# Social Inclusion and Refugee Protection: Examining Structural Marginalisation in Cameroon's Conflict-affected Contexts

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**Abstract**
This study examines the nexus between structural marginalisation, conflict formation, and refugee protection within Cameroon's Anglophone crisis and the experiences of Cameroonian refugees in host communities. The objectives are to analyse how structural marginalisation contributed to the Anglophone conflict, assess its effects on refugee socio-economic exclusion, and examine patterns of social exclusion across conflict and displacement contexts. The study is anchored on Social Exclusion Theory, which explain how structural inequalities and limited capabilities generate both conflict and exclusion. A qualitative research design was adopted, relying on secondary data from academic literature, policy reports, NGO documents, and publications of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns linking marginalisation to conflict emergence and refugee exclusion. Findings show that inequalities in political representation, education, and economic access contributed to conflict escalation in Cameroon. In host communities, refugees experience continued exclusion due to weak policy frameworks, limited livelihood opportunities, and unequal access to services. The study recommends strengthening policy coherence and expanding integrated livelihood and education systems.

**Keywords:** Marginalisation, Social Inclusion, Refugee Protection, Conflict.

## Introduction

Refugees globally occupy a structurally vulnerable position within host societies, often existing as non-citizens within established socio-political and economic systems. Their arrival into countries of asylum introduces complex challenges of integration, particularly given differences in legal frameworks, cultural practices, governance systems, and socio-economic structures. These dynamics raise critical questions regarding how refugees are incorporated into host societies and the extent to which they are able to access rights, services, and opportunities necessary for sustainable livelihoods.

Within this context, refugees are frequently exposed to marginalisation and social exclusion, primarily due to their minority status and limited political and economic agency. Social exclusion is understood as a structural and systemic process through which individuals or groups are partially or fully prevented from participating in societal institutions and benefiting from available resources and opportunities (Millere & Dobelniece, 2018). This process often manifests across multiple dimensions, including restricted access to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation, thereby reinforcing cycles of vulnerability and dependency. The issue of refugee inclusion has gained increasing attention in global policy and humanitarian discourse, particularly as part of broader efforts to strengthen social cohesion and reduce inequality. Several states have adopted inclusion-oriented policies such as quota systems and affirmative action to address marginalisation among minority populations. However, such frameworks are rarely extended to refugees, who often remain outside formal inclusion mechanisms despite their prolonged presence in host communities. This gap highlights a persistent tension between

citizenship-based rights and humanitarian protection obligations.

The Cameroonian refugee crisis, central to this study, demonstrates how forced displacement is deeply intertwined with processes of social exclusion. Rooted in long-standing tensions between Anglophone and Francophone communities, the conflict escalated in 2017, driving large-scale movements into Nigeria. Efforts at resolution, whether through military action or humanitarian engagement have failed to address the underlying fractures, resulting in successive waves of displacement shaped by shifting violence and insecurity (Lekane & Asuelime, 2017). The rise of fragmented armed groups, particularly Ambazonian factions, has intensified insecurity, exposing civilians to violence even in areas once considered safe. These dynamics have repeatedly pushed Cameroonian refugees into Nigeria, especially during moments of political tension such as the 2018 presidential election and localized clashes along the border.

Therefore, the term Refugee Protection is defined as all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law, namely human rights law, international humanitarian law and refugee law. Article 14(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution." Article 33(1) of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which prohibits countries from expelling or returning refugees to territories where their life or freedom would be threatened due to their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. These principles ensure that refugees have access to basic rights, including access to justice, the right to personal liberty and security, the right to work, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to property, and the right to freedom of movement. These rights facilitate the social inclusion of refugees in their host countries, enabling them to thrive. However, this ideal is not always reflected in reality, highlighting the need for continued efforts to uphold and protect the rights of refugees (Hyung, 2016).

Humanitarian actors, particularly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee, have increasingly emphasised social inclusion as a core component of refugee protection programming. Despite these efforts, evidence from various host countries indicates that refugees continue to face significant barriers, including limited access to formal employment, restricted mobility, and unequal access to public services. These challenges are often compounded by weak policy frameworks, limited institutional capacity, and socio-political resistance within host communities.

