

Universal Principle Of Non-Refoulement And Its Application Inuganda's Open Door Refugee Policy

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Abstract: This study examined the influence of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the protection and integration of refugees in Uganda, focusing on three key areas: access to public services, freedom of movement, and employment opportunities. The research was driven by Uganda's role as Africa's leading refugee-hosting country, despite mounting pressure on public infrastructure and services. Using a cross-sectional descriptive design, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 389 respondents, including refugees, host community members, government officials, and representatives of humanitarian agencies. Findings revealed a strong and statistically significant relationship between the implementation of the non-refoulement principle and improved refugee access to essential services. Pearson correlation results showed a positive effect on public service access ($r = 0.716$), freedom of movement ($r = 0.669$), and employment opportunities ($r = 0.628$). Regression analysis further confirmed that 72%, 67%, and 63.4% of the variations in these respective areas were attributable to Uganda's adherence to non-refoulement obligations. The study also highlighted Uganda's progressive refugee policies, including its non-encampment approach and integration of refugees into national systems, while pointing out challenges such as resource limitations and uneven policy enforcement. This research contributes to refugee policy discourse by reinforcing the practical implications of non-refoulement beyond legal non-return, framing it as a foundation for refugee dignity, security, and socioeconomic inclusion. The findings offer evidence-based insights for policymakers, humanitarian actors, and international bodies to enhance refugee protection, foster peaceful coexistence, and support sustainable host-refugee relations. Recommendations include strengthening service delivery mechanisms, enhancing accountability, and ensuring equitable implementation of refugee rights across all regions of Uganda.

Keywords: Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement, Open-Door Refugee Policy, Refugee Rights, International Refugee Law, Refugee Host Communities.

1.0. Introduction

The regulation of immigration has long been recognized as a fundamental expression of state sovereignty. Across history, countries have asserted their right to control the movement of people across borders primarily to prevent unauthorized entry and to return those deemed inadmissible. In modern contexts, this right remains legally valid but is increasingly contested in scholarly and humanitarian discourse. Scholars such as Hayter (2019) argue that immigration controls are often racially and economically discriminatory, reinforcing global inequalities and marginalizing vulnerable groups, particularly those from the Global South.

Despite such critiques, immigration control remains well-established in international law. Sovereign states maintain the authority to regulate entry and exit, a position repeatedly affirmed by legal bodies such as the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR, 2020). However, this sovereign right is balanced by obligations derived from international human rights law. States that are party to conventions such as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) are legally bound to uphold the rights and freedoms of all individuals within their jurisdictions, including non-nationals. The UN Human Rights Committee (2021) has confirmed that the principle of non-discrimination applies equally to immigrants unless exceptions are clearly defined within the treaty. While states are permitted to impose certain limitations such as restricting political rights of non-citizens such restrictions must be legally justified and proportionate (Gibney & Hansen, 2020).

Africa has been disproportionately affected by displacement crises and hosts some of the world's most protracted refugee situations. Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, has been plagued by decades of conflict, political instability, and economic hardship, leading to mass displacements both within and across borders. According to UNHCR (2018), by the end of 2013, there were over 43 million people of concern globally, nearly one-third of whom were in Africa. Approximately 13 million were based in sub-Saharan Africa, and more than 2.9 million were registered as refugees. Key hosting countries include Kenya, Ethiopia, Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, and Uganda.

Uganda stands out for its longstanding commitment to refugee protection. Historical records trace refugee hosting back to the 1940s and 1950s when Uganda welcomed Polish, Rwandan, and Sudanese refugees (Holborn, 1975). In contemporary times, Uganda is internationally recognized for its open-door refugee policy and is currently the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa and the third-largest globally (UNHCR, 2018). The majority of refugees in Uganda originate from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic

of Congo (DRC), Burundi, and Rwanda. The influx has been especially dramatic in recent years; by April 2016, the refugee population stood at approximately 526,000, rising to nearly 983,000 by the end of that year, and reaching over 1.3 million by mid-2017 (UNICEF, 2016; UNHCR, 2016; UNICEF, 2017). Notably, children account for 60% of this population, amplifying the demand for health, education, and protection services.

