

# **Is Local Social Cohesion Influenced by Hosting Refugees? The Case of Congolese Refugees in Rwanda**

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## **Abstract**

This paper investigates the social impact of hosting refugees for local communities in the context of Congolese refugees in Rwanda. We utilize a new dataset originating from a UNHCR-commissioned research project based on household survey data collected in host communities surrounding three refugee camps. We complement this with additional data from a community-level survey as well as in-depth information from focus group discussions. To assess social cohesion, we investigate a range of relevant outcomes including perceptions of safety, formal and informal social networks as well as measures of trust with respect to respondents' own-community, refugees and international organizations and NGOs. We assess the influence of hosting refugees by comparing these outcomes for local households at varying distances from the nearby refugee camp. We observe no statistically significant difference between host communities closer (less than 10 km) and farther (greater than 20 km) from camps in outcomes related to feelings of safety, formal networks, and trust indicators. However, those living closer to a camp have higher odds of having an informal network. The focus group discussions show that time and increased exposure as well as business interactions help increase trust between refugees and host communities. In addition, there is the perception among locals that aid given to refugees plays a key role in reducing and preventing conflict between the two groups, and minimizes potential crimes by refugees. As such, these findings provide a valuable lesson for other host countries trying to minimize adverse social effects on already vulnerable local populations and achieve a cohesive society.

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Keywords: forced migration, social cohesion, trust, refugees, Rwanda, social networks

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## **Introduction**

Developing regions hosted 86 percent of the world's refugees in 2015 (UNHCR, 2016). In these environments, host populations are often experiencing a level of poverty comparable to those seeking asylum on their territory. In a context of scarce resources and high vulnerability, it is easy to see how the inflow of a displaced population could increase tensions within the community. Yet, the impact of hosting displaced populations on developing country local communities has received relatively little attention in the empirical literature. The social impact in particular has been overlooked in favor of economic and environmental effects, despite the fact that social cohesion is a fundamental element of a peaceful and inclusive society.

This paper helps to fill this gap in the literature by investigating how the presence of Congolese refugees is linked to social cohesion-related outcomes in Rwandan host communities. The protracted nature of the refugee hosting situation (dating back decades), together with the social mixing opportunities between hosts and locals provided by a relatively unrestrictive policy framework, makes the Rwandan case particularly apt for studying social cohesion effects of refugees on host communities.

The examination of a social cohesion impact is challenged by the absence of a standard, theoretically derived social cohesion concept (cf. Guay, 2015). Elements commonly used to describe a cohesive society include a principle of inclusivity, cooperation, a sense of belonging, trust, and overall strong, positive relationships (Guay, 2015; OECD, 2011; Stanley, 2003). Low cohesion in a society, on the other hand, can be characterized by social tension and/or fragmentation, conflict and negative feelings (e.g., resentment, anxiety, perceptions of threat) among members of the community. As noted by the OECD, "social cohesion is a valuable goal in itself and contributes to maintaining long-term economic growth" (2011, p. 17). Given its multifaceted nature, social cohesion can be best measured through its different manifestations – hence, we examine a number of issues that give insights into the state of social cohesion within the community.

Our outcomes of interest include perceptions of safety, formal and informal social networks, as well as trust in the community, the refugees and the international organizations and NGOs (whose presence is generally linked to refugees). Using a new dataset originating from a UNHCR-commissioned research project, we examine the links between hosting refugee and outcomes related to social cohesion based on household survey data collected in host communities surrounding three Congolese refugee camps (Gihembe, Kigeme and Kiziba). The influence of the presence of refugees is estimated by comparing outcomes for local communities at varying distances (10 versus 20 km) from the nearby refugee camp. To gain a nuanced understanding, we also include information from focus group interviews and a survey conducted at the community level in the same areas as the household surveys.

