

**EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MECHANISMS FOR PROTECTING
REFUGEES: A CASE STUDY OF CAMEROON**

By

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ABSTRACT

Refugees are among the most vulnerable groups in the world—forced to leave behind their homes, families, and sense of safety. While international laws exist to protect them, the reality on the ground often tells a different story. This study explores how well Cameroon’s legal and institutional frameworks protect refugees, especially urban women, and whether those frameworks truly align with international standards.

Drawing on interviews with refugee women in urban areas like Douala, alongside conversations with legal experts and NGO representatives, this research paints a vivid picture of what it’s like to be a refugee in Cameroon today. It reveals that while Cameroon has ratified international treaties like the 1951 Refugee Convention and adopted national laws, many refugees still face serious challenges. These include delays in obtaining documentation, limited access to healthcare and education, discrimination in housing and employment, and exposure to gender-based violence all of which are made worse by weak institutional support and poor coordination.

The voices of the refugees in this study speak volumes. They tell stories of resilience in the face of neglect, and of daily struggles to access basic rights that most take for granted. At the same time, the study finds that there is hope many NGOs are stepping in to help, and there is a strong foundation of law that, if implemented properly, could offer real protection.

Ultimately, this thesis calls for more humane, gender-sensitive, and practical approaches to refugee protection in Cameroon. It urges policymakers, civil society, and international partners to bridge the gap between what the law promises and what refugees actually experience.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Refugee protection is fundamental to international human rights law, driven by the increasing population of displaced persons escaping conflicts, political turmoil, and natural calamities. By mid-2024, the global refugee population exceeded 30 million, marking a sharp increase from previous years, according to the UNHCR, (2024). Africa remains at the epicenter of this crisis, with millions seeking refuge in neighboring countries. As a key player in the Central African region, Cameroon hosts over 474,000 refugees and asylum seekers, as of June 2022 (ReliefWeb, 2022), making it one of the continent's largest refugee-hosting nations.

To address this humanitarian challenge, Cameroon has established legal frameworks designed to protect the rights of refugees. Chief among these is Law No. 2005/006 of 27 July 2005, which aligns with international conventions such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention. This legislation incorporates core principles of refugee protection, including the definition of refugees, the prohibition of refoulement, and non-discrimination (Republic of Cameroon, 2005; OHCHR, 2013). While these frameworks signify Cameroon's commitment to international refugee law, their implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in urban areas.

Urban refugees, who make up a significant portion of Cameroon's refugee population, face acute challenges in accessing legal, social, and economic support. Inadequate institutional capacity, combined with socio-economic barriers, often leaves urban refugees without sufficient access to employment, housing, and basic services (Pascal, 2023; ReliefWeb, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of proper documentation and legal recognition exacerbates their marginalization, hindering their ability to integrate into host communities (The New Humanitarian, 2019). These systemic challenges underscore the gap between Cameroon's legal commitments and the lived realities of refugees.

This study seeks to critically analyze Cameroon's legal frameworks for refugee protection, with a focus on their alignment with international standards and the specific socio-legal challenges faced by urban refugees. By doing so, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of these mechanisms and to identify areas requiring urgent improvement to enhance the protection and integration of refugees in Cameroon.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value in advancing the understanding of refugee protection mechanisms within the context of a developing country, using Cameroon as a critical case study. As the global refugee population continues to surge, understanding or researching the strengths and limitations of existing legal and institutional frameworks is crucial for shaping both national and international refugee policies. Given that Africa hosts over one-third of the world's displaced population, the findings from this research could provide vital insights for other nations grappling with similar humanitarian crises (UNHCR, 2024).

Cameroon's strategic position, bordering conflict-prone countries such as the Central African Republic and Nigeria, underscores its importance as a host country. This research will critically assess Cameroon's refugee protection policies to determine their adherence to international human rights standards. By identifying gaps in the implementation of these policies, particularly for urban refugees, the study aims to equip policymakers and humanitarian actors with the knowledge needed to strengthen refugee protection systems and enhance integration strategies.

The study also has practical implications for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies, and local authorities involved in refugee assistance. By shedding light on the specific challenges faced by urban refugees—such as socio-economic exclusion, legal barriers, and limited access to healthcare and education—the research will serve as a foundation for targeted advocacy and programmatic interventions (Pascal, 2023). Additionally, it will emphasize the need for collaborative, multi-stakeholder approaches to address these systemic challenges, fostering greater cooperation among government entities, humanitarian organizations, and host communities.

From an academic perspective, this research will contribute to the field of refugee and migration studies by providing empirical evidence on the implementation of international refugee conventions in a regional context. As a case study, Cameroon will add depth to existing literature on refugee protection, addressing critical gaps regarding the effectiveness of legal frameworks in Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, the study's findings could inspire future research into innovative and context-specific solutions for enhancing refugee protection and integration in host countries (Goodwin-Gill & McAdam, 2007).

In summary, this study is both academically significant and socially impactful. By critically analyzing the practical implications of Cameroon's refugee policies, it aims to influence positive

change in how refugees are protected and integrated into society. Through its focus on the voices and lived experiences of displaced populations, the research seeks to ensure that the needs of refugees are prioritized in policy development and humanitarian programming.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

Cameroon has made significant strides in developing legal frameworks to protect the rights of refugees, notably through the enactment of Law No. 2005/006 (Republic of Cameroon, 2005). This legislation reflects the country's commitment to aligning with international instruments such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and “the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention”. However, despite these legal provisions, concerns persist regarding the adequacy and implementation of these frameworks, particularly in urban areas where refugees face unique and compounded challenges (Mogan, 2014).

Urban refugees in Cameroon encounter a range of socio-legal difficulties, including limited access to legal assistance, employment opportunities, healthcare, and education (Wobelt, 2014). These challenges are exacerbated by systemic barriers such as inadequate institutional support, insufficient funding, and societal discrimination. Additionally, gaps between Cameroonian refugee laws and international standards raise questions about the effectiveness of these frameworks in protecting refugees' fundamental rights (Goodwin-Gill & McAdam, 2007). Such discrepancies hinder refugees' ability to integrate into society, exacerbating their vulnerability and marginalization.

This situation underscores the urgent need to critically examine Cameroon’s refugee protection mechanisms. This study aims to evaluate the extent to which national laws align with international refugee law and to explore the socio-legal challenges faced by urban refugees under these frameworks. Addressing these questions is critical to identifying areas where legal and institutional improvements are needed to enhance the protection and integration of refugees. Moreover, understanding these issues is essential for ensuring that Cameroon fulfills its international human rights obligations and provides refugees with the dignity, security, and opportunities they deserve.

1.4. Motivation of the Study

The motivation for this study arises from a profound concern for the escalating global refugee crisis and a commitment to advancing the discourse on human rights and social justice. Cameroon presents a compelling context for this research, given its role as a major host country in a region deeply affected by political instability and social upheaval. The resilience and struggles of refugees

displaced by conflict and persecution serve as a powerful impetus for exploring the mechanisms designed to protect these vulnerable populations. This study seeks to assess whether these mechanisms are effective in practice and whether they align with international standards aimed at safeguarding human dignity and ensuring equitable treatment.

A key driver of this research is the observed disparity between Cameroon's legal frameworks and the lived realities of refugees, particularly those in urban settings. Despite Cameroon's ratification of international conventions and the establishment of national laws intended to protect refugees, numerous challenges persist. Reports highlight restricted access to basic services, systemic discrimination, and heightened risks of exploitation for refugees (ReliefWeb, 2019). These ongoing issues highlight the need for a deeper examination of the factors contributing to this gap and an exploration of possible approaches to better align legal frameworks with the realities on the ground.

On a personal level, this study is motivated by an academic and professional interest in refugee and migration studies. The researcher's engagement with humanitarian organizations and exposure to the experiences of displaced individuals have fostered a deep passion for understanding the complexities of refugee protection. This research seeks to contribute to this field by providing critical insights that can inform not only policy development but also advocacy efforts and practical interventions. Central to this motivation is the belief that the voices and experiences of refugees must remain at the forefront of discussions surrounding their protection and integration.

Moreover, this study aligns with the global efforts to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16, which emphasizes the promotion of peace, justice, and strong institutions. The ultimate goal is to inspire systemic change that addresses the socio-legal barriers encountered by refugees, promotes their well-being, and fosters a more inclusive and equitable society.

1.5. Research Questions

1.5.1 Main Research Question

1. How does Cameroon's legal framework for refugee protection align with international standards, and what impact do these frameworks have on the lived experiences of urban refugees? Very fine research question.

1.5.2 Specific Research Questions

1. What are the key legal frameworks in Cameroon for refugee protection, and how do they operate in practice?
2. How do the institutions responsible for implementing these frameworks address refugee needs, and how is their capacity evaluated?
3. What socio-legal challenges do urban refugees face, and how do they navigate these challenges in their daily lives?
4. What are the discrepancies between Cameroonian and international refugee protection laws, and how do these affect the refugees' access to rights and opportunities?

1.6. Objectives of the Study

1.6.1 Main Objective

1. To assess the suitability of Cameroon's legal framework for refugee protection in comparison with international standards and understand how the discrepancies affect the lived experiences of urban refugees.

1.6.2 Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the legal framework in Cameroon for refugee protection, emphasizing its alignment with international refugee law.
2. To examine how effectively institutions tasked with refugee protection implement these frameworks, focusing on institutional capacity and practice.
3. To investigate the socio-legal challenges faced by urban refugees in Cameroon, with a qualitative focus on how they navigate these challenges.
4. To identify discrepancies between Cameroon's refugee protection laws and international standards and explore their implications for refugees' daily lives.

1.7. Outline of the Study

This thesis, which examines the effectiveness of mechanisms for protecting refugees in Cameroon, focuses on the legal frameworks, institutional roles, socio-legal challenges, and economic dependencies affecting urban refugees. The study employs theoretical frameworks, including Natural Law Theory, International Regime Theory, Functionalism Theory, and the African Refugee

Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. The structure of the thesis is organized into five chapters, as follows:

Chapter one introduces the study and outlines the context of refugee protection in Cameroon. It covers the background of the study, the problem statement, research objectives, significance, scope, and the research questions. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the research are also introduced here, laying the foundation for the analysis that follows. fine

Chapter two presents the literature review where we examine the theoretical framework and empirical review.

Chapter three is research methodology, it is made-up of the scope and area of study, research design, method of data analysis and limitation of method. fine

Chapter four presents the legal framework on the enforcement of refugee right as well as the comparative analysis of national and international legal frameworks on refugee protection.

Chapter five presents the findings from semi-structured interviews with urban refugees and government officials. The analysis addresses themes such as the alignment of Cameroon's legal frameworks with international standards, institutional capacities, and the socio-legal challenges faced by refugees. Quotes and narratives from participants illustrate their lived experiences, with a focus on how refugees navigate these challenges. The theoretical frameworks are applied to interpret the findings and provide a deeper understanding of the issues identified.

Chapter six which is the final chapter present the conclusion and recommendations. The final chapter summarizes the key findings of the research, discusses the implications of these findings, and provides a comprehensive conclusion. The chapter also offers recommendations for improving refugee protection mechanisms in Cameroon.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This review establishes a foundation by summarizing current understanding, thereby situating new research within the broader scholarly context. This process not only acknowledges prior scholarship but also identifies gaps, inconsistencies, and open questions in the existing literature, highlighting areas where further investigation is needed. In constructing a literature review, it is essential to engage with both theoretical and empirical studies. Theoretical literature offers various perspectives and frameworks that inform the understanding of the research topic, while empirical literature provides data-driven insights through original research findings. In summary, the purpose of a literature review is multifaceted: it provides a foundation of knowledge, identifies gaps in existing research, guides methodological decisions, and situates new research within the broader academic discourse. By engaging with both theoretical and empirical literature, researchers can develop a comprehensive understanding of their topic and clearly articulate the unique contribution of their study.

In this chapter, the study will delve into the theoretical framework by examining existing theories on refugee protection mechanisms. Subsequently, we will analyze Cameroon's legal and institutional structures for refugee protection, assessing their effectiveness and alignment with international standards. Finally, the chapter will conduct an empirical review of studies addressing the experiences of urban refugees and gender-specific challenges within African contexts, highlighting areas where current frameworks succeed or fall short.

2.1 EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Charles Nana Nguindip, in his article “The Legal and Institutional Framework for Protection of Foreigners in Cameroon”, examines the rights and protection of foreigners, including refugees, in Cameroon. His study highlights the legal framework that safeguards both nationals and non-nationals, investigating the national human rights mechanisms in place. A key similarity between Nguindip’s work and this study is the focus on the protection of non-citizens in Cameroon,

particularly through legal and institutional mechanisms. His research outlines the treaties and national laws that the government has signed and implemented to make Cameroon a safe haven for foreigners. However, while Nguindip's study broadly considers the protection of all foreigners, this research specifically evaluates the effectiveness of mechanisms dedicated to refugee protection. By narrowing the focus to refugees, this study aims to critically assess whether Cameroon's legal and institutional frameworks align with international standards and adequately address the unique challenges faced by urban refugees. This distinction highlights a gap in the literature that this research seeks to address by emphasizing the lived experiences of refugees and their interaction with the legal system in Cameroon.

Walbert and Morgan (2014) examined the challenges urban refugees face in Yaoundé, emphasizing the human rights violations they endure and their dependence on international protection. While their study provides critical insights into the difficulties experienced by urban refugees, it does not assess the effectiveness of legal and institutional mechanisms designed to protect them. My research builds on their findings by shifting the focus from identifying challenges to evaluating the adequacy of Cameroon's legal framework in addressing these challenges.

By engaging with these studies, my research aims to bridge the gap between international refugee protection standards and Cameroon's domestic implementation, with a specific emphasis on urban refugees. It critically examines whether the legal and institutional frameworks in Cameroon sufficiently align with international guidelines and how this alignment—or lack thereof—affects the lived experiences of refugees.

Ziba Vaghari, Zoe Tessier, and Christian Whalen highlight the negative impact of poor living conditions such as malnutrition, lack of clean water, and restricted availability of healthcare services on the physical and mental health of refugee and asylum-seeking children. Their work also emphasizes the importance of peace education and ensuring that refugee children have access to their fundamental rights in asylum countries. While their study shares a common interest in refugee protection, it primarily focuses on health and education rather than assessing the legal and institutional mechanisms for refugee protection. My research, in contrast, evaluates the effectiveness of Cameroon's legal framework in safeguarding refugees' rights. By considering

these broader legal mechanisms, my study extends beyond health concerns to examine the overall alignment of Cameroon's refugee protection system with international standards.

In her 2010 study, Clark-Kazak conducted interviews with young demonstrators, other refugee youth, members of the Congolese and Ugandan communities, as well as local officials, as part of a broader investigation into the political engagement of young refugees. A key event frequently mentioned by participants was the school fees protest, which had become a symbolic moment in the socio-political context of the refugee camp. The study revealed generational differences in how people interpreted the incident, though their accounts of what happened were largely similar. Young Congolese refugees viewed the incident as a reflection of the hierarchical nature of decision-making in the camp, which they felt limited their ability to participate meaningfully. Those directly involved in the protest expressed frustration over being denied the opportunity to speak in court. On the other hand, adult respondents-both from the refugee and host communities focused more on the perceived lack of control over the youth, viewing the demonstrators as unruly and disobedient. While most adults criticized the protest, they also condemned the authorities' response, seeing it as an abuse of power and a violation of human rights. This study is relevant to my research because it underscores the power dynamics and institutional barriers that shape refugees' lived experiences-an essential aspect of assessing the effectiveness of Cameroon's legal framework. The findings highlight the importance of participation and access to justice in refugee protection, elements that my research examines in the context of urban refugees in Cameroon.

Henderson (2014) contended that Australia's practice of detaining child refugees might amount to a crime against humanity because of the significant restriction of their freedom. While this study highlights the legal and human rights implications of detention policies, it also underscores the limitations of legal enforcement mechanisms in protecting refugee rights. This is particularly relevant to my research, as it raises questions about the effectiveness of Cameroon's legal frameworks in upholding the rights of refugees and whether similar legal gaps exist in the Cameroonian context.

Silverman and Lewis (2017) reported that some countries, such as Belgium and Japan, have sought alternatives to detention, such as family facilities and monitoring committees. They emphasize the

importance of clearer legal interpretations and procedural safeguards to prevent arbitrary detention. This informs my research by highlighting the need to evaluate whether Cameroon's legal and institutional frameworks incorporate similar safeguards or whether refugees experience systemic challenges in securing their rights.