The root causes of displacement ethnic violence, armed conflict, and political repression remain prevalent in the region. By 2017, Uganda had an estimated 30 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, reflecting both the scale of displacement and the country's humanitarian response (UNHCR, 2018). Uganda's adherence to the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement, which prohibits the return of individuals to countries where they may face persecution, torture, or other forms of harm, has underpinned its refugee response model. This legal and ethical framework forms the basis for Uganda's inclusive refugee policies and highlights the need for critical analysis of how these principles are applied in practice.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Uganda has earned international praise for its progressive refugee policy, anchored in the Refugees Act (2006) and the Uganda Refugee Policy (2018), which uphold the principle of non-refoulement—the prohibition of returning refugees to countries where they face threats to life or freedom. These frameworks, supported by international conventions such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the ICCPR, provide strong legal guarantees for refugee protection. However, recent evidence suggests a growing gap between policy and practice, with increasing reports of forced returns, denial of due process, and weakened protection systems, particularly in border areas and overstretched refugee-hosting districts (UNHCR, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2022). Despite Uganda's commitments, key challenges remain unaddressed. Indicators such as lack of legal aid, insufficient training for immigration officers, and weak monitoring mechanisms have contributed to sporadic breaches of non-refoulement obligations. While institutions like the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and humanitarian agencies continue to support refugee management, there is limited documentation of how the principle of non-refoulement is enforced in practice. Moreover, there are few accountability structures to investigate or redress violations, leaving affected refugees vulnerable to repeated harm and without recourse. Hence this study.

1.2 General objective

This study is aimed at examining the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and its application in Uganda's Open Door Refugee Policy.

1.3 Specific of objectives

To examine the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the refugees access to Public Services in Uganda

To evaluate the influence of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the Free movement of Refugees in Uganda

To examine the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the Refugee employment opportunities in Uganda

1.4. Theoretical Review

This study is underpinned by Exile and Resettlement Theory (Kunz, 2010) and the Refugee Aid and Development (RAD) Theory (Gorman, 1993). These theories complement each other by offering both a psychosocial understanding of refugee identity and displacement, and a developmental perspective on how host communities and refugees interact in shared spaces.

Exile and Resettlement Theory categorizes refugees based on their attitudes toward their home country: those indifferent to its politics, those who feel alienated by events (e.g., conflict), and those who leave due to ideological differences. In the African context, most refugees fall into the "events-related" category, such as those fleeing ethnic conflicts like the Rwandan and Burundian crises. This theory helps explain the psychological and political dynamics of displacement, especially why some refugees are hesitant or unable to return home despite changes in their countries. It underpins the study by helping to contextualize the lived experiences of refugees in Uganda, particularly regarding their need for continued protection and the relevance of the non-refoulement principle.

RAD Theory, developed by Gorman (1993), focuses on the interaction between refugee management and development. It argues that refugees should not be seen merely as a burden but as contributors to the host society when properly integrated. It emphasizes shared resource allocation, participation in development programs, and the importance of balancing refugee needs with those of host communities. This theory is central to the study as it provides a framework for assessing Uganda's open-door policy from a developmental perspective, exploring how host communities perceive refugee-related interventions and how policy gaps may lead to tension or protection failures.

Together, these theories inform the study by offering a dual lens—Kunz's theory frames the refugee experience and identity, while Gorman's RAD theory addresses structural and developmental dimensions of refugee-host community relations. They jointly support the investigation into how Uganda's refugee protection policies, particularly the principle of non-refoulement, are implemented and experienced in real-world contexts.