## **Social cohesion research in forced displacement contexts**

The interest to understand the impact of displaced populations on hosting communities has inspired a growing amount of literature in recent decades. However, a review of the literature reveals various shortcomings. First, there has been a strong thematic focus on the economic and environmental effects of refugee hosting, while the social impact often remains unstudied. This is especially true for African countries and the Global South in general, compared to the European and North American contexts where social effects of immigration (even if not of refugees specifically) have been studied more extensively. Moreover, the existing studies on the topic are overwhelmingly qualitative in nature. While this type of research has been useful in identifying the types and sources of possible social cohesion effects, there is a need for more quantitative studies to assess the magnitude and the ways in which the refugees' presence influences social cohesion in host communities. Based on an in-depth review of the existing literature, in the remainder of this section we discuss the ways in which refugee presence affects subjective safety, social networks and trust among locals. Despite their limitations, these findings are useful as a basis for our research.

### *Subjective safety*

The empirical evidence on the security effect of hosting refugees for local communities is not clear-cut. Multiple studies find a correlation between the presence of refugees and increased objective security risks (i.e. Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Jacobsen, 2002; Salehyan, 2007). Protracted refugee situations in particular have been linked to a number of problematic issues resulting in increased crime and violence. Issues include the increase in social vices and deviant behavior in the community (sexual promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse), military intrusions from the refugee-sending country, the infiltration of weapons, illicit activities to sustain livelihoods on the part of refugees or even the growth organized crime (Codjoe, Quartey, Tagoe, & Reed, 2012; Crisp, 2000; Jacobsen, 2000; Porter et al., 2008; Rutinwa, 1999; Whitaker, 1999). However, other studies find no effect of the displaced population on insecurity (Schmeidl, 2002). Findings are at times even conflicting for the same country. Studying Tanzania, UNHCR (2003) notes that the presence of refugees increased crime, while Rutinwa and Kamanga (2003) find that the increase in crime is not due to refugees but to the country's proximity to a conflict zone. In summary, we see competing arguments in the existing literature regarding the causal link between hosting refugees and security threats. Independently of the existence of an objective link, however, it is equally important to understand the local inhabitants' perceptions and opinions regarding how the presence of refugees affects the security of the local community. Such an analysis can give us an idea on the existence – or lack thereof – of intergroup feelings of threat, which could be interpreted as a sign of low social cohesion. In our research we therefore study the perceived level of safety in the community and its relation to exposure to refugees.

## *Social networks*

Social networks, both formal and informal, are cornerstones of a connected and cooperative community. For instance, engagement in formal networks (e.g. organizational membership) can indicate individuals' level of civic engagement and active participation in the life of the community, while informal networks may reflect individuals' social capital and support mechanisms. Informal networks, on the other hand, may reflect to what extent an individual is able to count on others (beyond their household) for financial, social or emotional help in time of need. The existence of such an informal social safety net is a key indicator of a cohesive community. In this paper, we are interested how formal and informal networks are affected by hosting refugees and pay particular attention to organizational membership and ability to rely on informal networks in times of financial need.

The relationship between the presence of refugees and locals' social networks can be discussed in various ways. An often-used approach interprets the arrival of refugees as an increase in diversity within the host community. In his 'hunkering down' theory, Putnam predicts an increase in diversity will lead inhabitants to "withdraw from collective life, [...] to withdraw even from close friends, [...] to volunteer less [...]" (2007, pp. 150–151). The inflow of a displaced population from a neighboring country may also be understood as an increase in diversity; considering Putnam's theory, this inflow could therefore lead to a decrease in social networks, both formal (e.g. through community organizations and other organized collective activities) and informal (close friends). Given the lack of empirical studies focusing on the social network effect of hosting refugees in particular, we draw conclusions based on research that looks at the effects of migrant stocks, which in our view is comparable considering the protracted nature of Congolese refugees in Rwanda.

With regards to organizational membership, in a cross-country study focusing on developed countries between 1981 and 2000, Kesler and Bloemraad (2010) find that on average, the relative migrant stock has a significant positive association. In a similar way, using data from 28 European countries, Gesthuizen et al. (2009) examine the role of migrant stock and find a significant positive association with organizational membership in the country as well as inhabitants' propensity to give informal help. Therefore, evidence from developed countries challenges the claim that the presence of migrants in general would weaken formal and informal social networks within the community. In this study we seek to examine the nature of these links in a developing country. The one study found which links the presence of refugees directly to informal social networks suggests a weakening of some traditional support networks based on qualitative data (Whitaker, 1999). However, this scarce evidence only underlines the need to examine the issue in more depth and on a larger sample.