Lundberg and Lind (2017) examined how immigration officials in Sweden failed to adequately assess children's asylum claims due to a lack of understanding of children's rights and ineffective documentation practices. This study is particularly relevant to my research as it raises concerns about institutional capacity in refugee processing. My study investigates whether Cameroonian institutions responsible for refugee protection demonstrate similar gaps in training, procedural efficiency, and rights awareness.

Kronick et al. (2018) explored refugee children's perspectives on detention in Canada, identifying themes such as confinement, surveillance, and loss of protection. This study is significant for my research because it demonstrates the psychological and social consequences of weak refugee protection frameworks. In the Cameroonian context, my research seeks to uncover how urban refugees perceive and navigate socio-legal challenges, including restrictions on movement, access to services, and interactions with authorities.

Mousin (2019) found that detention in the U.S. is often used as a first resort rather than a last resort, with families held for longer than legal limits. This study highlights the gap between legal provisions and actual practice, a key theme in my research. By investigating whether Cameroon's refugee protection frameworks align with international standards, my study will assess whether similar discrepancies exist and how they affect urban refugees' daily experiences.

Christian Nkatow highlighted that Kadey Division, among the seven administrative divisions of Cameroon's East Region, has emerged as a strategic sanctuary for both internally and externally displaced individuals, including those from neighboring Central African countries and from within Cameroon itself. His analysis focuses on the living conditions of Central African Refugees (CARs) and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) residing in this Division. Findings revealed that various stakeholders adopted multiple strategies aimed at integrating these displaced populations. Based on Cameroon's 2005 refugee law, the national government officially designated areas such as Lolo,

Mbile, Timangolo, and Gbiti within Kadey as settlement zones for CARs. In response, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) implemented programs to issue identification documents, which facilitated freedom of movement and access to humanitarian aid provided by both domestic and international actors. Furthermore, several initiatives aimed at fostering peaceful coexistence and social integration were launched to support the resettlement and well-being of both CARs and IDPs. Recognizing education as a central goal within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), displaced individuals were enrolled in primary and secondary schools across the Division. Additionally, the "Flying Doctors" program provided essential health services both at settlement centers and public hospitals, improving healthcare access for the affected populations. Despite these efforts, CARs and IDPs continued to face significant challenges in integrating into local communities. These included a general lack of awareness regarding basic human and refugee rights, along with xenophobic attitudes exhibited by some host community members. The integration of displaced populations in Kadey has produced mixed outcomes—on the one hand, strengthening diplomatic ties between Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and the UNHCR; while on the other, raising serious security concerns due to the emergence of rebel and criminal groups operating in the region.

Eloundou Mbua (2015) notes that Cameroon adopted a legal framework for refugee protection through legislation passed in July 2005, which came into force in November 2011. His analysis centers on the rights structure outlined in the law, the procedures for granting refugee status, and the entitlements accorded to both asylum seekers and officially recognized refugees. Particular emphasis is given to evaluating how well the 2005 refugee legislation aligns with international conventions on refugees and human rights to which Cameroon is a party. He argues that the implementation of the law's provisions remains incomplete and offers recommendations to improve the enforcement and practical application of the 2005 refugee legislation.

Parveen Parmar (2012) carried out a study focusing on women refugees from the Central African Republic (CAR) who had relocated to the rural Djohong District in Eastern Cameroon, alongside women from the host Cameroonian community. The aim was to evaluate the prevalence and circumstances surrounding sexual violence. Female heads of households were questioned regarding their demographic details, economic status, household assets, educational background, and personal experiences with sexual violence. The findings revealed that sexual violence is a

widespread issue affecting both refugee and host populations in Eastern Cameroon, with a significant number of female household heads reporting having experienced such abuse during their lifetime. The main perpetrators were often intimate partners, spouses, or members of armed groups.

Kisangani N. F. Emizet highlights that the mass killing of refugees during the 1996–1997 conflict in Congo underscores the gap between established international legal standards and their actual enforcement, with the principle of state sovereignty often being used to legitimize actions against vulnerable groups. He assesses data concerning the scale of the atrocities and estimates that approximately 232,000 refugees were killed. Emizet argues that a firm commitment to justice and the protection of human rights should not be seen as conflicting with a nation's goals of stability and development; rather, it serves as the most effective pathway to achieving these goals while strengthening state sovereignty within the global arena. He emphasizes that the effective application of international refugee law requires accountability for both state and non-state actors, as refugee movements impose significant burdens that are often unfairly borne by the international community. This article is relevant to our study as it underscores the existence of international legal instruments designed to protect asylum seekers, while also exposing the shortcomings in current legal frameworks and their implementation.

Motiti Nangeri (2016) explores the situation of refugees fleeing the Central African Republic (CAR) due to violence, torture, and religious as well as ethnic persecution, seeking refuge in Cameroon's Eastern Region. His study focuses on the responses by Catholic Caritas Cameroon and the Catholic Relief Services, emphasizing their application of Christian principles centered on Reconciliation, Empowerment, and Transformation. The analysis is grounded in a human resources theoretical framework to assess the efforts of these Catholic organizations in managing the crisis. Additionally, Nangeri reviews the contributions of various international stakeholders, including the UNHCR, the Cameroonian government, numerous NGOs, and other non-Catholic religious organizations such as the Lutheran World Federation.

Babacan, A., and Babacan, H. (2009) explore the refugee and asylum frameworks of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand within the broader discourse of globalization and evolving notions of citizenship. They trace the origins of refugee resettlement to the Cold War era, during which it

served both as a strategy to boost population numbers and to meet labour market demands. With the onset of global economic restructuring, these countries have shifted from humanitarian-based refugee policies to more restrictive containment strategies, marked by increasing efforts to block asylum seekers from entering their territories. These restrictive measures, justified by concerns over national sovereignty and security, have resulted in the exclusion and expulsion of asylum seekers. The authors argue that so-called 'illegal migration' is deeply rooted in global political and economic systems, especially the influence of transnational capitalism. They contend that tightening border controls and interdiction efforts are ineffective and only serve to deepen global inequalities. Ultimately, the authors call for a reinforcement of refugee rights as enshrined in the Refugee Convention and propose a new model of citizenship that transcends national boundaries.

Lawrence et al. (2019) argue that while the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) formally recognises refugee children as holders of rights, these rights are often not fully respected or implemented in the policies and practices of contemporary states. The extent to which the CRC's protections are applied to refugee children depends largely on how the term "refugee child" is defined and on whether these rights are acknowledged, accepted, and enforced within both international and domestic legal and administrative systems. The authors examine the CRC's support for children's rights, particularly the provisions relevant to the lived experiences of refugee children and the corresponding responsibilities of states. By exploring how modern governments resist or fall short of fulfilling the CRC's obligations, they link the rights of refugee children to their broader refugee and developmental contexts. Ultimately, the authors advocate for placing refugee children at the center of protection frameworks and policy implementation at both the global and national levels.

Charles Nana Nguindip examined the legal rights and protective measures available to non-nationals, particularly refugees, in Cameroon. His research underscores the critical role that the legal system plays in ensuring the protection of foreigners, which in turn contributes to the broader security of Cameroonian citizens. The study also explores the state of human rights at the national level, detailing various legislative instruments that uphold the civil, economic, and political rights of both Cameroonian citizens and non-citizens. A key similarity between this study and related works lies in their shared emphasis on the protection of foreigners residing in Cameroon. This

objective has been pursued through the adoption of several government-led legal and policy frameworks aimed at positioning the country as a secure and welcoming environment for displaced persons. Notably, both studies are based on the same demographic focus Cameroon.

Literature Gap

While these studies provide critical insights into refugee protection, they are largely centered on Western contexts and focus on detention as a primary concern. There is limited research on how legal frameworks function in African contexts, particularly in urban settings where refugees face unique socio-legal challenges. Furthermore, existing studies often focus on children or detention, whereas my research takes a broader view, examining how Cameroon's legal frameworks align with international standards and impact urban refugees' lived experiences. My study fills this gap by providing an Africa-specific perspective and exploring how refugees navigate legal, institutional, and social barriers in their daily lives.

Several authors have pondered on the subject of the protection of the right of refugees in Cameroon. However, although they mention some laws regulating the right of refugees, an in-depth analysis of the laws or legal and institutional frameworks are not made, effectiveness of the mechanisms is not made as well! Their research is purely doctrinal legal research. They did not also dwell on women and children which is the focus of our work. This study therefore adopts a legal standpoint in adding to these existing works by appraising the legal frameworks on the right of refugees in Cameroon, analysing their effectiveness, bringing out the similarities between the international, regional and national legal Framework and also bringing out a thematic analysis of the interviews from participants.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This thesis is underpinned by the Natural Law Theory, African Refugee Theory, and International Regime Theory. These theoretical frameworks provide the foundation for analyzing Cameroon's legal structures in relation to international refugee protection standards and their implications for refugees' lived experiences.

Natural Law Theory underscores the inherent rights of refugees, independent of state recognition, and serves as a lens to assess whether these rights are protected or violated under Cameroonian

law. This framework is crucial in answering research questions regarding the key legal frameworks (RQ1) and discrepancies between national and international refugee laws (RQ4). It helps evaluate whether refugee protections in Cameroon are aligned with universal human rights principles and how gaps in legal recognition impact refugees' access to rights and opportunities.

African Refugee Theory situates refugee displacement within the African socio-political and economic context, explaining the structural and historical factors influencing migration patterns and legal status determination. By applying this framework, the study explores the challenges faced by urban refugees (RQ3), considering both state policies and broader regional dynamics that shape refugee experiences in Cameroon. It sheds light on the extent to which international norms are incorporated into national law and how institutions navigate their obligations under these regimes.

2.2.1 The Natural law theory

This theory posits that all individuals possess intrinsic rights by virtue of their humanity. It is the implicit corpus of universal moral principles that forms the foundation of the ethical and legal standards by which human behaviour is occasionally assessed and regulated. This is due to the fact that all humans are subject to fundamental rules of nature. Naturalists assert that the principles of natural law are intrinsic to nature and exist independently of governmental acknowledgement or enforcement. Philosophers like John Locke asserted that humans are inherently free and equal. He also asserted that individuals possess rights, including the right to life, liberty, and property. A. David et al., 2004. Marcus Tullius Cicero asserted that natural law constitutes true law in accordance with nature, universally applicable, immutable, and eternal. Nonetheless, other authors hold divergent perspectives regarding natural law theory. The counterargument against natural law originates from Thomas Hobbes, whose works primarily illustrate the chaos and social strife resulting from prioritising natural and divine principles over the authority of the sovereign. Hobbes dismissed conventional higher law theories and urged individuals to embrace the prevailing rules and traditions of their nations, regardless of their repressive nature, in the interest of civil tranquilly and security. His critique has significantly contributed to the decline of natural law.

This analysis of Natural Law Theory serves as a foundation for examining the fundamental human rights in Cameroon such as the rights to life, freedom, and personal security and evaluating whether refugees in the country are afforded the protections guaranteed under both national and

international legal frameworks. The study utilizes this theoretical lens to determine whether Cameroon's legal system upholds these rights or whether refugees face structural barriers that undermine their legal entitlements. A critical perspective on Natural Law, particularly Hobbes' view that legal systems tend to favour state sovereignty over universal human rights, helps to highlight the tensions between national refugee policies and international human rights obligations. This framework enables a deeper investigation into whether Cameroonian refugee laws prioritize the interests of the state at the cost of refugees' essential rights, thereby shaping the real-life conditions of urban refugees in the country.

Natural Law Theory asserts that human rights are inherent and universal, not granted by governments or shaped by cultural boundaries. Rooted in the belief in objective moral truths accessible through reason, it establishes a moral foundation for laws that safeguard these rights (Aquinas, 1265–1274). This framework imposes an ethical responsibility on governments and societies to protect these rights, viewing any legal system that fails to do so as morally flawed (Finnis, 2011). It aligns strongly with international human rights instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the 1951 Refugee Convention, offering a normative lens to evaluate whether Cameroon's refugee laws uphold global standards. Its emphasis on universal principles ensures continued relevance across legal systems, making it a powerful tool for assessing the moral legitimacy of national refugee protection frameworks..

Weaknesses of Natural Law Theory

Despite its emphasis on universal moral principles, Natural Law Theory faces challenges in practical application, as interpreting whether a law aligns with moral imperatives can be subjective and context-dependent. Critics like Edvard Westermarck argue that its universalism may neglect cultural differences, creating friction between international norms and local realities—an issue relevant when assessing Cameroon's refugee protection system. The theory also assumes that laws will be fairly enforced, but in resource-limited countries like Cameroon, political will and institutional capacity often hinder effective implementation. Moreover, while Natural Law offers a strong ethical foundation, it lacks guidance on addressing practical obstacles such as resource distribution, administrative inefficiencies, and refugee integration, which are essential to effective protection on the ground.

Contribution to the Study

Natural Law Theory offers a compelling lens through which to evaluate Cameroon's refugee protection laws in relation to both international legal standards and universal moral principles. It enables a critical assessment of whether national legislation upholds essential human rights, such as non-discrimination, access to justice, and socio-economic entitlements. By emphasizing the universality and inalienability of rights, the theory draws attention to areas where Cameroon's legal and institutional frameworks may fall short in safeguarding the dignity and well-being of refugees. It further provides an ethical rationale for recommending legal reforms, particularly in support of vulnerable groups such as urban refugee women who often encounter structural barriers to accessing their rights. Importantly, the theory places justice and human dignity at the core of analysis, ensuring that the protection of refugees is not only legally assessed but also morally evaluated.

Although Natural Law Theory strengthens the normative critique of refugee laws, its universalist orientation may overlook the complexities of local realities. In contexts like Cameroon, where refugee policy is shaped by historical, political, and socio-economic factors, Natural Law alone may not fully capture the intricacies at play. Therefore, it is essential to complement this framework with African refugee theory, which situates refugee protection within the continent's unique postcolonial context. This regional perspective acknowledges the specific challenges faced by African states such as protracted conflicts and the legacy of colonial displacement while recognizing the importance of regionally tailored instruments like the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention. Integrating both universal and contextual perspectives enables a more comprehensive and grounded critique of Cameroon's refugee protection regime, ensuring that legal analysis reflects not only normative ideals but also the practical lived experiences of refugees on the ground.

2.2.2 African Refugee Theory

The intricate interaction of socio-economic elements influencing refugee flows does not impact each migrant uniformly. The diversity of refugee journeys is as intricate as the circumstances that generate them. Individuals possess varying perceptions of what they deem a threat to their well-being. In certain circumstances, the mere suggestion of instability can suffice to compel individuals to relocate. In some cases, individuals do not flee until they are directly impacted by violent conflict. Within the African context, the line between political oppression and economic hardship is often blurred, resulting in many displaced individuals being categorized as economic migrants.

Additionally, environmental changes can also trigger large-scale migration, although this type of displacement is frequently overlooked in modern classifications of refugees.

Rogge (1979) proposed a classification system for refugees based on the causes of their displacement, the intent behind their movement, and the extent to which they exhibit characteristics commonly associated with refugee status. His model divides involuntary migration into two main types: "forced" and "impelled," a distinction originally introduced by Petersen (1958, p. 261). According to Petersen, these terms differ based on how much control individuals retain over their decision to leave. Forced migrants are compelled to flee by authoritative powers, such as governments, without having any real choice; examples include the expulsion of Asians from Uganda under Idi Amin and the relocation of Black South Africans during Apartheid. Impelled migrants, on the other hand, still retain some degree of agency; they are able to assess threatening conditions and make a decision to move based on those circumstances. More recent examples of impelled migration in Africa include Somalis and Rwandans who sought asylum in neighboring countries. While most refugees in Africa fall under the impelled category, not all do. Understanding the motivations behind a refugee's displacement is vital for determining their legal recognition. Rogge's typology shows that some refugee groups are more likely to receive official status than others. For instance, environmental or ecological refugees often do not qualify for formal recognition under international law, although they may occasionally receive humanitarian assistance as seen with Malians in Niger in 1974 and Tigrayans in Sudan in 1984.

The African Refugee Theory offers a lens for examining the diverse and interconnected causes of displacement on the continent and how these different forms of migration impact legal acknowledgment and protection. Rogge's typology is particularly helpful for analyzing Cameroon's refugee policies, especially in distinguishing between those who are forcibly displaced and those who migrate under duress but still maintain some autonomy in their decision-making. Since my research examines the legal and institutional mechanisms for refugee protection in Cameroon, this theory will help assess whether the country's legal framework aligns with international standards in recognizing different types of refugees. Additionally, it will shed light on the challenges urban refugees face in accessing legal protection and support services, particularly if their migration status does not fit within Cameroon's legal definitions.