Against this background, this study examines the concept of social inclusion within refugee protection frameworks, identifies key drivers of social exclusion, and analyses strategic approaches for enhancing inclusion outcomes. It further explores the benefits of inclusive policies for both refugees and host communities, with a focus on promoting sustainable integration and social cohesion. By engaging with these dynamics, the study contributes to ongoing scholarly and policy debates on how best to address structural marginalisation within forced displacement contexts.

**Objectives**

1. To analyse how structural and policy-related marginalisation contributed to the emergence and escalation of the Anglophone conflict in Cameroon.
2. To assess how marginalisation shapes the socio-economic and institutional exclusion of Cameroonian refugees in host communities.
3. To contextualize the typology of social exclusion and examine the drivers that sustain its existence.

**Methodology**

This study adopted a **qualitative research design** using secondary data to examine marginalisation as a driver of conflict in Cameroon and refugee

exclusion in host communities. Data were sourced from journal articles, textbooks, policy reports, government publications, NGO documents, and credible online materials, including reports from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee. The data were analysed using **thematic analysis** to identify patterns related to marginalisation, conflict, and refugee inclusion.

**Problem Statement**

Marginalisation remains a persistent structural challenge in forced displacement contexts, particularly where conflict, weak governance, and fragmented policy frameworks intersect. In Cameroon, the Anglophone crisis illustrates how long-standing patterns of political, linguistic, and socio-economic exclusion can escalate into violent conflict, generating large-scale displacement into neighbouring countries such as Nigeria. While international protection frameworks exist, refugees originating from such conflict environments often continue to experience multi-layered marginalisation in host countries including limited access to livelihoods, education, and social services. Despite the growing emphasis on refugee inclusion, existing policies in many host settings remain inconsistent, weakly coordinated, and insufficiently integrated into national development structures. This has resulted in a situation where refugees are formally protected but practically excluded from full participation in socio-economic life. Furthermore, limited attention has been paid to how conflict-induced marginalisation in countries of origin is reproduced and reinforced in asylum contexts, thereby sustaining cycles of vulnerability across the displacement continuum. This gap highlights the need for a more integrated understanding of marginalisation that connects conflict dynamics with refugee protection outcomes.

**Conceptual Discourse**

**Social Inclusion**

This is a multifaceted concept that has been defined in various ways. According to Beck, Van der Maesen, and Walker (1997), social inclusion is a dynamic process where previously excluded or new groups, such as refugees, integrate into the social networks of the host society. This process is facilitated when established members of the host society provide opportunities and space for these new groups to participate and engage. Additionally, Wilson and Secker (2015) define social inclusion as having access to the necessary resources and opportunities to fully participate in economic, social, and cultural life. This definition emphasizes the importance of addressing the structural barriers that prevent marginalized groups from accessing essential services and opportunities. Social inclusion ensures that individuals have access to and can benefit from all opportunities available in a society (Eberhard & Schatz, 2008). It is a political response to exclusion that goes beyond removing systemic barriers to effective participation and equality of opportunity. Social inclusion promotes a comprehensive vision that values diversity and promotes the well-being of vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as refugee communities (Saloojee, 2001). A key measure of good governance is the extent to which it supports the most vulnerable members of society.

These definitions highlight the importance of creating an inclusive environment that enables refugees to integrate into their host society and participate fully in various aspects of life. By understanding the complexities of social inclusion, policymakers, practitioners, and researchers can develop effective strategies to promote the inclusion of refugees and other marginalized groups.

**Marginalization**

To be marginalized is to be excluded from the centers of power and resources, thereby limiting one's ability to self-determine in economic, political, and social contexts (Daniel, Fletcher, & Linder, 2002). Characteristically, marginalized individuals face significant barriers to accessing essential resources such as quality education and vocational training, economic opportunities including employment and entrepreneurship, healthcare and social services, and political representation and participation. Consequently,

their participation and self-determination in society are severely curtailed, leading to further social, economic, and political disenfranchisement. Notably, the definition of marginalization is highly context-dependent, varying across different historical contexts where past injustices and trauma continue to impact present-day experiences. Socio-economic settings also play a significant role, where factors like poverty, inequality, and discrimination exacerbate marginalization. Additionally, cultural contexts are important, where dominant groups may impose their values and norms on marginalized communities. Understanding these complexities is crucial for developing effective strategies to address marginalization and promote greater social justice and equality (Kagan & Burton, 2005).