## *Trust*

In addition to security and social networks, feelings of trust towards the community as well as different groups and institutions comprise a further key aspect of social cohesion. Similar to social networks, community trust is expected to be threatened by higher diversity within the community (Putnam 2007). However, the empirical evidence is almost non-existent in developing country contexts and inconclusive regarding the significance of the link. Delhey and Newton (2005) – who include less developed and African countries in their 60-country comparison – look at ethnic heterogeneity (‘ethnic fractionalization’) and conclude that although diversity maintains a negative relationship with generalized trust in all analyzed countries, the link is not strong outside of Nordic societies. In a comparative study of European countries, Hooghe et al. (2008) find no clear confirmation of the hypothesized negative link between rising ethnic diversity (or even the influx of foreigners) and generalized trust. Their null-findings fall in line with those of Kesler and Bloemraad (2010) and Gesthuizen et al. (2009) on the links between migrant stocks and social trust. Based on the latter studies, we would not expect a protracted refugee population to significantly affect levels of trust within the community.

In addition to trust in the community, in this paper we also examine the host communities’ trust in refugees as well as in international organizations and NGOs. Hostility towards refugees can stem from multiple sources, such as – real or perceived – competition over jobs, public goods and scarce resources as well as differences in values and conventions (Christophersen, Liu, Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013; Harb & Saab, 2014; Mercy Corps, 2013; Porter et al., 2008; REACH, 2014; World Bank, 2013). Intuitively, locals’ degree of exposure to and interaction with refugees can be expected to determine the impact that the host population attributes to refugees and therefore shape the attitudes (including trust) towards them.

Locals’ trust and general attitudes towards international organizations and NGOs can be influenced by the perceived (un)fairness of the aid and support provided to refugees, which is often seen as neglecting the local poor (Christophersen et al., 2013; REACH, 2014; World Bank, 2013). On the other hand, the NGOs appearing together with the displaced population can have a multitude of labor market and economic effects – beneficial for some while disadvantageous for others (Whitaker, 1999). As in the case with security effects, there are competing arguments for the positive and negative effects, however we find it important to also get a sense of how locals perceive the presence of NGOs with regards to their own situation. Ensuring that the voice of locals is heard can help develop solutions that are beneficial for both groups, and are welcomed as efforts of inclusive growth as opposed to a source of problems and/or resentment.

## **Contextual background**

### *Congolese refugees in Rwanda*

Conflict and political instability is widespread across the Central Africa and Great Lakes subregion. Recently, the crisis in the Central African Republic, together with recurring security problems in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have caused large displaced populations to seek refuge in Rwanda and other neighboring countries. Despite having experienced massive forced displacement itself during the conflicts of the early 1990s, the Rwandan population has been hosting refugees – primarily from the DRC, but also other neighboring countries – for decades. As of December 2015, over 105,000 refugees, returnees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable populations were residing in Rwanda, including 95,000 refugees from the DRC (UNHCR, 2015a).

Approximately 90 percent of Congolese refugees in Rwanda reside in one in five camps spread throughout the country: Gihembe and Nyabiheke in the North, Kiziba near the Western border (with the DRC), and Kigeme and Mugombwa in the southern part of the country. Four of these camps host ‘old caseload’ refugees, referring to refugees who entered the country during the first or the second Congo wars that respectively took place between 1996 and 1997, and between 1998 and 2003. With a new outbreak of violent conflict in Eastern DRC, a new camp was opened in 2012 in the Southern Province to accommodate an inflow of nearly 30,000 new Congolese refugees.