2.2.3 International Regime Theory

Stephen D. Krasner was instrumental in establishing Regime Theory as a significant area of inquiry in International Relations, partly through his work in 1983. Regime theory is a concept in international relations, rooted in the liberal tradition, positing that international institutions or regimes influence the conduct of states and other international actors. It posits that collaboration is feasible under the anarchic system of states, as regimes inherently represent forms of international cooperation. It aims to elucidate the collaboration of international actors on the global arena.

The international environment is predominantly anarchic, characterised by state dominance, lacking an overarching authority to compel states to cooperate amicably. Regime theory posits that power within the international system is allocated among various states and non-state entities, including nongovernmental organisations and multinational corporations, which collaborate on particular issues according to established international regimes. Regimes are the embodiment of collaboration among entities within the international system.

Stephen Krasner characterises an international regime as the 'principles, norms, regulations, and decision-making procedures that align the expectations of participants within a certain issue area.' International Regime Theory and African Refugee Theory synergistically analyse Cameroon's refugee protection procedures by connecting global governance with local contexts. International Regime Theory elucidates how international accords, such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the OAU Refugee Convention, delineate principles, norms, and regulations that governments, including Cameroon, are anticipated to adhere to. African Refugee Theory elucidates that refugee migrations in Africa are influenced by intricate socio-political and economic issues, frequently obscuring the distinction between forced and driven migration. This distinction is essential to my research, as it evaluates whether Cameroon's legal framework conforms to international standards while considering the recognition or exclusion of various refugee categories, such as ecological refugees or economic migrants, from protection. This study employs both theories to assess the efficacy of Cameroon's institutional response to refugees, emphasising the discrepancies between legal obligations and the actual realities of urban refugees confronting socio-legal issues within the nation.

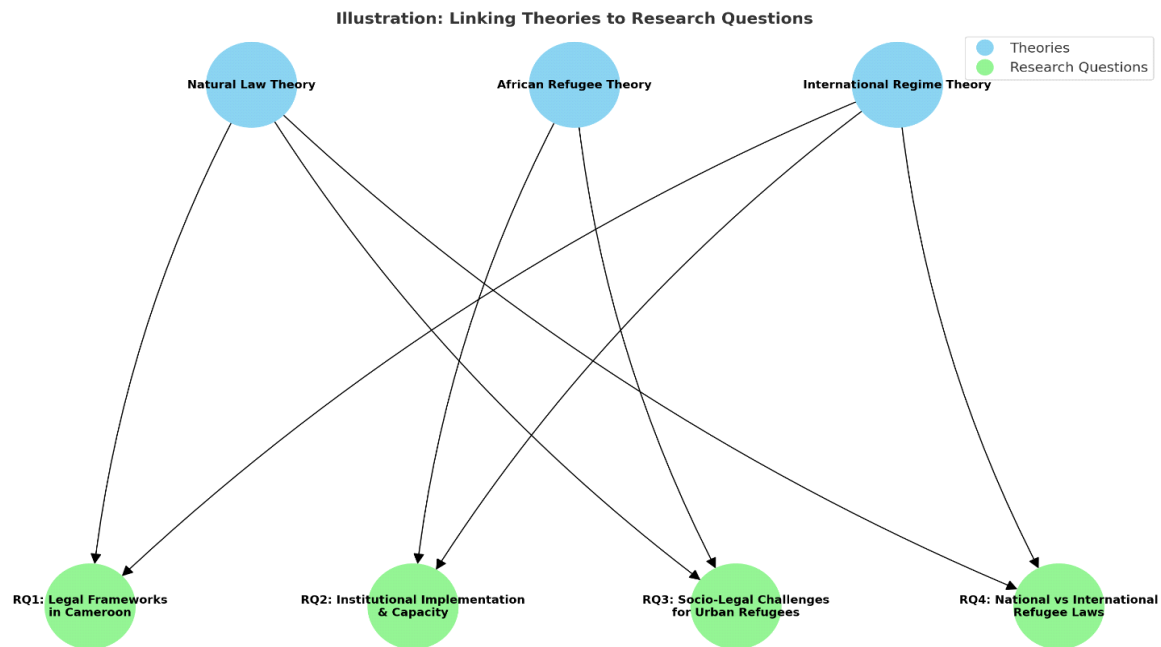


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework & Research Questions Linkage

The illustration visually demonstrates how the three theoretical frameworks—Natural Law Theory, African Refugee Theory, and International Regime Theory—collectively address the study's research questions. Natural Law Theory, with its emphasis on inherent and universal rights, guides the analysis of Cameroon's legal frameworks, socio-legal challenges faced by refugees, and discrepancies between national and international refugee laws. African Refugee Theory highlights the socio-economic and political factors influencing refugee experiences and the institutional responses to these refugees, offering insights into the practical implementation of protection measures. Finally, International Regime Theory bridges global governance with national practices, focusing specifically on institutional capacities, legal frameworks, and the alignment or discrepancies between Cameroon's national policies and international refugee protection standards. Together, these theories triangulate the analysis, allowing for a nuanced examination of how Cameroon's legal and institutional responses impact refugees' lived experiences, particularly in urban contexts.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted in this study. It provides a detailed discussion of the study area, research design, data collection methods, and ethical considerations. By combining doctrinal and empirical approaches, the research ensures a comprehensive analysis of refugee protection laws in Cameroon, with a particular focus on the lived experiences of urban refugee women.

3.1 Study Area

Cameroon, situated in Central Africa, is bordered by Nigeria, Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and the Republic of the Congo. Its geopolitical location makes it a key destination for refugees fleeing conflicts in neighboring countries. As of September 2024, Cameroon hosts approximately 422,623 refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from CAR and Nigeria (UNHCR, 2024). This study focuses on urban areas, particularly Douala, which presents unique challenges for refugees compared to rural or camp settings. Douala, as Cameroon's economic hub, hosts a diverse refugee population, predominantly women, who face significant socio-legal barriers, including challenges related to documentation, discrimination, and limited access to employment opportunities.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of refugees in urban areas of Cameroon, emphasizing women's challenges. Qualitative methods enable the researcher to interpret complex phenomena and provide in-depth insights into the socio-legal realities of refugees, which are best understood through naturalistic and interpretive approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). By using doctrinal and empirical research approaches, this study combines legal analysis with field data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

3.3 Research Methodology

The research employs a doctrinal methodology, the traditional approach in legal studies, which involves analyzing existing legal frameworks, case law, and other legal instruments. This method allows the researcher to examine the alignment and discrepancies between national and international refugee protection laws. Complementing the doctrinal approach, empirical methods

such as interviews and content analysis are employed to incorporate the lived experiences of refugees and insights from key stakeholders.

3.4 Sources of Data Collection

This study relies on both primary and secondary data sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis of refugee protection in Cameroon. This section clarifies how primary sources were selected to ensure data relevance, balancing refugee experiences with official policy perspectives. It also highlights the role of secondary data in situating Cameroon's refugee protection mechanisms within broader legal and academic discourses.

3.4.1 Primary Sources

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the following groups:

Refugees: Focused on adult women living in urban areas such as Yaoundé and Douala to understand their socio-legal challenges and coping strategies.

Government Officials: Interviews with officials from the Ministry of Territorial Administration and other relevant agencies to gather insights on policy implementation.

3.4.2 Secondary Sources

Secondary data included: International Reports: Publications from UNHCR, IOM, and other organizations to contextualize Cameroon's legal frameworks within global standards.

Legislative Documents: Analysis of national laws such as Law No. 2005/006 and international refugee statutes to assess compliance with global standards.

Academic Literature: Scholarly articles provided theoretical underpinnings and identified gaps in the alignment of national and international frameworks.

3.5 Data Collection Tools

To gather relevant data, this study utilized a combination of qualitative research instruments, ensuring both depth and breadth in data collection.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The interview questions were designed to align with the research objectives. They focused on understanding how discrepancies between national and international refugee frameworks affect refugees' daily lives, especially women. Unstructured interviews were conducted with 2 experts on refugee law and five individuals residing in refugee camps in Douala. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed for probing deeper into specific experiences and perspectives. This approach enabled the researcher to gather rich, qualitative data that highlights the lived realities of

refugees and the ways in which conflicting legal frameworks exacerbate their vulnerabilities. The inclusion of both legal experts and refugees ensured a comprehensive analysis, capturing both the theoretical and practical dimensions of the issue. Experts in refugee law were interviewed to provide authoritative insights into Cameroon's legal frameworks and clarify how national and international refugee protection laws interact in practice. Their professional perspectives help reveal institutional strengths, limitations, and the broader implications of legal discrepancies on refugee protection. Combining expert insights with the lived experiences of refugees allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of how these conflicting frameworks directly impact refugees, particularly in urban settings like Douala.

3.5.2 Content Analysis

Content analysis was employed to analyze data from primary and secondary sources (Stemler, 2015). The textual analysis focused on identifying themes, patterns, and gaps in the legal frameworks and their practical implications for refugee protection.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount in this study to protect the rights and well-being of participants. According to Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman (2007), participants must give informed consent, fully understanding the purpose and scope of the research. Respondents were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the information they provided. Saratakes (2003) emphasizes that researchers must avoid causing physical or mental harm to participants. Therefore, all necessary measures were taken to ensure that participants were not subjected to any form of discomfort, and their privacy was safeguarded throughout the study.

3.6.1 Positionality and Reflexivity

As a researcher, it was crucial to acknowledge my positionality and the potential influence it may have had on data collection and interpretation. My background, experiences, and biases inevitably shape the research process. To mitigate potential biases, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study, documenting my assumptions, preconceptions, and any emerging insights that could influence my analysis. Additionally, I remained conscious of power dynamics between

myself and the participants, ensuring that their voices were prioritized and not overshadowed by my interpretations.

3.6.2 Generalizability and Transferability

While this study provides valuable insights, it is essential to consider the extent to which findings can be generalized. Given the specific socio-cultural and geographical context in which the research was conducted, the findings may not be universally applicable. However, by providing thick descriptions of the research setting, participant demographics, and contextual factors, this study enhances transferability, allowing readers to determine the relevance of findings to similar contexts. In line with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of transferability, this approach ensures that the research contributes meaningfully to broader discussions while respecting the unique characteristics of the study sample.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework for the study, detailing the study area, research design, data sources, and ethical considerations. By combining doctrinal and empirical methods, this research provides a holistic evaluation of the mechanisms for protecting refugees in Cameroon, emphasizing the lived experiences of women in urban areas.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORKS ON REFUGEE PROTECTION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comparative examination of the legal frameworks regulating refugee protection in Cameroon, emphasising the interaction among domestic, regional, and international legal instruments. This chapter analyses the similarities and contrasts among these frameworks, emphasising the degree to which Cameroon's national laws conform to regional and international standards, along with the deficiencies and obstacles that impede effective refugee protection. The analysis is organised into three principal dimensions: domestic legal instruments, regional legal instruments, and global legal instruments, emphasising their effects on refugee rights and protection procedures in Cameroon.

4.2 THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON THE ENFORCEMENT OF REFUGEES RIGHTS IN CAMEROON

This section examines the legal framework governing the enforcement of refugee rights in Cameroon by comparing national legislation with regional and international legal instruments. It analyzes the extent to which Cameroon's domestic laws align with international refugee protection standards, particularly the 1951 Refugee Convention, the OAU Refugee Convention, and broader human rights frameworks. By identifying key similarities and discrepancies, this section assesses how these legal provisions impact the protection and lived experiences of refugees in Cameroon, providing a foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the country's refugee protection mechanisms.

4.2.1 DOMESTIC LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

In 2005, Cameroon enacted a national law concerning the status of refugees. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in Yaoundé adjudicates claims and determines the status of refugees. Asylum seekers register at the UNHCR headquarters in Yaoundé. Cameroon did not have its own

legislation concerning the status of refugees, but this does not mean that it was silent on refugee's affairs.

4.2.1.1 The Cameroon constitution,1996

The fundamental rights of individuals in Cameroon are protected under the country's national constitution, which was adopted on January 18, 1996, and forms a core part of the legal system. Cameroon has also ratified key international instruments, including the United Nations Charter and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, both of which affirm the principle of equal rights and responsibilities for all individuals. These protections extend to everyone residing in the country, including refugees, with the state bearing both the authority and the responsibility to ensure their safety and well-being. Additionally, the constitution explicitly states that no individual shall face harassment based on their origin or religion, nor be subjected to discriminatory restrictions under the pretext of public order.

4.2.1.2 Law No. 97- 12 of January 10 1997, to lay down the condition of entry, stay and exit of aliens from Cameroon

The legal framework that outlines the requirements for the entry, stay, and exit of refugees in Cameroon plays a vital role and must be strictly adhered to, as it highlights the importance of possessing appropriate documentation for cross-border movement. In this regard, Section 27, which addresses the issuance of refugee identification, mandates that individuals who have been granted refugee status must be provided with a refugee card. This identification document is valid for a period of two years and can be renewed. The specific procedures and criteria for both the issuance and renewal of the card are to be defined through a regulatory decree.

4.2.1.3 Law No. 2005 July 6 27 2005 relating to the status of refugees in Cameroon

This segment of the legal framework outlines the criteria used to define a refugee and affirms that Cameroon's refugee legislation incorporates key international norms, particularly the principle of non-refoulement. According to Section 7(1), no person should be denied entry at the border or subjected to any measure that would force them to return to a place where their life or personal liberty is in danger. Additionally, once an individual seeking asylum is present in Cameroon, the competent authority is required to compile a detailed report, including information about the applicant's nationality, marital status, occupation, and reasons for choosing Cameroon as a destination. Following this, the applicant is issued a temporary safe conduct pass valid for two

months, which cannot be renewed. The receiving authority must then forward the complete file to the Refugee Status Eligibility Commission without delay.

Furthermore, Section 9 outlines a range of rights granted to individuals recognized as refugees in Cameroon. These include the right to practice one's religion freely, the ability to own property, protection from discrimination, freedom of movement, and the right to obtain identification and travel documents. Refugees are also entitled to housing, education, employment, and access to legal processes. Additionally, the law mandates that refugees must comply with all existing national laws and regulations. Each recognized refugee is to be issued an official refugee identification card, with the duration of its validity and conditions for renewal to be defined by a separate regulatory decree.

4.2.2 REGIONAL LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

Having examined Cameroon's domestic legal framework for refugee protection, it is essential to place it within the broader regional legal context. While Cameroon has adopted national laws that incorporate key refugee rights, these must be understood in relation to Africa's regional legal instruments, which provide a collective approach to refugee protection across the continent. The 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and other regional agreements establish additional principles and obligations that shape Cameroon's refugee policies. By analyzing these regional legal instruments, we can assess whether Cameroon's domestic framework aligns with African standards and how regional cooperation influences the country's refugee protection mechanisms. This comparative approach also helps to highlight gaps and inconsistencies between national and regional obligations, setting the stage for an evaluation of how these frameworks interact with the universal legal instruments governing refugee rights.

4.2.2.1 The convention governing the specific aspect of refugee's problem in Africa (1969)

The body responsible for addressing refugee matters within the African context is the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), which introduced a key regional legal instrument known as the 1969 Refugee Convention. This convention was adopted on September 10, 1969, and became effective on June 20, 1974. Developed during the era of decolonisation, the Convention was designed to

enhance the protection of refugees across the continent. Article 1 defines a refugee as someone who, due to a legitimate fear of persecution based on factors such as race, religion, or nationality, has fled their country and is unwilling to return. Additionally, Article 2 calls on member states to admit such individuals, to the extent permitted by their national laws, and prohibits the rejection or expulsion of any refugee whose life or freedom would be endangered by being forced to return.

4.2.2.2 African charter on human and people's rights (1981)

The African continent by the African charter on human and people's rights is a regional legal instruments use to protect human rights as it states that every person has respects the dignity of human beings, this law seeks to prohibit all forms of inhuman practices like slavery and slave trade, torture and all cruel and degrading punishments. More so article 4 of the African charter provides that all human beings are entitled to respects for his life and integrity of his person, and so no refugees should be deprived of his right even in times of war.

4.2.2.3 Protocol to the African charter on Human and People's Rights Relating to the Rights of women in Africa (The Maputo Protocol)

The Maputo Protocol aims to safeguard refugee women and internally displaced persons (IDPs) during armed conflict. Article 11 stipulates that parties must adhere to applicable international humanitarian law in situations of armed conflict that impact women, thereby ensuring the protection of civilians, including women, in such circumstances.

