolution of labor market outcomes across eight waves of COVID-19 pandemic. This was realized via the employment of fixed effects estimator. We incorporated other covariates; age, gender, and educational attainment as well as intervention dummies. Intervention dummies captured coping mechanisms (sustainable and unsustainable), remittances, and policy-based interventions (including assistance from the government, FBOs, and NGOs).

The results indicated employment of refugees declining at the onset of the pandemic but rising in subsequent waves. The initial decline arose from lockdown measures that were imposed by the government of Kenya (UNHCR & World Bank, 2021). As work and movement

restrictions were lessened/ lifted, refugees sought and found employment. This coincided with greater uptake of low-quality jobs, and working multiple jobs (Vintar et al, 2022). Besides, refugees fell back on informal employment (Bhagat, 2020) given cutbacks on aid-financing (World Bank, 2023b). Relatedly, average hours worked rose progressively from wave 5 to 8. Improvements in hours worked are attributed to an increase in refugee employment, and job multiplicity. Since many employed refugees receive incentive wages that are quite low (Betts et al, 2018), working multiple jobs served as an earnings mobilization initiative.

Despite gender-based discrimination being absent, female refugees faced an education penalty with respect to hours worked and employment. That is, educated females were less likely to be employed and worked fewer hours compared to uneducated male counterparts. However, education penalty does not spillover to household per capita earnings. Incentive wages received by refugees are so low that the education premium is absent (Betts et al, 2018). The employment education penalty could have arisen from educated females finding household employment, e.g., childcare and other menial jobs, as unattractive. Household employment constitute a significant proportion of refugee employment. In terms of age, labor market outcomes rose but at a decreasing rate in age up to 60years (i.e., 18 + 42). Since older refugees are likely more experienced (Demirci & Kirdar, 2023), they find jobs easily, and maneuver around employment in working multiple jobs.

How interventions affected labor market outcomes depended upon the outcome of interest. Adopting any intervention was associated with higher monthly household earnings. Similarly, employment and hours worked rose among households that adopted unsustainable coping strategies relative to those that didn't. However, employment and hours worked significantly declined in remittances and policy-based assistance.

Previous research during the pandemic indicates refugees working multiple jobs (UNHCR & World Bank, 2021) with others becoming employed (Vintar et al, 2022). As a result, earners per household rose, thereby sustainably raising household earnings. Although remittances and other assistance aim at addressing financial deprivation (Warnaar & Bilgili, 2021), it is

probable that refugees considered such assistance as unemployment benefits. It is likelier that unemployment benefits exceeded the low incentive wages. Hence, refugees found employment less beneficial compared to reliance on assistance. Consequently, the demand for work declined alongside hours worked.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This paper analyzed labor market outcomes (employment, hours worked, and earnings) among refugees in Kenya. This was realized through an analysis of the evolution of labor market outcomes across the eight COVID-19 pandemic waves. Two broad sets of other covariates—i.e., age, gender, and diversity (AGD); and, interventions— were incorporated in the analysis. The first set analyzed outcomes according to the age, gender, and diversity approach with diversity being proxied by educational attainment. The second set incorporated four interventions, i.e., unsustainable and sustainable coping mechanisms, remittances, and assistance from the government, NGOs, and FBOs.

The study concluded the following:

- i. That as employment and hours worked rose, the increase probably originated from greater uptake of low-quality, low-wage jobs among refugees.
- ii. That female refugees were just as likely to be employed as their male counterparts all else equal. However, educated female refugees are heavily penalized in terms of employment and hours worked.
- iii. That interventions significantly raised household earnings. However, the effect on hours worked and employment was intervention-specific. Employment and hours worked rose significantly in unsustainable coping strategies but declined significantly in policy-based assistance, and remittances.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the findings of the research, the following recommendations are highlighted as follows:

- i. Avenues that enhance the employment of educated female refugees without necessarily leaving out male counterparts ought to be created. These avenues could include financing job search, and the removal of cultural biases that undermine the employment of educated, female refugees.

- ii. Social protection, and other targeted, programs ought to be rolled out. These would ensure that refugees integrate effectively on the labor market without depending on unsustainable coping mechanisms. Such programs ought to be directed in a manner that does not disincentivize work.

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