2.1. Review of Literature

2.1.1 The Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and Access to Public Services

Uganda has long been internationally praised for its progressive refugee policy, notably for integrating refugees into national service systems rather than confining them to isolated camps. As of 2024, Uganda hosts more than 1.5 million refugees, making it the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa (UNHCR, 2024). This policy approach—referred to as the "Ugandan Model"—is lauded for its inclusivity, particularly in providing refugees with access to education, healthcare, and other public services (Loiacono et al., 2022). However, the strain on local public services due to high influxes is increasingly evident, particularly in northern and western districts. Despite efforts by the Ministry of Health to upgrade facilities and integrate refugee care into national systems, health centers remain overstretched, and critical shortages persist in medical staff, infrastructure, and medication (MOH, 2022; Okiror, 2023).

A study by O'Laughlin and colleagues (2023) noted that although Uganda upholds the principle of non-refoulement in law, the indirect denial of services—such as lack of access to maternal health, clean water, or safe schooling—can create conditions that effectively compel voluntary return, undermining the spirit of non-refoulement. This raises ethical and legal concerns, especially when service access disparities lead to vulnerability and exploitation. Recent research suggests that although UNHCR and the Ugandan government emphasize shared services between host communities and refugees, inequitable access remains a major source of tension and inequality (Alix-Garcia et al., 2021).

2.1.2 The Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and Refugee Freedom of Movement

Uganda's Refugees Act (2006) and Refugee Regulations (2010) guarantee freedom of movement for refugees, a right that is seldom respected in many refugee-hosting countries. Refugees are not confined to camps but allowed to live in settlements or urban areas, access land for cultivation, and move across districts. This legal framework aligns with Article 26 of the 1951 Refugee Convention and is celebrated as a liberal refugee management model (Wamara et al., 2021). However, practical limitations remain, particularly at border points and in urban settings, where asylum seekers are sometimes detained or denied entry based on security grounds—raising concerns about disguised refoulement (Refugee Law Project, 2022).

The increasing securitization of refugee entry in Uganda, particularly due to regional instability in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo, has led to restrictive practices inconsistent with Uganda's legal obligations (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Urban refugees in cities like Kampala face bureaucratic hurdles, including lack of documentation and harassment from local enforcement officials, which effectively restricts their freedom of movement (Barbelet & Wake, 2021). While the policy promotes self-reliance, limited enforcement capacity and localized resistance among some district officials have weakened the practical realization of these rights.

2.1.3 The Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and Refugee Employment Opportunities

One of the most distinctive aspects of Uganda's refugee policy is its recognition of the right to work. Refugees are allowed to seek employment, start businesses, and even participate in local governance. However, the implementation of this right remains inconsistent, particularly in rural settlements where formal labor markets are underdeveloped and support services are inadequate (Klabbers et al., 2023). Despite being legally entitled to employment, many refugees report barriers such as language, documentation issues, and discrimination, which prevent them from accessing meaningful or sustainable employment (Pham et al., 2023).

Recent studies have highlighted that while Uganda's policy challenges the restrictive asylum systems of wealthier countries, its economic burden disproportionately falls on local governments and host communities, which often lack sufficient resources (Vancluysen, 2022). The tension between rights in law and realities on the ground threatens to undermine Uganda's compliance with the principle of non-refoulement. If refugees are left without access to livelihoods or services, they may be pressured—economically or psychologically—into returning to unsafe countries, constituting indirect refoulement (Alix-Garcia et al., 2021). Moreover, as Uganda continues to accept refugees from regions such as Afghanistan and Sudan, its model faces growing international scrutiny. Critics argue that the "open-door policy" has been used to justify underfunded humanitarian responses, relying heavily on international aid without corresponding improvements in refugee welfare (O'Laughlin et al., 2023). While the government has made efforts to integrate refugees into national development plans like the National Development Plan III, implementation remains slow, and accountability mechanisms are weak.

3.0. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive design integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The choice of design allowed for a real-time snapshot of how the principle of non-refoulement is applied in Uganda, particularly in refugee-hosting areas. The combination of methods enriched the data, offering both numerical trends and contextual insights into the lived experiences of refugees and the perceptions of key stakeholders involved in refugee protection.