This convention aims to safeguard asylum-seeking women, refugees, and returnees against all types of abuse, including rape, ensuring that any violators are prosecuted in a competent court. This treaty requests that states implement all necessary steps to protect girls under 18, as it outlaws child soldiering.

4.2.3.4. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990)

Article 22 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child mandates that state parties uphold international humanitarian law and obligates them to safeguard children in armed conflict situations, as well as to protect civilians to ensure the care and protection of children. Furthermore, Article 23(1) of this charter stipulates that the parties shall implement necessary steps to guarantee that minors seeking refugee status get humanitarian aid in accordance with relevant domestic legislation, enabling them to enjoy the rights delineated in this charter.

4.2.3 UNIVERSAL LEGAL INSTRUMENTS

This section analyses essential international legal frameworks that regulate refugee protection and the rights of displaced individuals. These universal tools establish the basis for evaluating national refugee programs, guaranteeing that domestic laws conform to internationally acknowledged criteria. The following debate centres on two essential treaties: the 1951 Convention pertaining to the Status of Refugees and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, both of which are instrumental in defining worldwide refugee protection frameworks.

4.2.3.1 The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees

For centuries, nations have offered refuge to individuals fleeing persecution; however, the modern legal framework governing refugee protection primarily took shape during the second half of the twentieth century. Like the development of international human rights law, today's refugee protection system was largely a response to the humanitarian crises that followed World War II and those experienced during the interwar years. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, affirms in Article 14(1) the right of individuals to seek and enjoy asylum in other countries. This right has since been elaborated upon in various regional human rights instruments, which guarantee the ability to request and obtain asylum in accordance with domestic laws and international agreements (Feller & Ahfan, 1984).

The cornerstone of modern refugee law is the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees—commonly known as the Geneva Convention of July 28. This treaty establishes a clear definition of who qualifies as a refugee, outlines the rights granted to those seeking asylum, and details the obligations of host countries. It also excludes certain categories of individuals from refugee status. Additionally, the Convention provides for travel documentation without the need for a visa for recognized refugees. Article 12 of the Convention specifies that a refugee's personal status is governed by the laws of the country in which they reside, and it ensures the protection of personal rights acquired prior to displacement, such as those related to marriage.

A central tenet of the Convention is the principle of non-refoulement, enshrined in Article 33, which prohibits the return of individuals to countries where they face threats to their life or freedom. This principle is considered a cornerstone of refugee protection under international human rights, humanitarian, and customary international law (Pascal, 2023). Although the 1951 Convention remains the prevailing legal instrument, regional agreements have expanded the

definition of who qualifies as a refugee, taking into account forms of displacement not originally addressed by the Convention.

The Convention itself does not set specific procedures for determining refugee status; rather, it leaves the development of asylum systems to individual states. This decentralization has led to differing national approaches, with each country shaping its refugee laws based on its own capacities, security concerns, and historical interactions with forced migration. Despite these differences, the overarching goal of the global refugee protection regime remains consistent: to ensure safety for individuals forced to flee because their home countries are either unwilling or unable to protect them. In support of this goal, human rights treaty bodies often adjudicate individual cases related to the principle of non-refoulement (Pascal, 2023).

4.2.3.2 Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

This convention seeks to safeguard the rights of refugee children, a vulnerable demographic within society during armed conflict. Consequently, Article 38 of the convention is crucial for child rights. For instance, certain monitored states impose standards on the recruitment of child soldiers. In accordance with Article 28, states are obligated to implement measures ensuring that individuals under the age of 25 do not engage in hostile actions, thereby preventing children under 15 from becoming soldiers or forming armed groups during armed conflict.

This article delineates the regulations governing the recruitment of young individuals during armed conflict, stipulating that states parties shall prioritise the recruitment of the oldest candidates. It also urged state parties to cease the recruitment of individuals under the age of 15. Furthermore, Article 38 provides protection for children during armed conflict; yet, it lacks mechanisms for implementation.

4.2.3.3 The Geneva convention of August 12 1949, relative to the protection of civilian population (the fourth Geneva convention)

This agreement aims to safeguard war victims and mitigate the hardships of conflict; it comprises three protocols and four treaties. This convention grants protective rights to noncombatants. Article 44 of the Geneva Convention stipulates that the detaining authority must not classify as enemy aliens or refugees individuals who do not genuinely receive the protection of any country. Furthermore, Article 24 of the Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates that parties must implement

steps to ensure that orphaned children under the age of 15 are not abandoned and that their welfare is maintained.

4.3 Similarities Between National and International Legal Frameworks

Cameroon's legal framework for refugee protection shows a strong alignment with both regional and global human rights standards, particularly in recognizing core freedoms and upholding the principle that refugees should not be returned to danger. At the national level, the country's foundational legal text guarantees essential liberties, including freedom from discrimination, religious freedom, and protection from abuse—safeguards that extend to both nationals and non-nationals residing in the territory. Similarly, continental instruments adopted across Africa emphasize the protection of human dignity, the right to seek refuge, and the prohibition of unfair treatment, reinforcing these same ideals. Internationally, foundational documents such as the Refugee Convention adopted in the early 1950s and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirm the right to asylum and reject the practice of forcing individuals back to life-threatening environments. Together, these legal texts reflect a shared global and regional commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of refugees.

A central point of agreement across these legal systems is the concept of non-refoulement—protection from being returned to a country where one's safety is at risk. This safeguard is clearly reflected in Cameroonian refugee law, which prohibits the expulsion of displaced individuals to places where they could face serious harm. This national provision mirrors broader African refugee frameworks, which require member states to shelter those fleeing persecution and generalised violence. It also echoes the core principles of international refugee law, where the prohibition of forced return is universally recognized as a cornerstone of refugee protection. The consistent presence of this principle across legal levels underscores its fundamental significance in protecting displaced populations.

In addition, various legal instruments—both within Cameroon and beyond—pay particular attention to the needs of especially vulnerable groups, such as women and children. Cameroon's legal system contains provisions ensuring access to key services, including education, housing, and legal recourse, specifically targeting the welfare of these groups. Regional treaties focused on women's and children's rights also reinforce these protections, especially in conflict-affected contexts. At the global level, international agreements further affirm the need to protect civilians

and minors during times of war, emphasizing the rights and safety of these populations. These multiple overlapping legal guarantees reflect a broad-based effort to address the unique challenges faced by refugee women and children and ensure their well-being and protection.

4.4 Differences Between National and International Legal Frameworks

Despite these similarities, significant differences exist between Cameroon's domestic legal framework and regional and international instruments, particularly in the scope of refugee definitions and implementation mechanisms. Cameroon's 2005 Refugee Law adopts a narrow definition of refugees, largely mirroring the 1951 Refugee Convention's focus on individual persecution (Law No. 2005/006 of July 27, 2005, Section 3). In contrast, the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention expands the definition to include individuals fleeing generalized violence, conflict, and external aggression, which is more relevant to Africa's displacement contexts (OAU Refugee Convention, 1969, Article 1(2)). This discrepancy highlights a gap between Cameroon's domestic framework and the broader regional definition, which could exclude many displaced persons from protection.

Another key difference lies in the implementation mechanisms. Cameroon's refugee protection mechanisms are heavily reliant on the UNHCR for status determination and documentation, indicating limited institutional capacity at the national level (UNHCR, "Cameroon Fact Sheet," 2023). In contrast, both the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention and the 1951 Refugee Convention emphasize state responsibility for implementing refugee protection measures, with less reliance on external agencies (1951 Refugee Convention, Article 35; OAU Refugee Convention, 1969, Article 2). This difference underscores the challenges Cameroon faces in operationalizing its legal commitments independently.

Additionally, while Cameroon's 2005 Refugee Law grants refugees rights to education, employment, and housing, these provisions are often not fully implemented due to resource constraints and administrative bottlenecks (Law No. 2005/006 of July 27, 2005, Section 9; UNHCR, "Cameroon Fact Sheet," 2023). Conversely, both the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention explicitly guarantee access to socio-economic rights and are supported by more robust enforcement mechanisms at the international level

(African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981, Article 18; 1951 Refugee Convention, Articles 17–24). This underscores a significant disconnect between the formal legal recognition of these rights and their actual implementation within the Cameroonian context.

Moreover, Cameroon's national legislation remains deficient in explicitly addressing the protection of refugees during armed conflicts, despite the country's proximity to regional instability (Refugee Law No. 2005/006 of July 27, 2005). In contrast, international and regional instruments such as the Maputo Protocol and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child provide comprehensive protections for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in conflict situations (Maputo Protocol, 2003, Article 11; African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990, Article 22). Similarly, the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) establish strong legal safeguards for civilians, including refugees, in times of armed conflict (Fourth Geneva Convention, 1949, Article 24; Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Article 38). This contrast reveals a substantial gap in Cameroon's domestic legal system, particularly in its ability to address the specific vulnerabilities of refugees during periods of conflict.

4.5 Implications for Refugee Protection in Cameroon

The comparative analysis reveals that Cameroon's legal framework for refugee protection is largely consistent with international and regional standards, particularly in recognizing fundamental rights and the principle of non-refoulement. However, significant gaps remain in the scope of refugee definitions, implementation mechanisms, and protections for vulnerable groups, particularly in conflict situations. The exclusion of individuals fleeing generalized violence from Cameroon's refugee definition undermines the country's ability to address displacement caused by regional conflicts (OAU Refugee Convention, 1969, Article 1(2)). Adopting the broader definition under the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention would enhance protection for a larger population of displaced persons.

Moreover, the heavy reliance on the UNHCR for refugee status determination and documentation highlights the need for stronger institutional capacity at the national level (UNHCR, "Cameroon Fact Sheet," 2023). Addressing resource constraints and administrative inefficiencies is critical to

ensuring the effective implementation of refugee protection measures. Finally, incorporating regional and universal standards on conflict-related protections would strengthen Cameroon's ability to protect refugees in armed conflict situations, particularly vulnerable groups such as women and children (Maputo Protocol, 2003, Article 11; Fourth Geneva Convention, 1949, Article 24).

While Cameroon's legal framework for refugee protection aligns with international and regional standards in many respects, significant gaps remain in its scope, implementation, and protections for vulnerable groups. Addressing these gaps requires stronger institutional support, enhanced regional cooperation, and greater alignment with the broader protections offered by regional instruments like the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention. By bridging these gaps, Cameroon can strengthen its refugee protection mechanisms and better fulfill its obligations under international and regional law.

4.6 Challenges Faced in the Protection of Refugees

This sub-chapter discusses the significant challenges identified in the practical protection of refugees in Cameroon. The analysis highlights the multifaceted obstacles—including political, financial, institutional, social, and legal factors—that hinder the effective protection and fulfillment of refugees' rights. The following sections systematically explore these challenges, offering a comprehensive picture of how they influence the lived realities of refugees in Cameroon.

i) Lack of Political Will

A major obstacle to effective refugee protection in Cameroon is the apparent lack of sustained political will. While the country has traditionally been considered a welcoming host for displaced persons, its dedication to upholding and advancing the rights of refugees has diminished in recent years. A notable example occurred in 2014 when Cameroon closed its borders with several Nigerian states, including Adamawa, Benue, Taraba, and Cross River. This action left many Nigerian refugees vulnerable to abuse by corrupt officials and criminal networks as they attempted to reach safety in refugee camps (Human Rights Watch, 2015). In addition, bureaucratic delays in establishing and approving new refugee settlements have led to extended periods of inadequate

support and living conditions for refugees, reflecting the government's limited urgency in responding to their needs (UNHCR, 2016).

ii) Financial Limits

Limited financial resources present a major barrier to effective refugee protection in Cameroon. While the Ministry of External Relations (MINREX) holds official responsibility for refugee affairs, the practical burden of protection often falls on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Cameroon Red Cross. Despite targeted funding and budgetary adjustments by the UNHCR, the agency struggles to adequately respond to the growing needs of the refugee population within the country (UNHCR, 2020). These financial shortfalls have led to severe consequences, including hunger and the outbreak of waterborne diseases among refugees, as the resources available are insufficient to cover their basic humanitarian needs (Amnesty International, 2019).

iii) Negative Police Attitudes

Negative attitudes among law enforcement officials significantly hinder the protection of refugees in Cameroon. Many police officers perceive migrants as potential criminals and threats to national security, leading to the belief that refugees should be restricted to designated camps (Mbuea, 2017). Nigerian refugees, in particular, are often subjected to suspicion due to alleged links with the extremist group Boko Haram, resulting in discriminatory treatment by security forces. Additionally, a number of lower-ranking officers are unfamiliar with official refugee identification cards, frequently claiming not to recognize them or questioning their authenticity. This lack of recognition is largely attributed to insufficient training regarding refugee rights and protection protocols (NAIJ.com, 2015). Further illustrating these hostile conditions, Nigerian returnees reported in August 2015 that Cameroonian police were involved in acts of theft, underscoring the hostile and unsafe environment that refugees may face (NAIJ.com, 2015).

iv) Xenophobia

Xenophobia, characterized by a deep-seated fear or resentment toward foreigners, poses a serious barrier to refugee integration in Cameroon. Although Cameroonians are widely known for their welcoming nature, growing economic hardships have contributed to a decline in tolerance toward refugee populations (Mbuea, 2017). As noted by Mbule Rene, the leader of the Chadian refugee community, many refugees, despite having the necessary qualifications, struggle to secure jobs in the country (Rene, 2018). Those who do manage to find employment frequently endure

exploitative working conditions, including unjust treatment, sudden terminations, and denial of rightful compensation. Such patterns of systemic exclusion not only increase the vulnerability of refugees but also significantly hinder their social and economic integration into the host communities.

v) Judicial Limits

Judicial constraints significantly impede the effective safeguarding of refugee rights in Cameroon. Although the national refugee legislation enacted in 2005 provides for the establishment of two key bodies—the Commission responsible for determining refugee status and the Refugee Appeals Board—their independence is compromised by state influence. This interference is particularly evident in the way members are appointed, the operational procedures they follow, and the financial resources they depend on. Additionally, the legal framework explicitly excludes the possibility of challenging the decisions of these bodies in ordinary courts, a provision that weakens access to justice and undermines public trust in the judicial system.

The difficulties in ensuring refugee protection in Cameroon are complex and stem from multiple sources, including insufficient political commitment, budgetary limitations, discriminatory attitudes among law enforcement officials, xenophobic tendencies in some communities, and a fragile judicial environment. Overcoming these barriers requires coordinated action by the state, international partners, and non-governmental actors. Reforms should aim at enhancing the legal system, ensuring adequate funding, and building a more inclusive and protective environment for displaced persons. Without such comprehensive efforts, refugees in Cameroon will continue to face serious risks of marginalization, exploitation, and rights violations.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative analysis of the interview responses gathered to analyze the effectiveness of the mechanisms for protecting refugees in Cameroon. The purpose of this analysis is to understand how Cameroon's legal framework and its implementation affect the lived experiences of urban refugees, with particular attention to the challenges faced by refugee women. In addressing the main and specific research questions, the analysis draws on axial coding to identify recurring themes, patterns, and interrelationships among the data. The interview transcripts were analyzed using axial coding, which helped reorganize the data into coherent themes. The following sections discuss each theme.

Theme 1: Refugee Documentation Process

The refugee documentation process emerged as one of the most consistently cited challenges. Several respondents highlighted the prolonged and complicated nature of obtaining and renewing legal documents. For example, one interviewee noted: *"C'était vraiment compliqué. When we arrived, getting refugee status and the right papers took a long time. Sometimes, on attendait toute la journée au bureau, and they'd tell us to come back another day."* Another respondent emphasized the recurring nature of the issue: *"Renewing our papers is a big headache chaque fois. Il y a toujours beaucoup de documents à fournir. Sometimes, on nous traite comme si on était venus déranger. It takes weeks, even months..."* A third interviewee recounted a similar experience: *"They always told us, 'Come tomorrow,' or 'Come next week.' It took many months before I finally got some papers from UNHCR." (Appendix 1)*

The data reveal a systemic issue where bureaucratic delays, language barriers, and unclear procedures significantly hinder the documentation process. The repeated instruction to "come back tomorrow" suggests that the system is not designed to promptly address refugee needs. One respondent mentioned the added challenge of language: *"Aussi, on parlait pas trop français au début,"* which highlights that non-native speakers face additional obstacles in navigating these procedures.

This documentation process functions as a gatekeeping mechanism, effectively delaying access to critical services such as healthcare, education, and employment. The compounded effect of these

delays leads to heightened stress and a pervasive sense of insecurity among refugees. Furthermore, the reliance on informal networks—whether through personal persistence, advice from other refugees, or assistance from NGOs—indicates that the official process is inadequate in addressing the urgent needs of the refugee population.