**Refugee**

The term "refugee" shall apply to any person who, owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail her/himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of her/his former habitual residence…is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (1951 Refugee Convention, Article 1).

Based on the definition, five essential elements must converge to qualify an individual as a refugee: A person must be outside their country of origin or former residence, driven by a well-founded fear of persecution. This persecution must be motivated by one of the following factors: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Furthermore, the individual must be unable or unwilling to seek protection from their home country or return there, due to a justified fear of continued persecution;

**Literature Review**

The literature on forced displacement and refugee protection has increasingly shifted from viewing refugees solely as vulnerable populations in need of humanitarian assistance to understanding them as subjects embedded within broader systems of structural inequality, governance, and conflict dynamics. Central to this shift is the recognition that marginalisation is not merely a by-product of displacement but a condition shaped by pre-existing inequalities, institutional arrangements, and policy choices in both countries of origin and host societies. As such, contemporary scholarship emphasises the need to analyse refugee experiences through a more integrated lens that connects conflict, exclusion, and governance across the displacement continuum (Citation needed). This body of literature draws from multiple theoretical traditions, including social exclusion theory, horizontal inequality frameworks, and political economy approaches to conflict and development. Together, these perspectives highlight how unequal access to resources, services, and political power contributes not only to the outbreak of conflict but also to the persistence of refugee marginalisation in host contexts. Furthermore, recent studies have underscored the limitations of humanitarian responses that prioritise short-term protection without addressing the structural drivers of exclusion. Within this evolving discourse, key areas of analysis include the role of policy frameworks, economic and educational exclusion, and intersectional inequalities such as gender. However, despite growing recognition of these factors, there remains limited integration between conflict analysis and refugee protection studies, particularly in understanding how marginalisation operates across both contexts simultaneously. It is within this gap that the present study is situated.

**Marginalisation, Conflict, and Structural Exclusion in Forced Displacement**

The study of forced displacement increasingly conceptualises marginalisation as a structurally produced condition of exclusion, rather than an incidental consequence of displacement. Drawing on social exclusion theory and horizontal inequality frameworks, scholars argue that marginalisation arises when groups are systematically denied equal access to economic,

political, and social opportunities (Stewart, 2008). Within forced migration studies, this shift has redirected attention from individual vulnerability to institutional, governance, and conflict-induced exclusion (Betts & Collier, 2017; World Bank, 2023). Importantly, this perspective establishes a continuum between pre-displacement inequalities and post-displacement vulnerabilities, linking marginalisation in refugee-hosting contexts to the same structural conditions that generate conflict and forced migration. A dominant strand of the literature identifies weak, fragmented, and exclusionary policy frameworks as central to sustaining refugee marginalisation. While international legal instruments such as the 1951 Refugee Convention provide normative protection standards, their domestic implementation remains inconsistent and often incoherent (Hathaway, 2021). This disconnect produces what has been described as "protection without inclusion," whereby refugees are formally recognised but excluded from meaningful participation in host societies (Betts & Collier, 2017). In conflict-affected settings, such exclusion reflects broader patterns of state fragility and governance deficits, which are often the same conditions underpinning displacement.

Therefore, within this structural context, economic exclusion functions as both a driver and outcome of marginalisation. Displacement disrupts access to livelihoods, assets, and social networks, while restrictive host country policies further constrain access to labour markets and productive resources (Betts et al., 2017). Empirical evidence indicates that refugees are frequently confined to informal and low-income economic sectors due to legal barriers and the non-recognition of qualifications (Desai et al., 2021). This reveals a persistent contradiction within refugee governance: while humanitarian frameworks emphasise self-reliance, state policies often inhibit economic integration, reflecting tensions between inclusion-oriented humanitarian objectives and sovereignty-driven policy restrictions (World Bank, 2023).