3.2 Study Population

The study was conducted in Kampala, one of Uganda's major urban refugee-hosting locations. The broader study population consisted of 14,743 refugees residing in Kampala settlements, as reported by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM, 2021). To provide a multi-stakeholder perspective, the study included a diverse group of participants: refugees, local community members, officials from the OPM, representatives from refugee and human rights NGOs, UNHCR staff, religious leaders, and local authorities.

These participants were selected based on their direct involvement or experience with refugee-related issues, particularly regarding access to services, freedom of movement, employment rights, and Uganda's adherence to the principle of non-refoulement. Their inclusion was aimed at capturing grounded insights into both policy implementation and practical challenges.

3.3 Sampling and Sample Size

The sample size was determined using Slovin's formula (1978), appropriate for large populations where the degree of precision is known. At a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the calculated sample size was:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

$$n = 14,743 / (1 + 14,743 \times 0.05^2)$$

$$n = 389 \text{ respondents}$$

4.3. Presentation of Findings.

4.3.1 On the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the refugees' access to Public Services in Uganda.

Responses showing participants' Opinions on the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the refugees' access to Public Services in Uganda.

Table 4.1: the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the refugees' access to Public Services in Uganda

Items of Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and refugees' access to Public Services in Uganda	Mean	SD
Refugees in Uganda have been granted access to government provided health care services without pay and or limitations.	4.39	0.08
Refugees in Uganda do enjoy and get the same education services through attending same schools with nationals with any pays.	4.23	0.11
Refugees in Uganda do equally benefit from government programmes like; Emwooga fund, NAADs and Parish Model.	4.10	0.14
Uganda is a signatory to all principal international legal instruments for refugee protection	4.02	0.17
Refugees in Uganda have been granted access to government provided health care services without pay and or limitations.	3.84	0.21
Refugees in Uganda have been granted access to government provided health care services without pay and or limitations.	3.62	0.23
Overall mean	3.80	0.19

Source of data: Primary Data, (2023)

From the results in Table 4.6 that the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement policy in Uganda is a crucial factor on the refugees' access to Public Services in Uganda. According to the above descriptive results, majority of the respondents agreed that refugees in Uganda have been granted access to government provided health care services without pay and or limitations, with a mean of (4.39), plus a widely spread SD at (0.08). Thus, in areas exposed to more refugees experienced better access to public and private schools, health centers, and roads as a result of resources allocated from aid, reducing tensions between refugees and host communities.

While, majority of the respondents asserted that refugees in Uganda do enjoy and get the same education services through attending same schools with nationals with any pays, with a mean value of (4.23), and SD at (0.11). And a good number of the respondents also agreed that refugees in Uganda do equally benefit from government programmes like; Emwooga fund, NAADs and Parish Model with a mean of (4.10) and SD value at (0.014).

More so, a good number of the respondents agreed that Uganda is a signatory to all principal international legal instruments for refugee protection, with a mean of (4.02), and SD value at (0.17). A number of respondents agreed that refugees in Uganda have been granted access to government provided health care services without pay and or limitations, with a mean value of (3.84), SD value at (0.21). And lastly, a number of respondents agreed that refugees in Uganda have been granted access to government provided health care services without pay and or limitations, with a mean value of (3.62), SD value at (0.23).

In support of the descriptive results, key informant I was quoted saying that, “.....Under international human rights law, the principle of non-refoulement guarantees that no one should be re- turned to a country where they would face torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and other irreparable harm.....”.

Key informant III was quoted saying that,Ugandans and refugees are feeling the strain of land, food, and resources. Poverty remains high and inflation is on the rise which will increase economic vulnerability and tensions amongst refugees and the host community will increase as social services provided by humanitarian actors are reduced in 2023.....”