Table 1: Refugee Documentation Process

Aspect	Details
Phenomenon	Difficulties in obtaining and renewing legal documentation.
Causal/Contextual Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bureaucratic delays and long waiting times - Language barriers (limited French proficiency) - Confusing procedures and inconsistent instructions
Strategies/Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reliance on personal persistence - Use of informal networks (other refugees, NGOs) - Occasional resort to bribery or informal help
Consequences/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heightened stress and insecurity - Inability to access other rights or services (healthcare, employment, housing)

Theme 2: Socio-Legal Experiences and Rights Awareness

Respondents consistently indicated that their understanding of legal rights was limited and unevenly communicated. One refugee explained: *"I understand just a bit. Je ne connais pas bien mes droits. I mostly get information from other refugees or NGOs."* This quote illustrates that rather than receiving clear guidance from official channels, refugees often rely on informal networks for legal information. Another interviewee noted: *"Sometimes, local officials help us. Mais parfois, they just see us as foreigners who shouldn't be here."* This inconsistency in treatment from local authorities creates a confusing environment where some refugees may receive minimal assistance while others are outright dismissed. Furthermore, another respondent emphasized the insufficiency of available information: *"Nobody has properly explained my rights. The little information I have comes from meetings held by NGOs, but that's not enough."* (Appendix I)

The analysis reveals that the socio-legal landscape for refugees in Cameroon is characterized by a significant gap in legal rights education and support. The lack of official, clear communication from governmental institutions leaves refugees reliant on peer networks and sporadic NGO outreach. This reliance is problematic because information obtained through these channels can be inconsistent, leading to misunderstandings and a diminished capacity for refugees to assert their rights.

Inconsistent interactions with local officials further compound this issue. While some officials provide minimal assistance, others treat refugees dismissively or even with hostility. Such variability not only impedes the effective dissemination of legal rights but also reinforces feelings of invisibility and disempowerment among the refugee population. Without a systematic and proactive approach to legal education, refugees are less likely to understand and claim their rights, thereby perpetuating cycles of marginalization and exclusion.

Table 2: Socio-Legal Experiences and Rights Awareness

Aspect	Details
Phenomenon	Unclear understanding and uneven recognition of legal rights.
Causal/Contextual Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inadequate legal information from authorities - Varying treatment by local officials (from helpful to dismissive)
Strategies/Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning rights via peer networks and sporadic NGO sessions
Consequences/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feelings of invisibility and marginalization - Reduced empowerment to claim rights and navigate legal systems

Theme 3: Access to Basic Services (Healthcare, Education, Housing)

Many respondents vividly described their struggles to access essential services such as healthcare, education, and housing. One interviewee recalled her experience with healthcare: "*C'est très*

difficile. When you go to a hospital, sometimes they ignore you, surtout si tu n'as pas assez d'argent. Even medicine is expensive. Une fois, mon fils était gravement malade, et le médecin refusait de nous recevoir avant qu'on paie." Regarding education, another respondent stated: *"Education has also been hard. Mes enfants vont à l'école publique ici, but paying fees and buying uniforms and books is difficult. Sometimes, the kids face bullying à cause de leur statut de réfugiés."* Housing issues were also a recurring topic. One refugee shared: "Je vis dans un petit studio avec mes enfants. C'est serré, but we manage. Finding housing was very hard—beaucoup de propriétaires disent ouvertement qu'ils ne veulent pas de réfugiés. Once, we got evicted sans préavis because the landlord didn't trust refugees."(Appendix 1)

The analysis indicates that systemic challenges in accessing basic services are both a consequence of and a contributing factor to the broader marginalization of refugees. The high costs, bureaucratic obstacles, and discriminatory practices restrict refugees' ability to improve their living conditions. The direct experiences with substandard healthcare, the financial burdens of education, and the housing discrimination all point to a gap between legal rights on paper and the actual implementation of these rights in everyday life

For instance, the recurring issue of being treated as second-class citizens in hospitals not only jeopardizes health outcomes but also reinforces a sense of exclusion. Similarly, the financial and social barriers in education and housing contribute to an ongoing cycle of instability and disempowerment.

Table 3: Access to Basic Services (Healthcare, Education, Housing)

Aspect	Details
Phenomenon	Significant barriers to accessing essential services.
Causal/Contextual Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discriminatory practices (e.g., refusal of service, extra charges) - High costs and bureaucratic obstacles
Strategies/Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reliance on informal or under-resourced channels for support - Seeking assistance from NGOs

Consequences/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor health outcomes and educational setbacks - Housing instability and frequent evictions - Overall diminished quality of life and well-being
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Theme 4: Economic Opportunities and Livelihood

Respondents repeatedly highlighted the difficulty of accessing stable economic opportunities. One interviewee explained: *"Pas beaucoup d'opportunités. Most refugees do informal work like selling goods in the streets, washing clothes, or cleaning homes. Moi-même, je vends du petit commerce au marché, mais c'est pas stable du tout."* Another respondent emphasized the discriminatory hiring practices: *"Employers refuse us because we don't have Cameroonian ID cards. Même quand tu es qualifiée, dès qu'ils savent que tu es réfugiée, c'est fini. C'est très décourageant."* Additionally, a respondent noted that: *"Very few opportunities exist. Most of the time, we sell small items on the streets or markets. Sometimes my husband finds day jobs like carrying goods or construction work, but these jobs don't last long. There's no stable job for refugees like us."* (Appendix 1)

The analysis of economic opportunities reveals a pervasive challenge where refugees struggle to integrate into the formal economy. The limited opportunities and systematic discrimination in hiring practices force refugees to rely on informal work that is both unstable and insufficient to meet their needs. This economic marginalization not only undermines refugees' self-sufficiency but also affects their ability to access other rights, such as healthcare and education, which often require financial resources. Furthermore, the persistent economic insecurity contributes to a cycle of poverty and vulnerability. The inability to secure stable employment compounds the difficulties of living in a society where refugees are already marginalized, thereby reinforcing their exclusion from mainstream economic activities.

Table 4: Economic Opportunities and Livelihood

Aspect	Details
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Phenomenon	Limited access to stable employment and economic opportunities.
Causal/Contextual Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discrimination in hiring practices - Lack of valid documentation - Scarcity of formal job opportunities
Strategies/Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement in informal work (e.g., street vending, day labor) - Temporary reliance on NGO-supported training and initiatives
Consequences/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chronic economic insecurity - Inability to achieve self-sufficiency or upward mobility

Theme 5: Protection, Security, and Well-being

A significant concern raised by many respondents was the persistent feeling of insecurity and the exposure to various forms of violence. One interviewee stated: *"Yes, often. Nous, femmes réfugiées, sommes très vulnérables. Il y a eu des cas d'agressions dans notre quartier. Parfois, on a peur de signaler à la police, parce que tu ne sais pas comment ils vont réagir."* (Appendix 1) Another respondent recounted her experience: *"I have felt unsafe many times. We live in a place where we have to be careful, especially at night. Sometimes, there are robberies or fights in the camp, and you don't know if you'll be safe."* (Appendix 1) For some, the issue was compounded by the lack of responsiveness from local authorities: *"They don't respond quickly. If we report incidents, the police often do nothing. NGOs try to help, but their resources are limited."* (Appendix 1)

The data indicate that despite legal provisions designed to safeguard refugees, the actual protection mechanisms are weak and often fail to provide a secure environment. The experiences of violence, harassment, and neglect by law enforcement are particularly pronounced among refugee women, who are more likely to face gender-based violence. The pervasive insecurity not only disrupts day-to-day life but also exacerbates psychological trauma. This lack of effective protection reinforces the broader challenges refugees face in accessing other essential services and integrating into society. The findings reveal that while institutions like NGOs may offer some support, the overall

state response remains insufficient. Refugees are left in a constant state of vulnerability, which undermines their ability to rebuild their lives and exercise other rights.

Table 5: Protection, Security, and Well-being

Aspect	Details
Phenomenon	Persistent feelings of insecurity and exposure to violence.
Causal/Contextual Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inadequate responses from law enforcement and local authorities - Increased vulnerability, especially among refugee women
Strategies/Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adoption of avoidance behaviors - Reliance on community networks and NGO support for protection and GBV response
Consequences/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elevated risks of physical harm and psychological trauma - Reduced trust in public institutions and ongoing vulnerability

Theme 6: Institutional Support and Policy Implementation

Respondents expressed a clear discrepancy between the legal frameworks and the actual support rendered by institutions. One refugee noted: *"Les ONG comme UNHCR essayent, mais c'est pas suffisant. Government institutions rarely take refugee issues seriously. Ils devraient améliorer leur engagement avec nous."* Another interviewee emphasized: *"Institutions don't help refugees much. UNHCR tries to support us, but their help doesn't reach everyone. Government offices mostly ignore refugee issues or make things complicated for us."* Furthermore, the first expert pointed (See Appendix 2) out that although there are legal frameworks in place, the implementation suffers due to limited resources and poor coordination among stakeholders. For example: *"The institutional capacity for addressing the needs of urban refugees in Cameroon is mixed. National and international agencies have made strides, but local institutions, especially in urban areas, lack the capacity to fully address the growing needs of refugees."* (Appendix 2)

The analysis of institutional support and policy implementation reveals a pronounced gap between the promise of legal protections and their practical application. The reliance on NGOs such as UNHCR and NRC to fill the void left by underperforming government agencies demonstrates that the state's capacity to enforce and operationalize refugee protection is limited. This lack of robust institutional support not only delays essential services but also leaves refugees to navigate a complex, often discouraging bureaucratic landscape.

The failure to effectively implement policies results in repeated instances where refugees face obstacles in documentation, access to healthcare, education, and secure livelihoods. This systemic shortfall undermines confidence in governmental support structures and perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability and marginalization.

Table 6: Institutional Support and Policy Implementation

Aspect	Details
Phenomenon	A gap between legal frameworks and on-the-ground realities.
Causal/Contextual Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak institutional capacity and resource constraints - Lack of coordination among governmental agencies, NGOs, and international bodies
Strategies/Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dependence on NGOs (e.g., UNHCR, NRC) to fill service gaps - Advocacy for legal reform and streamlined bureaucratic processes
Consequences/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inadequate implementation of rights despite supportive legal frameworks - Persistent discrepancies between intended protections and lived experiences

Theme 7: Refugee Women-Specific Challenges

The interviews revealed that refugee women face compounded difficulties due to their gender in addition to their refugee status. Several respondents emphasized that their unique needs are often

ignored by the system. For instance, one interviewee stated: *"They don't pay special attention to our needs as women. Parfois, tu expliques tes problèmes, mais ils disent seulement 'Revenez demain.' Honestly, it feels like nobody cares if you're struggling as a woman alone with children."* Another respondent highlighted the extra burdens faced by mothers: *"No, not really. They treat everyone the same way. As a woman with small children, it's harder because I can't leave my kids alone to spend the whole day at offices. They don't consider these challenges. It's very hard for mothers like me."* Additionally, several interviewees mentioned the heightened risk of gender-based violence and the lack of specific support programs. One expert commented on the issue: *"Urban refugee women face multiple challenges, including limited access to basic services and heightened risks of gender-based violence due to their vulnerability in urban environments."* (Appendix 1)

The analysis suggest that the intersection of gender and refugee status creates a unique set of vulnerabilities. The lack of gender-sensitive approaches in legal and institutional frameworks contributes to the neglect of refugee women's specific needs. For example, the repeated dismissal of women's concerns—with instructions like "Revenez demain"—illustrates systemic indifference to the urgent and practical issues that affect women and mothers.

This neglect not only hampers access to legal documentation and basic services but also perpetuates a cycle of disempowerment. Refugee women are forced to rely on informal support networks, which often do not provide the comprehensive care required to address risks such as gender-based violence, inadequate childcare, and limited economic opportunities. The data indicate a pressing need for targeted policies and programs that recognize and address these gender-specific challenges, ensuring that the unique circumstances of refugee women are not sidelined in broader protection efforts.

Table 7: Refugee Women-Specific Challenges

Aspect	Details
Phenomenon	Unique and compounded difficulties for refugee women.
Causal/Contextual Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intersection of gender discrimination with refugee status - Lack of adequate childcare and heightened risks of gender-

	based violence - Cultural barriers
Strategies/Interactions	- Advocacy for gender-specific programs - Targeted support in healthcare, legal aid, and economic empowerment
Consequences/Outcomes	- Heightened vulnerability and exclusion from public services - Ongoing trauma and pronounced need for tailored policy interventions

Theme 8: Alignment with International Standards and Implementation Gaps

Expert interviews and stakeholder responses indicate that, on paper, Cameroon’s legal framework is designed to comply with international standards such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and “the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention”. One expert explained: *"Cameroon’s legal framework for refugee protection generally aligns with international standards, especially in terms of definitions and principles like non-refoulement. However, the implementation of these laws often faces significant challenges due to resource constraints and bureaucratic delays."* Another expert pointed out: *"There is a persistent gap between the promise of legal protection and the lived reality of refugees. While the laws exist, their practical application is hampered by inadequate funding, poor coordination among agencies, and insufficient enforcement mechanisms."* (Appendix 1)

The analysis demonstrates that Cameroon’s commitment to international refugee protection standards is undermined by systemic implementation issues. Despite ratifying key international instruments, the legal framework’s effectiveness is limited by insufficient resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and fragmented coordination among governmental and non-governmental actors.

This misalignment between policy and practice results in significant barriers for refugees, from difficulties in obtaining documentation to challenges in accessing basic services. The experts’ insights suggest that addressing these gaps requires not only legal reforms but also substantial investments in institutional capacity, training, and inter-agency collaboration. Bridging this gap is essential for ensuring that the high standards set by international agreements translate into tangible improvements in refugees’ daily lives.

Table 8: Alignment with International Standards and Implementation Gaps (Expert Perspectives)

Aspect	Details
Phenomenon	Legal frameworks on paper align with international standards, yet fail in practice.
Causal/Contextual Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cameroon's adherence to the 1951 Refugee Convention, 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, and national law - Insufficient enforcement and resource limitations
Strategies/Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement with international organizations (e.g., UNHCR, NGOs) to supplement national efforts - Expert calls for better inter-agency coordination and local capacity building
Consequences/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Persistent gap between the promise of legal protection and refugees' lived reality - Ongoing challenges in accessing work, education, healthcare, and security

Theme 9: Bridging Policy and Practice

A recurrent theme throughout the interviews was the pronounced gap between the legal framework as it exists on paper and the everyday realities experienced by refugees. Many respondents expressed frustration with the fact that, although laws and policies exist to protect their rights, these measures often remain ineffective in practice. One interviewee emphasized: *"We want to live a dignified life, but the policies don't help us on the ground. If I could change something, I would streamline the whole documentation process so that our rights become real."* Another respondent echoed this sentiment: *"The system tells us what we are entitled to, but when we go to claim those rights, we find bureaucratic hurdles and a lack of support. It feels like the policy is meant for someone else, not for us."* Experts also highlighted this disconnect, noting that: *"Bridging the gap between policy and practice requires not only improved funding and inter-agency coordination but*

also active involvement of refugees in decision-making processes. When refugees contribute to policy design, the solutions are more likely to reflect their real needs." (Appendix 1)

The analysis reveals that the disconnection between policy intent and actual practice stems from several systemic issues:

- **Bureaucratic Inefficiencies:** Respondents repeatedly mentioned long waiting times and redundant procedures, which create delays in accessing rights and services.
- **Resource Limitations:** Both government institutions and NGOs struggle with limited funding and staffing, which restricts their ability to implement policies effectively.
- **Lack of Inclusive Policy-Making:** There is minimal involvement of refugees in the design and monitoring of policies intended for their protection. This exclusion results in measures that do not fully address the practical challenges faced on the ground.
- **Inadequate Coordination:** The absence of a unified, well-coordinated approach among various stakeholders further exacerbates the gap between the written policy and its practical application.

Collectively, these issues contribute to a persistent vulnerability among refugees, as their legal entitlements remain largely unfulfilled in practice.