The Rwandan government makes land available for refugee camps and – in a uniquely inclusive approach – enables refugees to move freely and access public services, the labor market, and especially the educational system. To absorb refugee children, local schools close to the camps have been provided with additional classrooms, teaching materials and uniforms (UN, 2012). This approach theoretically allows refugees to be present in local communities (despite residing in the camps), including opportunities for social and economic with host populations. Moreover, Congolese refugees have the opportunity to apply for Rwandan citizenship, which can affect the refugees’ level of integration into their host communities. In practice, however, the freedom of movement and the access to opportunities, including work, are limited by bureaucratic procedures and costs (Easton-Calabria & Lindsay, 2013). As a result, many of the Congolese refugees have been dependent on humanitarian aid for decades (Hovil, 2011). Rwanda’s exceptionally inclusive and unrestrictive system makes the country a particularly interesting case study – it allows us to observe the social implications of protracted refugee hosting in a context where there are no policies blocking interaction and cooperation between hosts and refugees. Hence, it may be interpreted as an example for what happens with regards to social cohesion when – at least in principle – social mixing between locals and refugees is unrestricted.

## Methodology

### *Data*

The data used in this study were gathered through a household survey implemented in May 2016 across multiple locations in Rwanda. The survey was conducted in and around the camps of Gihembe, Kigeme and Kiziba. The camps were chosen for being the three largest Congolese refugee camps in the country as well as for representing a diverse range of fundamental characteristics amongst themselves. For instance, the Kiziba and Gihembe camps mostly host refugees who arrived in the late 90s and have therefore been residing in the camps for nearly two decades; meanwhile, the Kigeme camp only opened its doors in 2012. Differences are also found in the geographical characteristics of the location: Kiziba for example is located on top of a mountain, which makes it the most remote of the three camps – the nearest town, Kibuye, is at least a few hours' drive. Gihembe and Kigeme, by contrast, are located along main national roads fairly close to important cities (Byumba and Gikongoro, respectively). The differences in conditions among the three camps can be expected to provide markedly different potential for interaction between refugees and host communities.

**Table 1: Breakdown of Congolese refugee camps in Rwanda**

Camp	Year Established	Total Population
Kiziba	1996	17,155
Gihembe	1997	14,205
Nyabiheke	2005	13,918
Kigeme	2012	18,646
Mugombwa	2014	8,319

Source: MIDIMAR (2016); UNHCR (UNHCR, 2015b). Figures are as of September 2015.

Host communities were included in the sample primarily based on their distance from each camp.<sup>1</sup> Figure 1 shows the research design used to define potential candidates for enumeration, including all cells located within a 10-kilometer radius from a camp (indicated in orange) and the same absolute number of cells from 20 kilometers onwards (indicated in red).<sup>2</sup> From the resulting list of eligible cells, we randomly selected four from both the within 10 km and the above 20 km areas around each camp and chose one community in each with the largest population.<sup>3</sup> Next, households were randomly chosen for enumeration from a master list of all households located in the selected community, created in consultation with a community representative. Overall, our design results in a representative sample for the within 10 km and above 20 km areas around the Gihembe,