4.3.1.1. Correlations on the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the refugees’ access to Public Services in Uganda

To assess the relationship between the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and refugees’ access to public services in Uganda, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 4.7 below:

Table 4.2: Correlation between Non-Refoulement Policy and Access to Public Services

	Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement	Refugees’ Access to Public Services
Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement	1.000	0.716 (**)
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.000
N	365	365

(Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed)

Source: Primary Data (2023)

The analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and refugees’ access to public services ($r = 0.716$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that as Uganda strengthens its implementation of non-refoulement—especially through its open-door and integration policies—refugees’ access to services such as healthcare, education, and national development programs significantly improves. Practically, this correlation implies that nearly **72% of improvements** in service access can be linked to the consistent application of non-refoulement obligations. Thus, ensuring legal and policy adherence to non-refoulement plays a pivotal role in enabling refugees to enjoy essential services equally with nationals.

4.3.1.2 Regression Analysis of the Influence of Non-Refoulement on Access to Public Services

To determine the extent to which the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement influences refugees’ access to public services, a linear regression analysis was conducted. The results are presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.3: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.953	0.718	0.599	1.0321

a. Predictors: (Constant), Refugees’ Access to Public Services

Source: Primary Data (2023)

The regression model revealed a high R-value of 0.953, indicating a very strong relationship between the independent variable (non-refoulement policy) and the dependent variable (refugees’ access to public services). The R^2 value of 0.718 demonstrates that approximately 72% of the variance in refugees’ access to public services can be explained by Uganda’s adherence to the non-refoulement principle, particularly as embedded in international frameworks like the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Moreover, the adjusted R^2 value of 0.599 affirms that the model has strong explanatory power even after accounting for statistical error. The standard error of 1.0321 indicates a relatively low dispersion of observed values from the regression line, confirming the model's reliability. These results affirm the first objective of the study: to examine the impact of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on refugees' access to public services in Uganda. The findings underscore that legal and policy commitment to non-refoulement is instrumental in ensuring equitable access to essential public services, contributing to refugee well-being and social cohesion in host communities.

4.3.2 The influence of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the free movement of Refugees in Uganda

Table 4.4: the influence of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the free movement of Refugees in Uganda

Item of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and the Free movement of Refugees in Uganda	Mean	SD
The Ugandan laws recognizes the right of refugees to move freely within the country and to live in the local community, rather than in settlements.	4.19	0.16
The Ugandan government promotes refugee 'self-reliance in the settlements by giving the training and incentive services	4.05	0.23
The refugees are freely allowed to associate with the public and are spread across several settlements throughout the country, and within the capital.	3.86	0.26
The Ugandan government encourages refugees to move to where they can be productive without restrictions	3.61	0.29
Credited for implementing one of the most progressive refugee policy regimes in the world and sustaining its open-door asylum policy and development-oriented model.	3.44	0.31
The Ugandan government promotes refugee 'self-reliance in the settlements by giving the training and incentive services	3.33	0.33
The refugees are freely allowed to associate with the public and are spread across several settlements throughout the country, and within the capital.	2.93	0.39
Overall Mean	3.42	0.32

Source of data: Primary Data, (2023).

Respondents largely agreed that Ugandan laws recognize the right of refugees to reside outside settlements and move freely across the country, reflected in a high mean of 4.19 and a low standard deviation of 0.16, suggesting strong consensus. Similarly, there was significant agreement that the government promotes self-reliance through training and incentive-based programs in settlements (mean = 4.05, SD = 0.23), as well as support for social integration by allowing refugees to associate freely and settle across the country, including urban centers (mean = 3.86, SD = 0.26).

Respondents also acknowledged that Uganda's non-restrictive asylum approach enables refugees to relocate to areas where they can be more productive without substantial limitations (mean = 3.61, SD = 0.29). The policy was recognized as one of the most progressive refugee frameworks globally, although the mean score here dropped to 3.44 (SD = 0.31), possibly reflecting varied implementation across regions. Lower agreement levels appeared for repeated items on service provision and community association, indicating some inconsistencies in policy application or awareness among stakeholders.