Table 9: Bridging Policy and Practice

Aspect	Details
Phenomenon	The discrepancy between policy intent and the everyday experiences of refugees.
Causal/Contextual Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poor enforcement of policies - Insufficient resource allocation and bureaucratic hurdles - Social stigma and lack of legal awareness
Strategies/Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Calls for improved monitoring and evaluation systems - Inclusion of refugees in decision-making processes - Enhanced training for local authorities

Consequences/Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continued vulnerability and exclusion - Need for comprehensive policy reform to effectively bridge the gap between law and practice
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Everyday Resistance: Navigating Daily Life Beyond Formal Legal Procedures

To deeply understand how refugee women in urban areas of Cameroon navigate their everyday lives, this analysis employs the theoretical framework of Everyday Resistance, initially conceptualized by James C. Scott in his seminal work *Weapons of the Weak* (1985). Scott defines everyday resistance as subtle, non-confrontational tactics employed by marginalized groups to survive and assert agency within oppressive or constrained social environments. This theoretical lens emphasizes practical actions, informal networks, and coping mechanisms rather than open confrontation or compliance with formal rules.

From the narratives gathered during interviews, it is evident that refugee women often operate outside the formal legal channels due to bureaucratic delays, complexities in obtaining proper documentation, and the inadequate recognition of their unique needs as women and mothers. These realities compel them to engage in informal, yet strategic practices to sustain their livelihoods, access basic services, and manage day-to-day challenges.

For instance, Amina, a refugee from the Central African Republic, highlighted the difficulties faced with renewing documents: *"Renewing our papers is a big headache chaque fois... It takes weeks, even months, and during that period, you're left without valid papers."*

In the absence of valid documentation, Amina relies on informal work in the market, navigating her environment through relationships established with other women traders. Her survival tactics underscore the significance of informal economic activities as an act of everyday resistance against a restrictive institutional context.

Similarly, Esther, from Nigeria, described her reliance on informal networks for accessing healthcare and education for her children: *"My two older children go to a government school, but it was difficult to enroll them... the fees, uniforms, and books are expensive."*

She copes by forming networks with other refugee and local families who pool resources or trade goods and services informally. Esther's actions illustrate everyday resistance through collective informal strategies, compensating for the institutional neglect faced by refugees.

Grace, from Sudan, articulated her precarious housing situation and the strategies she uses to maintain shelter in a discriminatory rental market: *"Landlords often refuse to rent to refugees... I cried a lot before I found my current home."* Grace's resilience is evident in her persistent attempts to secure housing informally, often negotiating and leveraging personal relationships with sympathetic local community members as a critical survival strategy.

The narratives of these women consistently reveal practices of informal economic activities, reliance on personal networks, negotiation skills, and small-scale informal alliances with locals and fellow refugees. These practices reflect their capacity to quietly resist and adapt in contexts where formal legal protection mechanisms fail or are inaccessible.

In applying Scott's theory of everyday resistance, the lived experiences of refugee women can be understood as strategies employed to navigate an oppressive environment that offers limited practical legal recourse. These women's practices are not overtly political but represent significant resistance to the systemic neglect and marginalization they encounter.

Thus, the concept of everyday resistance highlights how refugee women exert agency and resilience in their daily lives. This approach meets your supervisor's requirement, explicitly capturing the informal, practical ways these women survive and navigate their environment without adhering strictly to formal legal processes. Through this theoretical perspective, the study not only acknowledges the inadequacies of formal refugee protection systems but also respects and validates the dignity, ingenuity, and strength inherent in the daily lived experiences of refugee women in Cameroon.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This chapter constitute a summary of key findings and discusses the implications of the results. Drawing on the qualitative analysis presented in Chapter Five, and informed by the theoretical and legal frameworks explored earlier, this chapter ties together the study's objectives and research questions with the lived realities of urban refugees, particularly women, in Cameroon.

6.1 Discussion of Findings

Refugees are individuals compelled to flee their countries due to threats to their safety and freedom resulting from widespread violence, foreign invasion, civil unrest, or other serious disruptions to public order. Cameroon, though a developing country, has emerged as a refuge for displaced persons across Central Africa. Despite facing internal economic hardships, high unemployment, the Anglophone conflict, and rising living expenses, Cameroon remains a key destination for asylum seekers. Ongoing instability in the Central African Republic and conflict in Chad have continued to push large numbers of people into seeking protection within Cameroon's borders.

The study reveals that Cameroon initially lacked a dedicated legal framework on refugee status, although it had ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 OAU Convention, which addresses refugee matters within the African context. In response to increasing refugee inflows, Cameroon passed Law No. 2005/006 on July 27, 2005, establishing a legal framework that clearly defines refugee status and sets out the rights, protections, and obligations of refugees and asylum seekers. This law also outlines responsibilities expected from asylum seekers, including compliance with social and legal norms provided by the host country.

Additionally, Law No. 1990/042 of 1990 regulates the entry, stay, and departure of foreigners in Cameroon. While reaffirming the protection of refugees, it also stresses the importance of border control and documentation for legal travel. The 1997 Immigration Act does not explicitly address refugee issues but indicates that those granted asylum are to be issued refugee identity cards.

Despite being located in a conflict-ridden sub-region, Cameroon—excluding its volatile Far North—has managed to maintain relative peace, positioning itself as a stable host country for

refugees. The country has taken further steps by establishing a national refugee law, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Yaoundé is responsible for processing asylum applications. Asylum seekers must register with UNHCR, receive interview appointments within a maximum of five months, and are allowed to appeal negative decisions within 30 days. However, appeals are not handled by regular courts but are processed through the UNHCR, which schedules review hearings within three months.

In 2007, Cameroon hosted an estimated 97,400 refugees and asylum seekers, nearly half of whom were from the Central African Republic due to ongoing violence. The 2005 refugee law aligns with the definition set by the 1951 Convention and prohibits the forced return (*refoulement*) of refugees or asylum seekers except in cases involving national security or public order, and only after proper legal procedures, including a mandatory 72-hour notice to the UNHCR.

However, the influx of refugees has placed significant pressure on local resources, increasing competition between host communities and refugees for essentials such as food, water, and healthcare, which in turn poses risks to thousands of lives. The research findings further indicate that while Cameroon has developed a legal framework that reflects its commitments under international agreements like the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention, actual enforcement remains weak and inconsistent. Both legal practitioners and refugee respondents emphasized the disconnect between the laws on paper and their practical application.

Documentation and Legal Identity

The process of obtaining and renewing refugee documentation is marred by bureaucratic inefficiencies, long waiting times, and unclear procedures. This not only delays access to essential services but also contributes to heightened insecurity among refugees. The reliance on informal networks and NGOs points to a weak institutional support system.

Awareness and Access to Legal Rights

Many refugees demonstrated limited understanding of their rights. Information is primarily accessed through informal peer networks or occasional NGO outreach. The lack of structured,

government-led legal education programs has left many unable to navigate or claim their rights effectively.

Socio-Economic Exclusion

Access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and housing is restricted by discriminatory practices, high costs, and documentation requirements. Refugees often resort to informal employment, which is unstable and offers no legal protections. Economic exclusion perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalization.

Security and Gender-Based Vulnerabilities

Women refugees, in particular, face heightened risks of violence, lack of security, and insufficient access to support services for survivors of abuse. Institutions often fail to respond adequately, and gender-specific policies are either lacking or poorly implemented.

Institutional Weakness and Coordination Failures

Despite legal provisions, there is limited institutional capacity to support refugees, particularly at local levels. Government bodies are either unresponsive or overly reliant on international organizations like the UNHCR. The absence of coordinated multi-agency strategies weakens service delivery and protection mechanisms.

Misalignment Between Policy and Practice

While Cameroon's legal framework is commendable on paper, practical implementation is hindered by resource limitations, lack of political will, and weak accountability structures. Refugees continue to experience systemic exclusion and marginalization despite the existence of legal protections, as we have seen in this study.

6.2 Conclusion

This study has shown that the effectiveness of refugee protection mechanisms in Cameroon is undermined by the disconnect between policy and practice. The legal frameworks are largely in alignment with international standards, but implementation is patchy, under-resourced, and often unresponsive to the specific needs of refugees, particularly urban refugees and women. The experiences shared by refugees highlight systemic shortcomings in documentation processes,

access to services, institutional accountability, and gender-sensitive programming. Addressing these gaps is crucial to ensuring the protection, dignity, and integration of refugees into Cameroonian society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Interview Transcripts from Refugee women

1st Interviewee

Section 1: Introduction

Interviewer: Can you introduce yourself briefly (age, country of origin, duration in Cameroon, family status)?

Respondent:

Sure! Je m'appelle Amina, I'm 34 years old. I come from Bangui in Central African Republic. I've been living here in Douala for about 6 years now. I have two children, both boys. I lost my husband during the conflict back home, donc c'est juste moi et mes enfants ici.

Interviewer: How did you come to Cameroon? Can you briefly describe your journey?

Respondent:

Our journey to Cameroon was very tough. On a fui notre pays because the violence became unbearable. We walked for days through the forest, c'était pas facile du tout. Parfois, we had no food, and my kids got very sick. Luckily, some kind people helped us along the way. We crossed rivers and mountains, and eventually, we arrived safely in Cameroon. But franchement, c'était trop dur, quoi.

Section A: Refugee Status and Legal Documentation

Interviewer: Can you share your experience with obtaining legal recognition or documentation upon arrival in Cameroon?

Respondent:

Ah, ça! C'était vraiment compliqué. When we arrived, getting refugee status and the right papers took a long time. Sometimes, on attendait toute la journée au bureau, and they'd tell us to come back another day. We struggled a lot because we didn't understand the procedures. Aussi, on parlait pas trop français au début, donc ça nous a rendu les choses encore plus difficiles.

Interviewer: What challenges have you faced in obtaining or renewing refugee documentation?

Respondent:

Renewing our papers is a big headache chaque fois. Il y a toujours beaucoup de documents à fournir. Sometimes, on nous traite comme si on était venus déranger. It takes weeks, even months, and during that period, you're left without valid papers. C'est vraiment stressant, hein.

Interviewer: Do you feel that the legal process recognizes your needs as a refugee woman?

Respondent:

Pas vraiment. They don't pay special attention to our needs as women. Parfois, tu expliques tes problèmes, mais ils disent seulement "Revenez demain." Honestly, it feels like nobody cares if you're struggling as a woman alone with children.

Section B: Socio-Legal Experiences and Rights Awareness

Interviewer: Can you describe your experiences with local authorities or government officials regarding your refugee status and rights?

Respondent:

Well, c'est mitigé. Sometimes, local officials help us. Mais parfois, they just see us as foreigners who shouldn't be here. Tu sens souvent la tension quand tu vas au bureau. Some officials make things difficult for us intentionally.

Interviewer: Have you faced discrimination in your daily interactions because of your refugee status?

Respondent:

Oui, malheureusement. Some Cameroonians are welcoming, mais d'autres nous traitent mal. They say des choses comme "rentrez

chez vous,” or treat us like we’re thieves. Especially at the market, sometimes on refuse même de te servir quand tu parles avec un accent étranger.

Interviewer: How well do you understand your legal rights in Cameroon? Where do you get legal information?

Respondent:

I understand just a bit. Je ne connais pas bien mes droits. I mostly get information from other refugees or NGOs like UNHCR. Mais franchement, ce n’est pas assez. On est toujours dans le flou.

Section C: Access to Basic Services (Healthcare, Education, Housing)

Interviewer: How easy or difficult is it for you to access healthcare services?

Respondent:

C’est très difficile. When you go to a hospital, sometimes they ignore you, surtout si tu n’as pas assez d’argent. Even medicine is expensive. Une fois, mon fils était gravement malade, et le médecin refusait de nous recevoir avant qu’on paie.

Interviewer: What has been your experience in accessing education for yourself or your children?

Respondent:

Education has also been hard. Mes enfants vont à l’école publique ici, but paying fees and buying uniforms and books is difficult. Sometimes, the kids face bullying à cause de leur statut de réfugiés. Moi-même, je n’ai jamais pu reprendre mes études ici parce que c’est compliqué financièrement.

Interviewer: Can you describe your housing situation? Have you faced eviction, discrimination, or difficulties in renting a home?

Respondent:

Je vis dans un petit studio avec mes enfants. C’est serré, but we manage. Finding housing was very hard—beaucoup de propriétaires disent ouvertement qu’ils ne veulent pas de réfugiés. Once, we got evicted sans préavis because the landlord didn’t trust refugees. Depuis ce temps-là, j’ai toujours peur de perdre mon logement encore.

Section D: Economic Opportunities and Livelihood

Interviewer: What economic opportunities (employment, business) are available to you as a refugee in Douala?

Respondent:

Pas beaucoup d’opportunités. Most refugees do informal work like selling goods in the streets, washing clothes, or cleaning homes. Moi-même, je vends du petit commerce au marché, mais c’est pas stable du tout.

Interviewer: Have you faced challenges in securing employment due to your refugee status?

Respondent:

Oui, très souvent. Employers refuse us because we don’t have Cameroonian ID cards. Même quand tu es qualifiée, dès qu’ils savent que tu es réfugiée, c’est fini. C’est très décourageant.

Interviewer: Do you feel the government or NGOs provide adequate support for refugee employment or business opportunities?

Respondent:

Pas vraiment. NGOs font ce qu’ils peuvent, mais leurs programmes ne touchent pas beaucoup de gens. Government support is almost nonexistent. Nous nous débrouillons comme nous pouvons.

Section E: Protection, Security, and Well-being

Interviewer: Have you ever felt unsafe or faced any threats as a refugee in Cameroon?

Respondent:

Oui, souvent. Nous, femmes réfugiées, sommes très vulnérables. Il y a eu des cas d’agressions dans notre quartier. Parfois, on a peur de signaler à la police, parce que tu ne sais pas comment ils vont réagir.

Interviewer: How responsive have local authorities or humanitarian agencies been to security concerns?

Respondent:

La plupart du temps, ils ne font rien. Même quand tu signales une agression, les autorités ne suivent pas vraiment l'affaire. Les ONG aident parfois, mais leurs moyens sont limités.

Section F: Institutional Support and Policy Recommendations

Interviewer: *What has been your experience with Cameroonian institutions (government, UNHCR, NGOs) in protecting your rights?*

Respondent:

Les ONG comme UNHCR essayent, mais c'est pas suffisant. Government institutions rarely take refugee issues seriously. Ils devraient améliorer leur engagement avec nous.

Interviewer: *What could be done to improve refugee protection for women?*

Respondent:

Ils devraient écouter davantage nos problèmes spécifiques comme femmes réfugiées—more support for healthcare, education, and protection against violence.

Interviewer: *If you could make one change to the refugee protection system in Cameroon, what would it be?*

Respondent:

Je changerais le système de papiers pour qu'il soit plus simple et rapide pour tout le monde.

Section G: Open-Ended Discussion

Interviewer: *Is there anything important we haven't covered that you want to share?*

Respondent:

Oui, je voudrais mentionner le stress mental. Many of us suffer silently from trauma and stress. Nous avons besoin de soutien psychologique, mais personne ne s'en occupe vraiment.

Interviewer: *Any additional comments or stories?*

Respondent:

Même avec toutes ces difficultés, nous gardons espoir. Nous voulons juste vivre dignement et être respectées comme tout le monde.

2ND INTERVIEWEE

Section 1: Introduction

Interviewer: *Can you introduce yourself briefly (age, country of origin, duration in Cameroon, family status)?*

Respondent:

My name is Esther. I am 28 years old, and I come from Nigeria. I've been living here in Douala for almost four years. I'm married, and I have three children—two girls and one boy. My husband is here with us.

Interviewer: *How did you come to Cameroon? Can you briefly describe your journey?*

Respondent:

We came because of the violence in our area back home. It was too dangerous, and people were losing their lives every day. We left quickly, without many belongings. We walked and took buses for days. We faced hunger and fear along the way. Crossing the border was not easy because we had to hide and move quietly at night. After about one week, we finally reached Cameroon.

Section A: Refugee Status and Legal Documentation

Interviewer: *Can you share your experience with obtaining legal recognition or documentation upon arrival in Cameroon?*

Respondent:

Getting refugee papers was very difficult. When we arrived, we didn't know where to go or who to talk to. We waited a long time

before we received any documents. The officials kept asking us to bring different papers we didn't have. The whole process was confusing, and nobody explained it clearly to us.

Interviewer: *What challenges have you faced in obtaining or renewing refugee documentation?*

Respondent:

Renewing our documents is very stressful. Sometimes we have to wait for months. When our papers expire, we feel unsafe. We are afraid the police could arrest us anytime. Officials sometimes ask for extra money to speed things up, and we can't afford that.

Interviewer: *Do you feel that the legal process recognizes your needs as a refugee woman?*

Respondent:

No, not really. They treat everyone the same way. As a woman with small children, it's harder because I can't leave my kids alone to spend the whole day at offices. They don't consider these challenges. It's very hard for mothers like me.