Similarly, educational exclusion reinforces marginalisation across generations. Refugee education systems often reproduce inequality when delivered through parallel structures rather than integrated national systems (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Although integration into national systems is widely advocated, implementation remains uneven and dependent on host country capacity (Abamosa et al., 2020). From a conflict perspective, disparities in access to education and public services are not only consequences of displacement but also pre-existing grievances that contribute to conflict emergence, thereby reinforcing the cyclical relationship between marginalisation and displacement. Gender-focused scholarship further underscores the intersectional nature of marginalisation. Refugee women and girls experience compounded vulnerabilities due to pre-existing gender inequalities that are intensified during conflict and displacement (Freedman, 2016; Edwards, 2009). Structural disparities in economic participation, decision-making power, and access to protection services heighten exposure to gender-based violence. While frameworks developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee aim to address these inequalities, critiques suggest that implementation often remains procedural and fails to transform underlying power structures (Freedman, 2016). Notably, these gendered inequalities are embedded within broader conflict systems, reinforcing the link between marginalisation, violence, and forced migration.

Despite these insights, a critical gap persists in the literature. While marginalisation is widely recognised as structurally produced, insufficient attention is given to its dual function as both a driver of conflict and a determinant of refugee exclusion. Existing studies often treat conflict dynamics and refugee protection as separate analytical domains, overlooking the continuity between exclusion in countries of origin and exclusion in host societies. Furthermore, the interaction between sectoral policy incoherence—particularly across education, labour, and social protection—and conflict-induced displacement remains underexplored, especially in Global South contexts characterised by institutional constraints. Finally, the literature

reflects a shift from viewing refugee marginalisation as a humanitarian concern to understanding it as a systemic outcome of conflict, governance failure, and structural inequality. However, persistent gaps in policy coherence, conflict linkage analysis, and intersectional understanding highlight the need for more integrated and empirically grounded research. This study contributes to this gap by examining marginalisation across the displacement continuum, linking conflict dynamics in countries of origin to exclusion outcomes in host communities.

**Marginalisation as a Driver of Conflict**

Marginalisation has emerged in contemporary conflict scholarship as a central explanatory variable for the persistence and escalation of violent conflicts in Africa. While many conflicts are outwardly framed along ethnic, religious, or resource-based lines, a growing body of empirical literature demonstrates that such identities become conflictual primarily when linked to systematic inequalities in political representation, economic access, and cultural recognition (Cederman et al., 2011; Østby, 2008). Marginalisation, therefore, should be understood not as a peripheral condition but as a structural **driver** that shapes both grievance formation and mobilisation dynamics. Recent studies further emphasise that these inequalities are often historically rooted, particularly in colonial state formation processes that institutionalised uneven power relations across identity groups (Tatchim, 2024). Although, pre-colonial African societies experienced various forms of conflict—including expansionist campaigns by entities such as the Oyo Empire and the Kanem-Bornu Empire—the colonial reconfiguration of African polities fundamentally transformed the nature of conflict. By amalgamating heterogeneous groups into singular administrative units, colonial regimes created artificial states characterised by asymmetrical inclusion, where certain groups were privileged in governance structures while others were subordinated. These structural imbalances persisted into the post-colonial period, reinforcing patterns of exclusion and contestation that continue to underpin contemporary conflicts (Mamdani, 1996; Tatchim, 2024).

Thus, The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon provides a paradigmatic illustration of how marginalisation translates into protracted conflict. The origins of the crisis lie in the 1961 reunification of British Southern Cameroons and French Cameroon, which was intended to establish a bilingual federal state. However, from its inception, the process was marked by asymmetrical power relation**s**. Anglophone elites perceived the Foumban constitutional negotiations as exclusionary, given that the constitutional framework was largely pre-determined by the Francophone leadership (Anyangwe, 2014; Konings & Nyamnjoh, 2003). This initial imbalance entrenched a pattern of political marginalisation that would deepen over time. Subsequent institutional transformations further exacerbated these inequalities. The abolition of federalism in 1972 and the consolidation of a unitary state centralised authority within Francophone-dominated political structures. This shift facilitated the systematic erosion of Anglophone autonomy through the imposition of French administrative, legal, and educational systems in English-speaking regions. Such policies have been widely interpreted as mechanisms of cultural and linguistic assimilation, contributing to a sustained perception of collective exclusion among Anglophone populations (Bang & Balgah, 2022; Tatchim, 2024). In parallel, limited access to high-level political office reinforced the perception of political under-representation, further deepening horizontal inequalities.