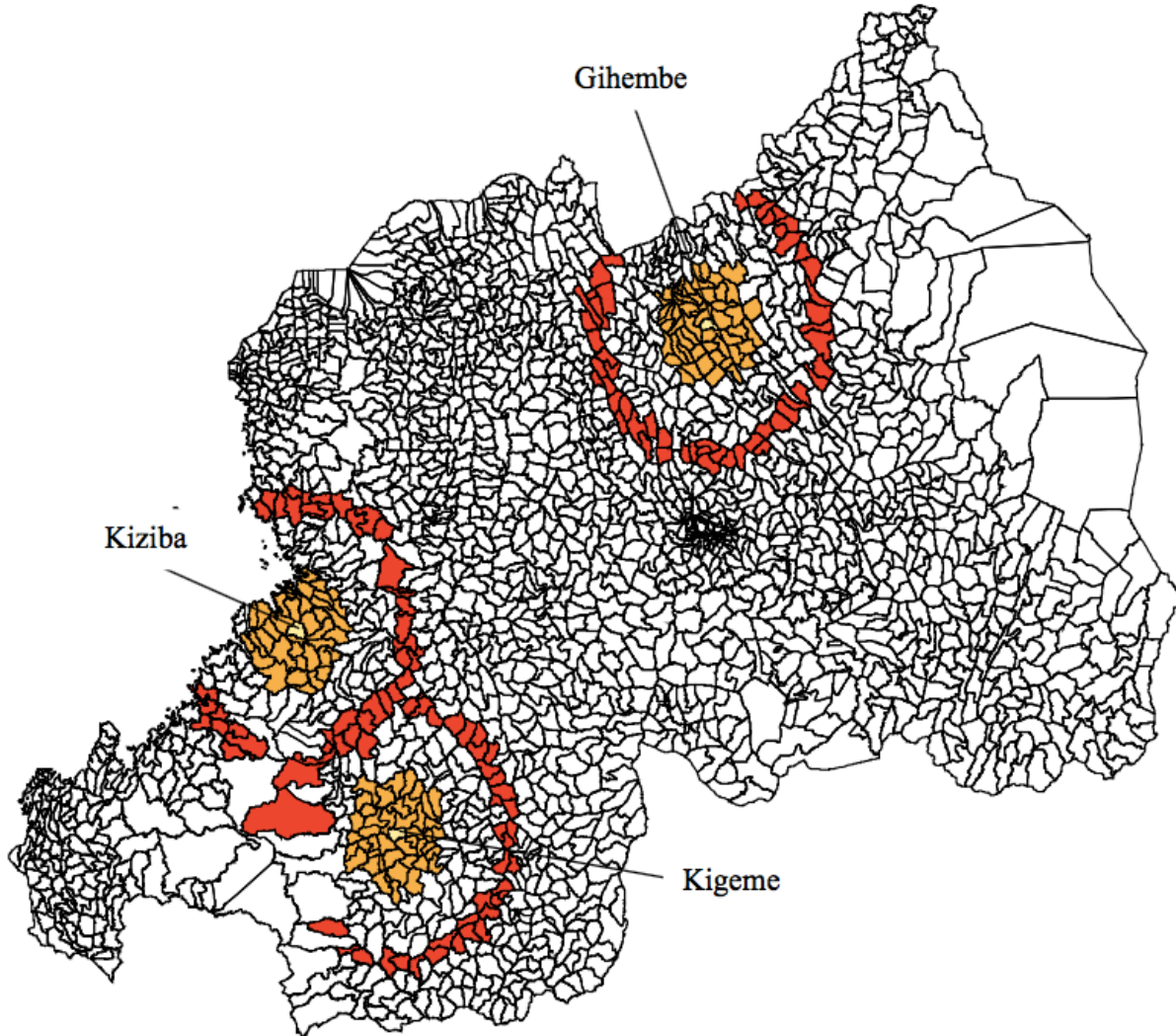
<sup>1</sup> For our purposes, we use 'community' to indicate the lowest administrative unit in Rwanda, otherwise known as a village.

<sup>2</sup> A cell is the second lowest administrative unit above the village. Country-wide data at the village level was not readily available; therefore, pre-defined randomization took place at the cell level.

<sup>3</sup> Population data at the village level for those selected cells was generously made available by the National Institute of Statistics Rwanda (NISR)

Kigeme and Kiziba camps. Table 2 shows that after dropping observations for missing values, the final dataset used in this study is comprised of 933 respondents, each representing one household.

**Figure 1: Sampling strategy at the cell level**



Note: Own generation based on publicly available administrative GIS data. Yellow cells indicate the location of each refugee camp. Orange cells are those within 10 km of each camp. Red cells are those above 20 km of each camp.

In addition to the household survey, a community-level survey was also carried out within the framework of the larger UNHCR project. These questionnaires were conducted with community representatives: preferably the community leader, otherwise a senior person in the community, and/or someone who knows about the history of the community and its present affairs, or who has lived in the community for a long time (for example, a teacher, a religious leader, a healthcare worker etc.). Similarly to the household survey, community-level data was collected from a total



of 46 communities, including communities at a short (up to 10 km) and a long (over 20 km) distance from the respective nearest refugee camp (Kigeme, Kiziba, or Gihembe).