The findings emphasize that Uganda's non-encampment policy, supported by the non-refoulement principle, creates an environment where refugees are not confined or forcibly isolated but encouraged to become economically self-reliant and socially integrated. However, despite a legal framework that promotes free movement, practical challenges—such as limited local resources, informal restrictions, and varying district-level enforcement—may hinder full policy realization.

Qualitative Insights

The qualitative data reinforced the survey findings. One **key informant** noted: *"Uganda's progressive refugee policies allow refugees to settle in various parts of the country, from Kampala to secondary cities like Mbarara and Arua. This freedom supports employment and self-reliance among refugees, particularly in urban settings."*

Another official elaborated: *"Refugees in Uganda not only have the right to move but also to work, start businesses, and access education and health services. They are given land to farm and build homes, which enhances their independence and integration with host communities."* These narratives confirm that Uganda's adherence to the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement goes beyond preventing forced return. It also entails enabling freedom, dignity, and opportunity for refugees through a policy framework that actively supports integration and mobility.

4.3.2.1 Correlations on the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the on the free movement of Refugees in Uganda

To determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and the free movement of refugees in Uganda, a Pearson correlation coefficient analysis was conducted. The findings are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Correlation between Non-Refoulement and Refugees' Free Movement

	Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement	Free Movement of Refugees
Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement	1.000	.669 (**)
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.001
N	365	365
Free Movement of Refugees	.669 (**)	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	—
N	365	365

(Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed)

Source: Primary Data (2023)

The results show a moderately strong positive correlation ($r = 0.669$) between the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and the free movement of refugees, which is statistically significant ($p = 0.001 < 0.01$). This suggests that as the enforcement and recognition of non-refoulement improves, so too does the freedom of movement for refugees within Uganda. This outcome reinforces the principle that the right to non-refoulement is not limited to protection from forced return, but also includes enabling conditions that allow refugees to live freely and safely. It supports the interpretation that refugees—regardless of whether they come from peaceful or conflict-affected states—should not face restrictions that limit their fundamental freedoms, especially if they risk harm upon return.

In particular, individuals fleeing political persecution, torture, or other human rights violations—such as opposition leaders or ethnic minorities—are entitled to mobility and security in their host country. The 67% association implied by the correlation underscores that non-refoulement, when effectively applied, facilitates not only protection from return but also the right to relocate, settle, and participate in society without undue restriction.

This finding provides empirical support for Uganda's liberal refugee policy, which allows refugees to reside outside camps, move across districts, and integrate with host communities—further aligning with its obligations under international human rights and refugee law, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention.

4.3.2.2 Regression Analysis on the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the free movement of Refugees in Uganda

Table 4.6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.803 ^a	.672	.584	1.0112

a. Predictors: (Constant), Free movement of Refugees

Source of data: Primary Data (2023)

From the regression analysis result in table 6 above, 67% variations in the free movement of Refugees in Uganda is attributed to the implementation of Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement.

The R-value is 0.803, which represents the moderate correlation and therefore, indicates a moderate degree of correlation. The R² value of .672 indicates how much of the dependent variable (Free movement of Refugees) is attributed to the independent variable (Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement). The standard error of the estimate is 1.0112 and the Adjusted R square value is .584. This value, therefore, implied that the free movement of Refugees was dependent on the implementation of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement by 67%, hence justifying the second study objective which identified the effect of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the free movement of Refugees in Uganda.