Therefore, marginalisation in Cameroon is thus multidimensional, encompassing political, institutional, and cultural domains. The persistence of these inequalities, coupled with weak institutional avenues for redress, created conditions conducive to escalation. Consistent with broader theoretical insights, prolonged exclusion eroded state legitimacy and increased the salience of identity-based mobilisation (Cederman et al., 2011). The 2016 protests by Anglophone lawyers and teachers, initially

centred on sector-specific grievances—rapidly evolved into a broader movement following the state's coercive response (Bang & Balgah, 2022). This escalation underscores a critical dynamic: state repression in contexts of entrenched marginalisation often transforms reformist demands into secessionist claims. The resultant militarisation of the crisis, including the emergence of Ambazonian separatist movements, reflects the culmination of these processes. Recent analyses conceptualise the conflict as a "complex emergency," characterised by overlapping dimensions of political violence, humanitarian crisis, and institutional fragility (Bang & Balgah, 2022). Beyond immediate security implications, the conflict has generated significant socio-economic consequences, including large-scale displacement and disruptions to education, thereby reinforcing cycles of vulnerability and underdevelopment (Galindo-Silva & Tchuente, 2023).

Analytically, the Cameroonian case reinforces a broader proposition within conflict studies: identity alone is insufficient to explain violent conflict; rather, it is the politicisation of identity through unequal structures of power and resource distribution that drives mobilisation. Marginalisation operates as the key mechanism linking structural inequality to violent contestation. Where such inequalities remain unaddressed, they not only trigger conflict but also sustain it by entrenching grievances and undermining prospects for durable peace. Marginalisation remains a critical lens for understanding conflict dynamics in Africa. The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon demonstrates how historically rooted inequalities—shaped by colonial legacies and perpetuated through post-colonial governance—can evolve into protracted violent conflict. Addressing such conflicts requires moving beyond short responses towards structural reforms that prioritise inclusive governance, equitable representation, and the recognition of plural identities within the state.

**Marginalisation in Refugee Protection**

Marginalisation within refugee protection regimes is a complex and deeply embedded phenomenon, reflecting broader patterns of structural inequality at the global and national levels. It encompasses the systematic exclusion of refugees from economic participation, social integration, and political inclusion, thereby limiting their capacity for self-determination and access to essential resources. Conceptually, marginalisation operates both as a process and an outcome, sustained through institutional practices and policy frameworks that reproduce inequality over time (Kagan & Burton, 2005). In refugee contexts, this exclusion is not incidental but often structurally produced through governance systems that prioritise state security over human protection.A central dimension of refugee marginalisation is economic exclusion. Refugees frequently encounter legal and administrative barriers to formal employment, including restrictions on work permits, recognition of qualifications, and access to financial systems. These constraints confine many to informal labour markets characterised by precarity, exploitation, and low wages. Contemporary research demonstrates that such exclusion is not only a humanitarian concern but also a structural inefficiency, as it prevents refugees from contributing meaningfully to host economies (Betts et al., 2017; World Bank, 2023). The persistence of restrictive labour policies reflects broader global inequalities, where host states, particularly in the Global South lack the institutional capacity or political will to facilitate inclusive economic integration.