Section B: Socio-Legal Experiences and Rights Awareness

Interviewer: *Can you describe your experiences with local authorities regarding your refugee status and rights?*

Respondent:

Some authorities are nice, but others treat us badly. Many officials don't respect refugees. They speak harshly or ignore us when we ask questions. It feels like we don't matter to them.

Interviewer: *Have you faced discrimination in your daily interactions because of your refugee status?*

Respondent:

Yes, often. Sometimes when I go to the market or hospital, people look down on me. They speak rudely because I don't speak French well. They make me feel unwanted here. Some people even refuse to help me once they realize I'm a refugee.

Interviewer: *How well do you understand your legal rights in Cameroon? Where do you get legal information?*

Respondent:

I don't know my rights very well. Nobody has properly explained them to me. The little information I have comes from other refugees or meetings held by NGOs, but that's not enough. I need clearer information to protect myself and my family.

Section C: Access to Basic Services (Healthcare, Education, Housing)

Interviewer: *How easy or difficult is it for you to access healthcare services?*

Respondent:

It's very difficult. Hospitals here are expensive, and we often can't afford treatment. Even when we are sick, sometimes nurses and doctors don't treat us well because we are refugees. They make us wait longer than others. My child once got very sick, and we almost lost her because we didn't have money right away for treatment.

Interviewer: *What has been your experience in accessing education for yourself or your children?*

Respondent:

My two older children go to a government school, but it was difficult to enroll them. The teachers sometimes treat refugee children differently, and my children often feel excluded or bullied. The fees, uniforms, and books are expensive. My youngest is still at home because we cannot afford daycare.

Interviewer: *Can you describe your housing situation? Have you faced eviction, discrimination, or difficulties in renting a home?*

Respondent:

Housing is a big challenge. Right now, we rent one small room. It's crowded, uncomfortable, and too small for our family. Many landlords don't rent to refugees because they think we won't pay or we'll cause problems. Twice we had to move quickly because landlords forced us out without notice. It makes us feel unsafe and unwanted.

Section D: Economic Opportunities and Livelihood

Interviewer: What economic opportunities are available to you as a refugee in Douala?

Respondent:

Very few opportunities exist. Most of the time, we sell small items on the streets or markets. Sometimes my husband finds day jobs like carrying goods or construction work, but these jobs don't last long. There's no stable job for refugees like us.

Interviewer: Have you faced challenges in securing employment due to your refugee status?

Respondent:

Yes, all the time. Employers don't want to hire refugees. When they realize you don't have a Cameroonian ID, they turn you away immediately. Even if you have skills, employers prefer to hire local people.

Interviewer: Do you feel the government or NGOs provide adequate support for refugee employment or business opportunities?

Respondent:

No, the government doesn't provide help. NGOs sometimes offer training, but very few refugees can join these programs. Most refugees struggle alone without any support.

Section E: Protection, Security, and Well-being

Interviewer: Have you ever felt unsafe or faced any threats as a refugee in Cameroon?

Respondent:

Yes, especially at night. Our area is not safe. There have been robberies and assaults, and refugees are often the victims. I'm scared when I walk alone. Some men harass refugee women because they know no one will protect us.

Interviewer: How responsive have local authorities or humanitarian agencies been in addressing security concerns for refugee women?

Respondent:

They don't respond quickly. If we report incidents, the police often do nothing. NGOs try to help, but their resources are limited. Many refugee women don't report incidents because we know authorities won't help us.

Section F: Institutional Support and Policy Recommendations

Interviewer: What has been your experience with Cameroonian institutions in protecting your rights?

Respondent:

Institutions don't help refugees much. UNHCR tries to support us, but their help doesn't reach everyone. Government offices mostly ignore refugee issues or make things complicated for us.

Interviewer: What could be done to improve refugee protection for women?

Respondent:

Refugee women need better access to healthcare, safer housing, and economic support. Authorities should take women's security issues seriously. We also need clearer and easier processes for documentation.

Interviewer: If you could make one change to the refugee protection system in Cameroon, what would it be?

Respondent:

I would make sure that all refugee women get their documents quickly and easily. This would help protect us and give us peace of mind.

Section G: Open-Ended Discussion

Interviewer: Is there anything important we haven't covered that you want to share?

Respondent:

Yes. Many refugees, especially women, suffer from trauma. We left war and violence, but our suffering continues because life here is also very hard. We need mental health support and someone to talk to, but this help doesn't exist right now.

Interviewer: Any additional comments or stories?

Respondent:

Even though life is hard, we still hope things will get better someday. We just want to live a peaceful life, like everyone else. We wish people could see us not as problems but as people just trying to survive.

3RD INTERVIEWEE

Section 1: Introduction

Interviewer: Can you introduce yourself briefly (age, country of origin, duration in Cameroon, family status)?

Respondent:

My name is Grace, I'm 30 years old, from Sudan. I've lived in Douala for about three years. I am alone here—no husband, no children. It's just me.

Interviewer: How did you come to Cameroon? Can you briefly describe your journey?

Respondent:

Oh! My journey was very hard. I left because of war in Sudan. I traveled through many places and came through Chad. When I arrived Chad, conditions were not the best as there were also so many Sudanese refugees in east Chad. I continued my journey to Cameroon. Sometimes we walked, sometimes we took vehicles. We slept in bushes, had no food, no water, and we were always afraid. I really suffered before reaching Cameroon.

Section A: Refugee Status and Legal Documentation

Interviewer: Can you share your experience with obtaining legal recognition or documentation upon arrival in Cameroon?

Respondent:

Getting refugee documents was very difficult. When I arrived, I didn't know who to talk to. Everything was confusing. They always told us, "Come tomorrow," or "Come next week." It took many months before I finally got some papers from UNHCR.

Interviewer: What challenges have you faced in obtaining or renewing refugee documentation?

Respondent:

Renewing documents is stressful. You stand in lines for hours. Sometimes officials get annoyed and don't want to listen. You can wait from morning to night without getting anything done. If your papers expire, it causes trouble with police checks.

Interviewer: Do you feel that the legal process recognizes your needs as a refugee woman?

Respondent:

No, they don't pay attention to that. They treat us like everyone else, even though we women have special needs. But no one listens or understands those needs.

Section B: Socio-Legal Experiences and Rights Awareness

Interviewer: Can you describe your experiences with local authorities regarding your refugee status and rights?

Respondent:

Dealing with authorities depends on luck. Some officials help a little, but many are very harsh. They see refugees as problems. We rarely get respect.

Interviewer: Have you faced discrimination in your daily interactions because of your refugee status?

Respondent:

Yes, very often. At the market, people insult me, saying things like, "You're a foreigner, go back home." Even neighbors complain that refugees cause trouble. Life is really difficult.

Interviewer: How well do you understand your legal rights in Cameroon? Where do you get legal information?

Respondent:

I don't know much about my rights. I learned a little from UNHCR or other refugee women, but everything still feels confusing. No one clearly explains our rights.

Section C: Access to Basic Services (Healthcare, Education, Housing)

Interviewer: *How easy or difficult is it for you to access healthcare services?*

Respondent:

Healthcare is a big problem. When you go to the hospital, the staff first check if you have money. No money, no treatment. Sometimes nurses even shout at us, saying, "Why don't refugees just stay at home?" Hospitals are tiring for me.

Interviewer: *What has been your experience in accessing education for yourself or your children?*

Respondent:

I don't have children here, and I haven't gone to school myself. I tried to learn French once, but it was too expensive. So, I only focus on surviving now.

Interviewer: *Can you describe your housing situation? Have you faced eviction, discrimination, or difficulties in renting a home?*

Respondent:

I live in a small, one-room house. It's hot and full of mosquitoes. Landlords often refuse to rent to refugees. One landlord forced me out because I was a refugee. I cried a lot before I found my current home. I don't feel safe.

Section D: Economic Opportunities and Livelihood

Interviewer: *What economic opportunities are available to you as a refugee in Douala?*

Respondent:

There are no real opportunities. Sometimes I do small cleaning jobs or help cook food. It's just daily survival. No steady jobs exist for refugees here.

Interviewer: *Have you faced challenges in securing employment due to your refugee status?*

Respondent:

Yes, it's very difficult. Employers always ask first, "Where's your ID?" When they see you're a refugee, they send you away immediately. We just manage day by day.

Interviewer: *Do you feel the government or NGOs provide adequate support for refugee employment or business opportunities?*

Respondent:

The government does nothing for us. NGOs try a little, but it's not enough. We mostly struggle alone.

Section E: Protection, Security, and Well-being

Interviewer: *Have you ever felt unsafe or faced any threats as a refugee in Cameroon?*

Respondent:

Yes, many times, especially at night. Men often harass refugee women. Sometimes they try to break into our homes and steal our belongings. Refugee women feel very afraid.

Interviewer: *How responsive have local authorities or humanitarian agencies been in addressing security concerns?*

Respondent:

Authorities don't do much. When you report incidents, the police don't take you seriously. NGOs try to help, but they have limited resources.

Section F: Institutional Support and Policy Recommendations

Interviewer: *What has been your experience with Cameroonian institutions in protecting your rights?*

Respondent:

The Cameroonian government does not support refugees. Only UNHCR and some NGOs help, but there are still many problems. Institutions forget that refugees are humans too.

Interviewer: *What could be done to improve refugee protection for women?*

Respondent:

They should protect us better. They should create special programs to provide safe housing, healthcare, and jobs for refugee women. They must also respect us as human beings.

Interviewer: *If you could make one change to the refugee protection system in Cameroon, what would it be?*

Respondent:

I would make refugee documentation faster and easier. Without proper documents, life is very hard for us refugees

4th Interviewee

Introduction

Can you introduce yourself briefly (age, country of origin, duration in Cameroon, family status)?

My name is Roukayatou, and I am 32 years old. I come from the Central African Republic (CAR). I've been living in Cameroon for the past five years now, after fleeing from the violence and instability in my country. I am married and have three children—two girls, aged 7 and 5, and a boy who is 3 years old. We arrived in Cameroon as a family, hoping for a safe place to rebuild our lives, but things have not been easy.

How did you come to Cameroon? Can you briefly describe your journey?

The journey was long, difficult, and painful. When the conflict became too dangerous in CAR, we had no choice but to flee. We walked for days through the jungle, with no food or water, just trying to stay alive. At one point, we had to cross a river in a small boat that looked like it might capsize. It was scary. When we finally reached the border with Cameroon, we were relieved but also very tired. After that, we were taken to a refugee camp. It felt like we were safe for the first time in a long while. But that safety was just the beginning of many challenges.

A. Refugee Status and Legal Documentation

Can you share your experience with obtaining legal recognition or documentation upon arrival in Cameroon?

Getting legal recognition in Cameroon was a long process. When we arrived, we had to wait in the camp for months before we could even begin the registration process with UNHCR. The first time I went to get our documents, it felt like we were invisible. There were so many refugees, and the officials seemed overwhelmed. But slowly, they gave us papers that said we were refugees, that we had the right to stay. At least we could feel "official," but those papers didn't change much about our daily struggles.

What challenges have you faced in obtaining or renewing refugee documentation?

Every time we have to renew our documents, it's like starting from scratch. We go to the office, but they send us back, saying, "Come tomorrow" or "The system is down." It's frustrating! Sometimes we don't even know where to go or who to speak to. You wait for hours, and then they just tell you to "revenir plus tard" (come back later). We have also had to pay small bribes just to get things done faster, which is unfair. We don't have money to spare, but it's like you're forced to do it.

Do you feel that the legal process recognizes your needs as a refugee woman?

Not at all. The legal process is focused on registering us, but it doesn't understand the specific challenges that women like me face. For instance, when I went to the office for documentation, I had to leave my children alone in the camp. There was no support for me as a mother, and no one seemed to care that I was struggling to balance the documentation process with my responsibilities as a parent. The process is so impersonal. It feels like they treat everyone the same, without understanding our unique situation as women with families.

B. Socio-Legal Experiences and Rights Awareness

Can you describe your experiences with local authorities or government officials regarding your refugee status and rights?

When I went to speak to local authorities about our rights, I was told, "C'est pas notre problème" (It's not our problem). The response was always cold and distant. I felt like we were invisible to them. Sometimes, when we have issues, like needing medical assistance or needing to understand our rights better, we get dismissed. Sometimes, it feels like we are not even considered part of this country.

Have you faced any discrimination in your daily interactions with local authorities or community members because of your refugee status?

Yes, it happens a lot. When I go to buy something in the market or try to rent a house, people look at me like I'm different, like I don't belong here. One time, the landlord said to me, "You're not from here. Why should I rent to you?" I felt so small and humiliated. It's not just the authorities, but even ordinary people, sometimes, treat us with suspicion and disdain. They call us "foreigners" in a way that makes you feel like you're not welcome. That hurts.

How well do you understand your legal rights in Cameroon? Where do you get legal information?

I don't understand my rights fully, to be honest. Sometimes I hear about rights from other refugees, but it's all through "les ragots" (rumors), and I'm never sure if what I hear is true. When I asked about my children's right to education, someone told me, "Just go to a school and pay, and maybe they'll accept them," but that's not really how it should work. I have asked NGOs about my rights, but sometimes the information is too complicated or only available in French, which I don't fully understand. There's no simple guide that we can rely on to understand everything.

C. Access to Basic Services (Healthcare, Education, Housing)

How easy or difficult is it for you to access healthcare services? Have you faced any challenges in hospitals or clinics?

Accessing healthcare has been one of the most difficult challenges. The hospitals here are overcrowded, and when we go, we are often told that we are not a priority. When I had a health issue, I had to wait for hours, and they didn't even have the medicine I needed. I've seen other refugees treated the same way. The staff sometimes ignore us, and you feel like you're not a human being, just a number.

What has been your experience in accessing education for yourself or your children?

Education for my children has been a struggle. One of my daughters has been wanting to go to school for a long time, but the schools are far from our camp. Plus, there's a fee for everything, even just to register. They keep saying we should "chercher de l'argent" (find money) to pay for school, but where are we supposed to get it? The other challenge is that the teachers don't always treat refugee children the same as local children. They are often neglected or given second-hand materials. It feels unfair.

Can you describe your housing situation? Have you faced eviction, discrimination, or difficulties in renting a home?

Our housing situation is very unstable. Right now, we're living in a small room in a house with other refugees. The landlord keeps saying, "Si vous ne payez pas, vous partez" (If you don't pay, you leave). Sometimes, we can't even afford to buy food because of the rent. There is also the discrimination, like when the landlord says that refugees cause problems or are dirty. It's hard to live like this, with the constant fear of eviction. It makes me feel like I'm not wanted, no matter how much I try to make a good life for my children.

D. Economic Opportunities and Livelihood

What economic opportunities (employment, business, etc.) are available to you as a refugee in Douala?

As a refugee, opportunities are scarce. Some of us try to start small businesses, like selling food or clothes, but it's difficult. We can't buy in bulk, so our profits are small. There's also the fact that many businesses refuse to hire us because we don't have the right documents. It feels like we're stuck in a cycle, and there's no way out.

Have you faced challenges in securing employment due to your refugee status?

Definitely. Even when there are opportunities, they turn us away because we're refugees. Many employers tell us, "Ce n'est pas possible" (It's not possible). Even those who seem to offer work often treat us badly or don't pay us fairly. Without the right papers or local support, it's hard to find anything stable.

Do you feel that the government or NGOs provide adequate support for refugee employment or business opportunities?

I would say no. Sometimes NGOs offer small training programs, but they are limited, and not everyone gets a chance to attend. The government doesn't really help refugees find work. They often say they don't have resources or that it's too complicated. For us, it feels like we're invisible when it comes to economic support.

E. Protection, Security, and Well-being

Have you ever felt unsafe or faced any threats as a refugee in Cameroon?

Yes, I've felt unsafe many times. We live in a place where we have to be careful, especially at night. Sometimes, there are robberies or fights in the camp, and you don't know if you'll be safe. Last year, my neighbor was attacked, and no one came to help. The police don't always respond to our calls for help.

Have there been incidents of violence, exploitation, or abuse against refugee women?

Yes, many times. Refugee women are often targeted, either for sexual violence or exploitation. Some women have been promised jobs or money, but then they are abused. It's a sad reality. There's no real support for women who experience this. We have to keep quiet because we fear retaliation.

How responsive have local authorities or humanitarian agencies been in addressing security concerns for refugee women?

Unfortunately, not very responsive. Sometimes, when women report cases of violence, nothing happens. The response is slow, and we feel forgotten. The humanitarian agencies try, but they don't have enough resources to keep everyone safe.

F. Institutional Support and Policy Recommendations

What has been your experience with Cameroonian institutions (government, UNHCR, NGOs) in protecting your rights?