To complement our quantitative results, we also conducted a series of focus group discussions which offer deeper insight into the lived experiences of host community members. Two focus group discussions took place in a randomly chosen community from both the within 10 km and over 20 km areas from each camp, resulting in a total of twelve discussions. Each discussion group was comprised of six members, with one being made up fully of women and the other fully of men. The groups were split by gender due to the concerns raised by local stakeholders that female participants might feel hesitant to voice their opinion in the presence of male participants. The discussions were led by a local moderator, who was assisted by a dedicated note-taker. The moderator was provided with an interview guide in order to steer the discussion towards certain topics of interest related to our research questions; however, the open nature of the discussion allowed the participants freedom to emphasize and expand on issues they saw of particular importance. The discussions were conducted entirely in the local language, Kinyarwanda, and were translated by the note-taker afterwards.

### *Empirical approach*

In order to assess the effect of refugee presence on host communities, our empirical approach relies on the comparison of households that are more ‘exposed’ to refugees due to their proximity to a refugee camp, and those households that are ‘not, or less exposed’ to refugees due to larger distance from a camp. The distinction in the sample between 10 and 20 km communities serves to provide a counterfactual scenario in which the two types of communities represent the treatment and the control group, respectively. Therefore, our variable of interest indicates whether the respondent and their household are located in a community at a shorter distance (<10 km) from a refugee camp or a longer distance (>20 km).

To gain a multifaceted understanding of the social cohesion impact of the Congolese refugees, we compare outcomes in terms of subjective safety, formal and informal social networks, as well as trust in the community, in refugees, and in international organizations and NGOs. Subjective safety was assessed by asking the respondent ‘Do you currently feel safe in this community?’ with possible responses on a five-point scale: ‘Not at all safe’; ‘A little safe’; ‘Neutral’; ‘Mostly safe’; and ‘Completely safe’. In the analysis, we use a binary version of the variable which takes on 1 for the latter three options (neutral, mostly safe, completely safe). Having a formal network was defined as the respondent being an active member of at least one community organization (such as an agricultural cooperative, a trader’s association, women’s association etc.). Having an informal network was determined by the respondent having at least one person on whom they could count for sudden financial help (beyond their immediate household). Trust indicators were measured in multiple dimensions: trust towards people from the respondent’s own community; trust in international organizations or NGOs, and trust towards refugees. The presence of trust was

determined by answers ranging from ‘Neutral’ to ‘Quite a lot of trust’ and ‘Completely trust’. The variable used in the analysis takes on zero for ‘Little trust’ and ‘No trust at all’.

To account for potential confounding factors, we include a list of control variables into the models. First, we include binary variables for the respondent’s gender (1 for females) and for their marital status (1 if married, either monogamously or polygamously, and 0 if never married, divorced, separated or a widow or widower). Next, we include a binary variable measuring whether the respondent’s household has at least one member who is employed in paid work. The socio-economic situation of the household is further assessed through the share of children (as compared to adults) in the household, the size of the household, as well as the total monthly income in the household (given in Rwandan Francs). Finally, we control for the closest refugee camp to account for area-level differences. This is done through dummy variables for each area (indicated with the name of the closest camp), using the Kiziba area as a reference given its particular geographical characteristics – most importantly, the remoteness of the refugee camp.

As a further step in our analysis, we add interactions between the camp proximity variable and the binary variables referring to the nearest individual refugee camp (mentioned above). The resulting three variables measure the effect of proximity disaggregated by refugee camp – in other words, for each camp, they show how the outcomes differ for communities at a short (as opposed to a long) distance from that camp.

### *Descriptive statistics*

As a first step in the analysis, we identify the descriptive differences in household characteristics and social cohesion outcomes for households in communities at a short versus long distance from a refugee camp. Beginning with differences across the standard characteristics that serve as controls in our models, Table 2 shows short and long distance communities are represented roughly equally among respondents. We also differentiate between communities by the refugee camp that falls closest to them. The three camps, Gihembe, Kiziba, and Kigeme, have a balanced share within the sample (roughly 33 percent each). Female respondents are slightly overrepresented (at around 60 percent) in both the short and the long distance groups. Over 70 percent of respondents are married, and roughly two-thirds (66 and 63 percent) are literate in both groups. Over 90 percent of households in both communities have at least one member who is employed in paid work. The average share of children and adults within the household is close to being balanced in both groups, with 1.01 and 0.97 children per adults in short and long distance households respectively. The average household size is slightly higher among short distance households, with 4.98 people per household compared to 4.61 among long distance households.