Furthermore, Marginalisation is reinforced through social exclusion and discrimination. Refugees often face systemic barriers in accessing education, healthcare, and social services, compounded by xenophobia and negative public perceptions. These challenges are particularly acute for vulnerable sub-groups, including women, children, and persons with disabilities, who experience intersecting forms of marginalisation (Kagan & Burton, 2005; UNHCR, 2022). Gendered dynamics, for instance, expose refugee women to heightened risks of economic dependency and gender-based violence, while limited access to education constrains long-term opportunities for refugee

youth. Such patterns illustrate how marginalisation is not uniform but differentiated across social categories. At the institutional level, restrictive asylum and migration policies play a critical role in perpetuating refugee marginalisation. Despite the normative framework established by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and grounded in the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, many states have adopted increasingly securitised approaches to migration governance. These include stringent border controls, prolonged detention, and deportation practices that effectively criminalise forced displacement (Betts & Collier, 2017; Hathaway, 2021). Such measures create legal ambiguities and protection gaps, undermining refugees' ability to access their rights and reinforcing their socio-political exclusion.

Moreover, political narratives and public discourse significantly shape the marginalisation of refugees. Refugees are frequently constructed as economic burdens or security threats, rather than as rights-bearing individuals. This framing influences policy decisions and legitimises exclusionary practices, thereby entrenching marginalisation within both formal institutions and societal attitudes (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). In many contexts, these narratives obscure the structural drivers of displacement and shift responsibility away from international cooperation towards restrictive national policies. The cumulative effect of these dynamics is the production of a protracted condition of marginality, in which refugees remain physically present but socially and economically excluded from host societies. This has significant implications for refugee protection, as prolonged marginalisation undermines resilience, increases vulnerability to exploitation, and can generate secondary forms of displacement. Emerging scholarship further highlights the link between marginalisation and instability, suggesting that exclusionary policies may contribute to social tensions within host communities (World Bank, 2023).

In sum, marginalisation in refugee protection reflects a broader tension between state sovereignty and humanitarian obligations. While international legal frameworks emphasise protection and inclusion, their implementation is often constrained by domestic political considerations and global inequalities. Addressing this therefore requires a shift from short-term responses towards long-term, inclusion-oriented strategies. This includes expanding access to labour markets, strengthening legal protections, promoting social cohesion, and enhancing international burden-sharing mechanisms. It remains a defining challenge within contemporary refugee protection systems. It is sustained by interconnected economic, social, and political factors that systematically exclude refugees from meaningful participation in host societies. Effective responses must move beyond normative commitments to address the structural conditions that produce and reproduce marginalisation, ensuring that refugee protection is not only a legal obligation but a practical reality.

**Contributory Factors to Refugee Exclusion**

**Educational Exclusion and Segmented Integration**

For Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria, access to education exists but remains uneven and constrained by structural limitations. While many refugees are integrated into public schools under Nigeria's out-of-camp policy, challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited teaching capacity, language differences and financial barriers affect the quality of inclusion. In some instances, reliance on informal or parallel learning arrangements further reinforces educational gaps and limits long-term integration, particularly for children transitioning to higher levels of education.

**Livelihood Constraints and Economic Exclusion**

Economic marginalisation is highly pronounced among Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria. Displacement has resulted in the loss of assets, farmland, and livelihoods, while restricted access to formal employment, credit facilities, and land

in host communities limits opportunities for recovery. Most refugees engage in low-income activities such as subsistence farming, petty trading, or casual labour. The absence of documentation and non-recognition of qualifications further constrain access to skilled employment. As a result, many households remain in chronic economic precarity, increasing reliance on humanitarian assistance and negative coping mechanisms.

**Gender Inequality and Differential Vulnerabilities**

Gendered patterns of exclusion are evident within refugee communities in Nigeria. Women and girls face heightened vulnerabilities, including limited access to livelihood opportunities, reduced participation in decision-making, and increased exposure to gender-based violence. Economic hardship has also contributed to coping strategies such as transactional sex and early marriage. Although gender-focused programmes exist, their reach and sustainability are often limited, meaning that underlying socio-cultural norms and structural inequalities remain largely unaddressed.

**Weak Policy Frameworks**

While Nigeria provides protection through mechanisms such as temporary protection arrangements and an out-of-camp policy, policy and institutional gaps continue to constrain full inclusion. Refugees' access to employment, financial systems, and public services is not always clearly defined or consistently implemented. In addition, reliance on humanitarian actors for service delivery has led to parallel or semi-integrated systems, which, although necessary, can limit long-term integration into national structures. Policy fragmentation across sectors further reduces the effectiveness of inclusion efforts.