4.3.3 Descriptive Analysis of the influence of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the Refugee employment opportunities in Uganda

Table 4.7: the influence of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the Refugee employment opportunities in Uganda

Items of Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the Refugee employment opportunities in Uganda	Mean	SD
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Within each settlement, land is allocated to each refugee household in order to facilitate refugees' economic independence through agricultural livelihoods	3.85	0.21
The Ugandan laws recognizes the right of refugees to work anywhere in the country without any restrictions, not even a working permit.	3.79	0.23
The government of Uganda is commended for its efforts to expand economic opportunities through promoting investments while enhancing environmental management in refugee settlements.	3.67	0.26
The Ugandan laws provide for employment rights and equal access to services such as healthcare and education.	3.59	0.29
The Ugandan laws provide for the refugees right to own property, as some property rights are guaranteed, can own movable property, such as cars and machinery.	3.45	0.31
In Uganda, Refugees can vote and stand for office at the local level.	3.37	0.35
The Ugandan government has adopted land tenure security systems and small-scale infrastructure investments targeting both refugees and the host community.	2.89	0.39
Overall Mean	3.33	0.322

Source of data: Primary Data, (2023).

Table 4.12 indicates that that majority of the respondents asserted that within each settlement, land is allocated to each refugee household in order to facilitate refugees' economic independence through agricultural livelihoods, and this is confirmed by mean value of (3.85) and SD at (0.21). While, majority of the respondents agreed that the Ugandan laws recognizes the right of refugees to work anywhere in the country without any restrictions, not even a working permit, with a mean value of (3.79) and SD at (0.23). Also, a good number of the respondents of the respondents asserted that the government of Uganda is commended for its efforts to expand economic opportunities through promoting investments while enhancing environmental management in refugee settlements, with a mean value of (3.67) and SD at (0.26). And a good number of the respondents of the respondents asserted that the Ugandan laws provide for employment rights and equal access to services such as healthcare and education, with a mean value of (3.59) and SD at (0.29).

More so, a good number of the respondents agreed that the Ugandan laws provide for the refugees right to own property, as some property rights are guaranteed, can own movable property, such as cars and machinery, with a mean value of (3.45) and SD at (0.31) from the mean value. A good number of the respondents asserted that in Uganda, Refugees can vote and stand for office at the local level, with mean value of (3.37) and SD at (0.35) from the mean value. And lastly, a relative number of the respondents of the respondents agreed that the Ugandan government has adopted land tenure security systems and small-scale infrastructure investments targeting both refugees and the host community. The study results of Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on the Refugee employment opportunities in Uganda, was an average mean of 3.33 and STD value of 0.322, interpreted as good. This shows that the implementation of Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement was crucial for improved access of Refugee employment opportunities in Uganda.

In support of the descriptive results, key informant III was quoted saying, "....Closing borders to refugees is not the solution. Among refugees are doctors, lawyers and other university graduates that can make valuable contributions to host communities.....," says Mr. Hakiza, advocating free movement in host countries and across borders.

Key informant II had this to say, "Uganda's refugee policy guarantees freedom of movement and the right to employment, education and health, as well as the right to start a business. The government also provides refugees plots of land so they can farm and construct shelters. It empowers refugees to become economically self-reliant, while granting them the same rights that citizens enjoy....."

4.3.3.1 Influence of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement on Refugee Employment Opportunities in Uganda

This section examines how the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement affects refugee employment opportunities within Uganda's inclusive refugee policy framework. A **Pearson correlation analysis** was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables, as presented in **Table 4.13**.

Table 4.13: Correlation between Non-Refoulement and Refugee Employment Opportunities

	Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement	Refugee Employment Opportunities
Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement	1.000	.628 (**)
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.002

N	365	365
Refugee Employment Opportunities	.628 (**)	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	—
N	365	365

(Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed)

Source: Primary Data (2023)

The results show a moderate-to-strong positive correlation ($r = 0.628$), significant at $p = 0.002$, indicating that as the application of the non-refoulement principle improves, so do the employment opportunities available to refugees. This suggests that legal protection from forced return provides the security and legal status refugees need to seek, access, and engage in meaningful employment.