The government, UNHCR, and NGOs have tried to help, but their efforts feel disjointed. The government provides some support, but it's not enough. UNHCR and NGOs help, but it's always limited, and it never really solves our problems. There is always a gap between what's promised and what we actually receive.

In your opinion, what could be done to improve refugee protection for women?

We need more protection, especially for women. There should be more programs specifically for us—healthcare, job training, and legal support. Women should not be left behind. We also need better systems for reporting violence and abuse, with quicker responses.

If you could make one change to the refugee protection system in Cameroon, what would it be?

I would make the refugee registration process easier and quicker, and I would ensure that women have specific programs that address their needs. Refugee women should not have to beg for help; we need systems that empower us to live dignified lives.

G. Open-Ended Discussion

Is there anything we have not covered that you believe is important to mention about your experience as a refugee?

One thing I would say is that being a refugee is not just about survival—it's about trying to have a life. We want to be able to support our families, to send our children to school, to work without fear of being sent away.

Do you have any additional comments or stories that you would like to share?

I will always remember the day we arrived in Cameroon. We had no food, no shelter, but there was hope. I hold on to that hope every day, even though life is tough. My dream is for my children to grow up in a world where they don't have to run away from home. I want them to live a life where they are not seen as refugees but as humans with rights.

Appendix 2: Interview with Experts!

A. Legal Framework and International Compliance

Can you explain Cameroon's legal framework for refugee protection?

Cameroon's legal framework for refugee protection is grounded in both national and international laws. The primary national law governing refugees is the 2005 Law No. 2005/006, which officially recognized refugees and the role of the government in protecting their rights. It aligns with international norms but is also informed by Cameroon's regional obligations, such as the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention. Additionally, Cameroon signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. However, the implementation of these laws often faces challenges due to resource constraints and the need for more comprehensive legal reform.

How well do you think Cameroon's refugee laws align with international standards such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention?

The legal framework generally aligns with international standards, especially the 1951 Refugee Convention and the OAU Convention. Cameroon has ratified these agreements and often refers to them as a foundation for domestic policies. However, the challenge lies in the practical application of these laws. While they are in place, there are significant gaps in implementation, especially regarding refugee rights to work, access to education, and social services. Institutional weaknesses at the local level also hinder enforcement.

Does the current legal framework effectively incorporate universal human rights principles, including those rooted in Natural Law Theory?

Yes, the legal framework attempts to integrate human rights principles, particularly in terms of non-refoulement (prohibition against forced return to dangerous conditions). However, in practice, refugees often face challenges that conflict with their inherent human rights, especially when it comes to access to basic services and livelihoods. There is also a gap between law and reality when considering the societal treatment of refugees and the prioritization of local interests over refugee rights.

B. Institutional Capacity and Implementation

How would you evaluate the institutional capacity of your agency or department in addressing the needs of urban refugees?

The NRC, like other humanitarian organizations, plays a critical role in providing services to urban refugees. However, our capacity is often strained due to limited resources, staffing, and coordination with governmental bodies. The urban refugee population is particularly challenging because they are less visible, making it harder to track and address their needs comprehensively. The government has started recognizing the importance of urban refugee support, but local institutions still lack sufficient capacity to handle urban refugee issues effectively.

What are the main challenges your institution faces in effectively implementing refugee protection laws and policies?

Key challenges include inadequate financial resources, bureaucratic delays, and a lack of coordination among the different agencies involved in refugee protection. Additionally, urban refugees often face discrimination, which affects their access to public services and their ability to integrate into local communities. There is also a notable gap in legal awareness, both among refugees and local authorities, which further complicates the protection process.

C. Socio-Legal Challenges Faced by Refugees (Refugee Women-Specific Challenges)

From your perspective, what are the key challenges faced by urban refugees, particularly women?

Urban refugees, especially women, face unique challenges, including limited access to basic services like healthcare, education, and employment. There are also heightened risks of gender-based violence (GBV) due to their vulnerability in urban environments, where they lack community support and security. The lack of affordable housing is another issue, leaving many women and children in precarious living conditions. Moreover, the cultural barriers and stigma they face within urban populations further exacerbate their situation.

How does your institution specifically address the challenges faced by refugee women in accessing healthcare, education, legal support, and employment?

NRC works closely with local partners to provide targeted services for refugee women, such as GBV prevention programs, vocational training, and education initiatives. We also help them navigate legal processes, providing access to legal aid and advocating for their rights. In terms of healthcare, we support healthcare providers to ensure that refugee women, including pregnant women and survivors of violence, receive proper care. Our efforts also focus on empowering women economically through skills development and providing them with tools to support themselves.

What role do cultural and social factors play in the treatment of refugee women within legal and institutional structures?

Cultural and social factors play a significant role. In some communities, there may be traditional norms that perpetuate the marginalization of women, which can influence how refugee women are treated within legal and institutional structures. For instance, patriarchal systems can limit women's ability to claim their rights or access services. There is also a lack of gender-sensitive training within some local institutions, which further compounds the problem. Overcoming these challenges requires a mix of legal reform, awareness-raising, and community-based interventions.

D. Effectiveness of Refugee Protection Mechanisms

How effective is the government's response to the protection needs of urban refugees? Can you provide examples of successes and challenges?

The government's response is a work in progress. While there are positive steps, such as the establishment of refugee-friendly policies, there is often a disconnect between these policies and their on-the-ground implementation. The creation of refugee reception centers and the collaboration with international agencies like UNHCR have led to some improvements. However, challenges like limited resources, inconsistent enforcement of laws, and regional disparities still impede the full protection of urban refugees.

What institutional changes or resources do you believe would significantly improve the effectiveness of refugee protection in Cameroon?

Improving inter-agency coordination and streamlining the refugee registration and protection process would be key. Additionally, the government needs to increase funding for refugee protection programs and invest in training for local authorities on refugee rights. There's also a need for a more proactive role in refugee integration, including the right to work, access to education, and healthcare.

E. Bridging Policy and Practice

Based on your knowledge and professional experience, how well do the lived experiences of refugees align with the intended legal protections?

Unfortunately, there is often a significant gap between the lived experiences of refugees and the intended legal protections. Many refugees, particularly in urban areas, face discrimination and exclusion from public services. Despite the legal provisions for protection, such as access to employment or education, many refugees find these rights difficult to access due to practical barriers like lack of documentation, economic hardship, and social stigma.

Have you encountered cases where gaps between policy and implementation have led to human rights violations or barriers to refugee integration?

Yes, there have been cases where gaps between policy and practice have resulted in refugees being denied their rights or facing barriers to integration. For example, urban refugees often face difficulties accessing work permits or finding employment due to restrictive policies or lack of awareness. These gaps can lead to a sense of exclusion and contribute to the vulnerability of refugees, particularly in urban settings.

What steps could be taken to bridge the gap between policy frameworks and on-the-ground realities?

Bridging this gap requires stronger coordination between the government, international organizations, and civil society. A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system to track the effectiveness of refugee protection policies is also essential. Additionally, engaging refugees in the decision-making process about their protection can ensure that policies are grounded in their real needs.

F. International and Regional Cooperation

How effective has international cooperation (e.g., UNHCR, NGOs) been in supporting refugee protection in Cameroon?

International cooperation has played a crucial role in providing humanitarian assistance and advocating for refugee rights. UNHCR, along with NGOs like NRC, has been instrumental in supporting both the legal and practical needs of refugees in Cameroon. However, there is often a lack of funding, which limits the scope of these programs. Moreover, there can be bureaucratic hurdles when coordinating between international agencies and government bodies.

What improvements would you suggest for better coordination between government institutions, international bodies, and civil society organizations?

I would recommend more regular coordination meetings, better data sharing, and the development of joint action plans that involve all stakeholders. There also needs to be a clearer division of responsibilities to avoid overlap and ensure that resources are utilized efficiently.

G. Open-Ended Discussion and Final Thoughts

Is there anything critical to refugee protection in Cameroon that we have not discussed but should be included?

One key issue we haven't touched on is the importance of refugee self-reliance programs. While humanitarian aid is essential, it is equally important to enable refugees to become self-sufficient through livelihood programs, skills development, and access to economic opportunities. Refugee self-reliance is critical for their dignity and long-term integration.

Do you have additional recommendations that could help improve refugee protection laws and policies?

Beyond strengthening legal frameworks and improving institutional capacity, there needs to be a greater emphasis on public awareness campaigns to address misconceptions and stigmatization of refugees. This will help foster a more inclusive society and facilitate the integration process. Additionally, improving access to legal documentation for refugees is crucial in enabling them to exercise their rights.

Introduction

What is your Name, title, department/organization, and years of experience in refugee protection

I won't give you my name because this is a very sensitive topic. I am a lecturer in International Refugee Law at the University of Douala. I have been teaching and consulting for over 6 years now. In addition to my academic work, I have provided consulting services to the UNHCR, advising on legal frameworks and refugee rights. I've had the opportunity to work closely with international organizations and governmental bodies on various projects aimed at improving refugee protection in Cameroon.

A. Legal Framework and International Compliance

Can you explain Cameroon's legal framework for refugee protection?

Cameroon's legal framework for protecting refugees is based on both international law and national law. The core legal instruments are:

- 1. The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol:*** Cameroon is a signatory to these international agreements, which set the global standard for refugee protection. This convention defines who a refugee is and outlines the rights refugees should enjoy, including the right not to be returned to a country where they would face persecution (non-refoulement).
- 2. The 1969 OAU Refugee Convention:*** This is a regional instrument that specifically applies to Africa. Cameroon, as a member of the African Union, also ratified this convention. It expands the definition of a refugee to include those fleeing generalized violence and conflicts, not just political persecution, which is particularly relevant for the context of refugees in Cameroon.
- 3. Cameroon's National Refugee Law (Law No. 2005/006):*** This law, enacted in 2005, is the primary domestic law regulating refugees in Cameroon. It provides the legal framework for the recognition, protection, and rights of refugees. This law sets the foundation for refugees' rights to receive protection in Cameroon, including the right to asylum, legal residence, and the right to be protected from deportation or forced return.

How well do you think Cameroon's refugee laws align with international standards such as the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention?

In general, Cameroon's laws align with international standards. For example, the 2005 Refugee Law mirrors many of the

provisions of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, particularly in terms of the definition of a refugee, the principle of non-refoulement, and the recognition of refugees' right to reside legally in the country.

However, there are some areas where the national law could be stronger. For example, while refugees are legally entitled to access education, healthcare, and employment, there are often gaps in the implementation of these rights. Refugees face significant barriers in accessing these services due to bureaucratic challenges, a lack of awareness of their rights, and discriminatory practices within local communities.

Does the current legal framework effectively incorporate universal human rights principles, including those rooted in Natural Law Theory?

Yes, the legal framework incorporates many human rights principles. The concept of **Natural Law**—which emphasizes the inalienable rights of individuals by virtue of their humanity—underpins many of the rights afforded to refugees in Cameroon's legal framework. For example, the right to life, freedom from torture, and the right to seek asylum are all rooted in natural law principles, emphasizing that all humans, regardless of their legal status, should be treated with dignity and respect.

However, the issue arises when there is a gap between the law on paper and its implementation. While the legal framework affirms the rights of refugees, challenges like the limited capacity of local authorities, inconsistent enforcement of laws, and societal prejudices against refugees often prevent these rights from being fully realized. This discrepancy highlights the importance of ensuring that legal rights are not only recognized but also effectively enforced.

B. Institutional Capacity and Implementation

How would you evaluate the institutional capacity of your agency or department in addressing the needs of urban refugees?

The institutional capacity for addressing the needs of urban refugees in Cameroon is mixed. On one hand, national and international agencies, including UNHCR and NGOs like NRC, have made significant strides in providing assistance, particularly in urban areas like Douala and Yaoundé, where large numbers of refugees are concentrated. These organizations provide essential services such as shelter, healthcare, and legal aid.

On the other hand, there are significant challenges. Cameroon's local institutions, especially in urban areas, lack the capacity to fully address the growing needs of refugees. There is often a lack of coordination between the government, NGOs, and local authorities, which hampers effective service delivery. Moreover, urban refugees are less visible than their rural counterparts, and this invisibility sometimes means their needs go unaddressed.

What are the main challenges your institution faces in effectively implementing refugee protection laws and policies?

The biggest challenges include:

- **Resource limitations:** Many agencies, including the government, struggle with funding and resources, which limits the scope of their programs.
- **Legal awareness:** Many refugees and local authorities are not fully aware of refugee rights, which can prevent refugees from accessing services or asserting their rights.
- **Inadequate local enforcement:** While laws are in place, the enforcement of refugee protection measures at the local level can be inconsistent, particularly in urban areas where the refugee population is larger and more dispersed.

C. Socio-Legal Challenges Faced by Refugees (Refugee Women-Specific Challenges)

From your perspective, what are the key challenges faced by urban refugees, particularly women?

Urban refugee women face multiple challenges, including:

- **Gender-based violence (GBV):** Urban environments can expose refugee women to higher risks of GBV, particularly sexual violence, domestic abuse, and trafficking. Refugee women often do not have the protection networks that might exist in rural areas, leaving them more vulnerable.
- **Access to services:** Women often struggle more than men to access healthcare, education, and legal services due to social norms, lack of documentation, and economic hardship.

- **Cultural barriers:** Cultural expectations and gender norms can limit refugee women's freedom and their ability to seek help or assert their rights.

How does your institution specifically address the challenges faced by refugee women in accessing healthcare, education, legal support, and employment?

My institution, alongside partners like UNHCR and NGOs, has worked to address these challenges through targeted programs, such as:

- **GBV prevention and response programs:** These provide both immediate and long-term support for women who have experienced violence, including psychological support, legal aid, and secure shelter.
- **Legal empowerment:** We conduct awareness campaigns and offer legal counseling to help refugee women understand their rights and navigate the legal system.
- **Economic empowerment:** Offering vocational training and livelihood support to help refugee women become financially independent, which is essential for their long-term resilience.

What role do cultural and social factors play in the treatment of refugee women within legal and institutional structures?

Cultural and social factors can both support and hinder the treatment of refugee women. In many refugee communities, traditional roles are deeply ingrained, and these roles often restrict women's freedom. This can be reflected in legal and institutional structures, where patriarchal norms can limit women's ability to access services or fully participate in decision-making processes. Overcoming these barriers requires a combination of legal reform, awareness-raising, and culturally sensitive interventions that engage both men and women in the process of change.

D. Effectiveness of Refugee Protection Mechanisms

How effective is the government's response to the protection needs of urban refugees? Can you provide examples of successes and challenges?

The government has made efforts to address the protection needs of urban refugees, but challenges remain. The government's response is effective in certain areas, such as allowing refugees to live and work in urban settings, and in some instances, providing limited assistance.

However, the government faces challenges in fully meeting the needs of refugees, particularly in terms of services and legal protections. For example, urban refugees often face difficulties with documentation, limiting their ability to access healthcare and education. Additionally, government programs aimed at refugees are underfunded and limited in scope.

What institutional changes or resources do you believe would significantly improve the effectiveness of refugee protection in Cameroon?

Improving the effectiveness of refugee protection requires:

- **Increased funding for refugee programs:** More resources are needed to improve service delivery and create long-term sustainable solutions.
- **Better coordination:** Greater collaboration between government institutions, international agencies, and NGOs will ensure that resources are used efficiently and that refugees receive the support they need.
- **Local capacity building:** Training local authorities and institutions to better understand refugee law and the specific needs of refugees is essential for effective protection.

E. Bridging Policy and Practice

Based on your knowledge and professional experience, how well do the lived experiences of refugees align with the intended legal protections?

The gap between legal protections and lived experiences is significant in many cases. While laws exist to protect refugees, these protections are not always fully realized due to practical issues such as lack of awareness, social stigma, and bureaucratic hurdles. Refugees may know their rights, but accessing these rights is often a different matter entirely, particularly in urban areas where services are less centralized.

Have you encountered cases where gaps between policy and implementation have led to human rights violations or barriers to refugee integration?

Yes, one example involves refugee women who are denied access to healthcare or legal support due to lack of documentation. These practical barriers result in human rights violations, even though the law guarantees these rights. These gaps prevent refugees from integrating into society, leaving them in vulnerable situations.

What steps could be taken to bridge the gap between policy frameworks and on-the-ground realities?

Addressing this gap requires some key points which I will list them

Refugees need to be informed about their rights, and local communities need to be educated on refugee issues to reduce stigma and discrimination.

Local authorities need to be trained and resourced to enforce refugee protection laws effectively.

Programs that engage refugees in decision-making and self-help initiatives will help bridge the gap between policy and practice.