**The Intersectionality of Marginalisation in Relation to Exclusion**

These exclusionary factors are deeply interconnected within the Nigerian context. Limited access to quality education reduces employment prospects; livelihood constraints increase economic vulnerability; gender inequalities further restrict access to resources; and policy gaps amplify these challenges. Together, they create cumulative disadvantages that are difficult for refugees to overcome, particularly in under-resourced host communities. Beyond these direct linkages, the findings indicate that marginalisation operates as a self-reinforcing cycle. For instance, low educational attainment limits access to formal employment, which in turn reduces income levels and the ability to afford education for the next generation, thereby reproducing disadvantage over time. Similarly, economic precarity increases exposure to harmful coping mechanisms, which disproportionately affect women and children and further entrench gendered inequalities.

Consequently, the intersection of legal and socio-economic constraints also shapes refugees' agency. Unclear or restrictive policy environments limit mobility and access to formal systems, forcing refugees into informal arrangements where exploitation risks are higher and protections are weaker. This condition not only deepens economic exclusion but also reduces access to justice and social protection mechanisms. Importantly, these intersecting factors are compounded by spatial inequalities, as many refugee-hosting areas in Nigeria are characterised by weak infrastructure, limited public services, and high levels of poverty. In such contexts, both refugees and host communities compete over scarce resources, which can intensify social tensions and further marginalise refugees.

Thus, the intersectionality of marginalisation reveals that exclusion is not the result of isolated factors but a complex system of mutually reinforcing constraints. Addressing these challenges therefore requires integrated, multi-sectoral interventions that simultaneously target education, livelihoods, gender equality, and policy reform, rather than isolated or sector-specific responses. The marginalisation of Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria is structurally

embedded and multidimensional, shaped by overlapping constraints in education, livelihoods, gender relations, and policy frameworks. Although Nigeria's inclusive, out-of-camp approach provides opportunities for integration, structural limitations and resource constraints hinder its full realisation. Sustainable refugee inclusion therefore requires stronger policy coherence, improved access to economic opportunities, and targeted interventions that address the interconnected nature of marginalisation.

**Strategies for Promoting Social Inclusion of Cameroonian Refugees in Nigeria**

In the context of Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria, service integration is a key strategy under the country's out-of-camp and inclusion-oriented refugee approach. By delivering education, health, and other essential services through existing public systems, both refugees and host communities are able to access shared infrastructure. In states such as Cross River, Benue, and Taraba, refugees attend public schools and use government health facilities alongside host populations. This shared access reduces social separation and fosters interaction. However, the effectiveness of this approach is influenced by limited infrastructure, overstretched public services, and funding constraints, which sometimes affect service quality and equity.

**Advocacy to Stakeholders**

Advocacy efforts targeting government actors, traditional rulers, and host community leaders are critical in improving the protection environment for Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria. Such engagement has contributed to the adoption of temporary protection arrangements and more flexible settlement options. Continued advocacy also supports improved access to livelihoods, documentation processes, and public services. However, gaps remain in translating policy commitments into consistent practice at local levels, particularly in rural and resource-constrained communities where implementation capacity is weak.

**Peace Education**

Peace education plays an important role in reducing tensions between Cameroonian refugees and host communities, especially in areas where competition over scarce resources exists. Through sensitisation programmes led by humanitarian actors and local partners, both populations are educated on coexistence, conflict prevention, and non-violent communication. This helps to reduce misinformation and prevent stereotyping of refugees as economic burdens. In communities where peace education has been sustained, there is evidence of improved tolerance and reduced incidents of social tension.

**Dialogue and Community Engagement**

Regular dialogue platforms between Cameroonian refugees and host communities in Nigeria have served as important mechanisms for managing grievances and strengthening social cohesion. These engagements allow both groups to discuss challenges such as access to farmland, employment opportunities, and service delivery. They also function as early warning systems for preventing conflict escalation. In several hosting areas, dialogue initiatives have improved trust and encouraged cooperative relationships, although outcomes vary depending on local leadership and resource availability.