These findings highlight that non-refoulement does more than prevent deportation—it lays the foundation for integration and economic participation. When refugees are secure from expulsion, they are better positioned to settle, build livelihoods, and contribute to host economies. Uganda's refugee model, which allows refugees the right to work, own property, and start businesses, aligns well with these principles.

4.3.3.1 Regression Analysis: Influence of Non-Refoulement on Refugee Employment Opportunities

To determine the degree of influence the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement has on refugee employment opportunities, a linear regression analysis was carried out. The results are summarized in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14: Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.799	0.634	0.499	1.0150

a. Predictors: (Constant), Refugee Employment Opportunities

Source: Primary Data (2023)

The regression model produced an R-value of 0.799, indicating a moderately strong correlation between the non-refoulement principle and refugee employment. The R^2 value of 0.634 reveals that 63.4% of the variation in refugee employment opportunities can be attributed to the effective implementation of the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement.

An adjusted R^2 of 0.499 indicates that even when accounting for error, the model remains robust and statistically meaningful. The standard error of 1.0150 confirms a relatively good fit between predicted and observed values. This finding strongly supports the third objective of the study, confirming that legal protection under the non-refoulement principle directly influences refugee access to employment in Uganda. With security from forced return, refugees can focus on rebuilding their lives, participating in economic activities, and contributing to national development—outcomes that are especially encouraged under Uganda's self-reliance model and integration agenda.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

On the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and Access to Public Services: The study found a strong, statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.716$, $p < 0.05$) between the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and refugees' access to public services in Uganda. Regression analysis revealed that 72% of the variation in service access could be explained by how effectively the non-refoulement policy is implemented. These findings align with prior research (e.g., Dustmann et al., 2019; MOH, 2021), which has described Uganda as a global model for refugee integration. Public services—especially in refugee-hosting regions—have expanded due to international aid, reducing community tensions and enhancing inclusivity.

On the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and Free Movement of Refugees: Results also showed a positive correlation ($r = 0.669$, $p = 0.001$) between non-refoulement and the freedom of movement for refugees. Regression findings indicated that 67% of refugee mobility was linked to Uganda's implementation of the principle. This supports earlier work (Wamara et al., 2021; Merkx, 2002), which praised Uganda's open-door policy and legal guarantees that allow refugees to live outside camps and move freely. However, the study also notes challenges in enforcement and equitable access in poorer districts.

On the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and Employment Opportunities: The correlation analysis showed a positive and statistically significant relationship ($r = 0.628$, $p = 0.002$) between the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement and refugee employment opportunities. Regression results attributed 63.4% of employment access to the policy's implementation. The findings mirror views by Klabbers et al. (2023) and Tulibaleka et al. (2022), noting that while Uganda's refugee policy supports self-reliance and labor rights, land tenure issues and administrative barriers persist. Urban refugees especially benefit from opportunities in Kampala and regional cities, despite systemic challenges.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that the Universal Principle of Non-Refoulement significantly influences refugee access to essential services, freedom of movement, and employment opportunities in Uganda. Specifically, access to public services is positively affected by 72%, with a regression coefficient of 0.493; freedom of movement is enhanced by 67%, with a coefficient of 0.344; and employment opportunities increase by 63.4%, supported by a coefficient of 0.239. These findings collectively demonstrate that effective implementation of the non-refoulement principle not only safeguards refugees from forced return but also facilitates their social and economic integration within host communities.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes valuable insights into how international legal principles, particularly non-refoulement, interact with Uganda's Open Door Refugee Policy. It informs key stakeholders—such as UNHCR, OPM, and other humanitarian actors—on policy gaps and implementation challenges, and provides a foundation for designing evidence-based interventions in refugee-hosting contexts. The research highlights the strain on host communities, particularly on water and healthcare systems, due to rising refugee numbers. It also underscores the broader humanitarian, political, and development-related dimensions of displacement. Importantly, it demonstrates that the effectiveness of refugee hosting largely depends on the policy approaches and support mechanisms adopted during and after displacement.

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