The social inclusion of Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria is best achieved through integrated and locally responsive approaches that combine shared service delivery, sustained advocacy, peace education, and structured community dialogue. While Nigeria's inclusive refugee framework provides a strong foundation, its effectiveness is shaped by resource limitations, uneven implementation, and local capacity constraints. Strengthening these areas is essential for reducing marginalisation, improving coexistence, and promoting sustainable inclusion within host communities.

**Conclusion**

This study set out to interrogate social inclusion as a response to refugee marginalisation, with emphasis on the structural and policy conditions that shape exclusion in host countries. The

analysis demonstrates that refugee marginalisation is not a temporary or incidental condition of displacement, but a systematically produced outcome of institutional design, governance choices, and uneven policy implementation. In this sense, exclusion operates less as a humanitarian failure and more as a reflection of broader structural constraints within refugee protection system.

Thus, a key insight from the study is that the persistent gap between international protection norms and domestic policy practice produces a form of conditional inclusion, where refugees are physically present but institutionally peripheral. Even where legal frameworks exist, weak enforcement mechanisms, fragmented sectoral policies, and limited institutional coordination significantly reduce their effectiveness. Consequently, refugees remain excluded from key domains such as labour markets, education systems, and political participation, reinforcing long-term dependency and socio-economic vulnerability. The analysis also shows that social inclusion strategies, particularly service integration, advocacy, and community-based dialogue are increasingly positioned as corrective mechanisms. However, their effectiveness is contingent upon the presence of strong state capacity and coherent governance systems. Where such conditions are absent, inclusion interventions risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative, addressing surface-level integration while leaving deeper structural inequalities intact.

Importantly, the study highlights that refugee inclusion cannot be fully understood outside the broader context of structural inequality in host countries. Inclusion policies operate within pre-existing socio-economic hierarchies, meaning that refugees often enter systems already characterised by uneven access to resources. As a result, social inclusion becomes not merely a technical policy goal but a political and institutional challenge involving redistribution, recognition, and rights enforcement. Therefore, the study argues that sustainable refugee protection requires moving beyond programmatic inclusion towards systemic reform of governance structures that produce exclusion in the first place. Without addressing the structural foundations of marginalisation, social inclusion risks remaining partial, uneven, and unsustainable.

**Recommendations**

- **Strengthen Policy Coherence and Legal Protection Frameworks**
  Hosting countries should develop and harmonise clear refugee policies that align international protection standards with national laws. Consistent implementation across national and local levels is essential to reduce legal ambiguity and ensure refugees have predictable access to rights and services, including education, healthcare, and lawful employment.

- **Promote Economic Inclusion and Self-Reliance**
  Governments should gradually ease restrictions on refugee access to labour markets, land use, and financial services. Expanding vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and access to microfinance will enhance self-reliance and reduce long-term dependency on humanitarian assistance, while also contributing to local economic development.

- **Integrate Refugees into National Service Systems**
  Hosting states should prioritise integration of refugees into existing public systems rather than parallel service structures. Strengthening national education and health systems to accommodate both refugees and host communities will improve efficiency, reduce duplication, and enhance social cohesion.

- **Strengthen Gender-Responsive Protection Systems**
  Host countries should mainstream gender considerations into refugee protection frameworks by ensuring access to gender-based violence prevention and response services. Special attention should be given to empowering women and girls through

education, livelihoods, and participation in community governance structures.

- **Invest in Refugee-Hosting Communities** Increased investment in infrastructure and public services in refugee-hosting areas is essential to reduce pressure on local systems. Improvements in education, healthcare, water, sanitation, and livelihoods will benefit both refugees and host populations, reducing competition over scarce resources and enhancing coexistence.

- **Strengthen Community Engagement and Social Cohesion Mechanisms** Hosting countries should institutionalise dialogue platforms between refugees and host communities. These mechanisms help to address grievances, prevent conflict escalation, and build trust. Local leaders and authorities should be actively involved in fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding.

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