The most notable difference between the two groups is in the monthly household income, with short distance households producing an average monthly income nearly twice as high as that of long distance households (approx. 47,000 versus 25,000 RWF; equivalent to roughly 56 versus 30

US Dollars). It should be noted that the standard deviation is also much higher in the long distance group; this is caused by the presence of a few households who are outliers in terms of reported income.

**Table 2. Summary statistics of the sample (by community's distance from refugee camp)**

	<10km		>20km		N	Perc. (of total)
	Freq. / Mean	Perc./ St. Dev.	Freq. / Mean	Perc./ St. Dev.		
Female	282	60.91	275	58.51	557	59.7
Married	338	73	322	68.51	660	70.74
Literate	306	66.09	298	63.4	604	64.74
At least one employed member in the household	426	92.01	451	95.96	877	94
Share of children vs. adults in household	1.01	0.86	0.97	0.82		
Monthly household income (RWF)	47,546.07	13,0784.2	25,398.24	46,095.87		
Household size	4.98	2.09	4.61	2.11		
Closest refugee camp						
Kigeme	156	33.69	157	33.4	313	33.55
Kiziba	156	33.69	156	33.19	312	33.44
Gihembe	151	32.61	157	33.4	308	33.01
N	463	49.62	470	50.38	933	100

Second, Table 3 examines the descriptive differences in social cohesion outcomes. We see that the level of perceived safety is roughly the same in short-distance and long-distance communities: a respective 86.39 and 85.74 percent of respondents report feeling safe in their community. The share of people with a formal network is slightly higher in long distance communities (46.65 percent versus 48.51 in short-distance communities), but the difference is not statistically significant. In terms of informal networks, the difference is markedly higher in communities in proximity of a refugee camp and statistically significant: 48.60 percent of respondents can count on help compared to 38.09 percent in long-distance communities.

**Table 3. Descriptive differences of local households by communities' distance from refugee camp**

	Local communities				N
	Short distance (=<10km)		Long distance (~20km)		
	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	
Subjective safety	400	86.39	403	85.74	803
Formal network	216	46.65	228	48.51	444
Informal network for assistance	225	48.60	179	38.09	404**
Trust in people from own community	368	79.48	391	83.19	759
Trust in international organizations and NGOs	426	92.01	435	92.55	861

Note: \*\* indicates statistically significant mean difference across groups at the 5 percent level

Trust outcomes are fairly high in general – around or over 80 percent in all three categories – and are roughly similar for the two groups regardless of proximity to refugee camp. The most notable differences are found for trust in own community, for which the share of ‘trusting’ respondents is somewhat lower in short-distance communities (79.48 percent) than in long-distance communities (83.19 percent). For the other two indicators, the difference is less than one percentage point.

In summary, the general descriptive analysis of the household data with regards to social cohesion indicators reveals little notable differences between local communities that are closer and farther away from refugee camps. A noteworthy difference can be identified for informal networks. Disaggregating the data by the closest refugee camps (instead of distance to refugee camps), we see a slightly more marked variation across the three areas, but still within a quite narrow range (see Annex).

Data from the previously mentioned community-level survey provides us with some additional information for our analysis regarding the societal context in the different types of communities. Based on this data, Tables 4–5 show additional descriptive statistics with regards to perceptions of security and trust within the community, as well as the involvement of international organizations in the different areas and by the community’s distance from the nearest refugee camp, respectively.

**Table 4. Perceived level of security in local communities, based on community survey (by area and distance)**

	Closest refugee camp to local community			Community’s distance from refugee camp	
	Kigeme	Kiziba	Gihembe	<10 km	>20 km
Security scale (% within area)					
Very bad (=1)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Bad	16.67	0.00	0.00	8.82	0.00
Medium	22.22	12.50	25.00	20.59	25.00
Good	44.44	75.00	70.00	64.71	50.00
Very good (=5)	16.67	12.50	5.00	5.88	25.00
Average security score (1-5)	3.61	4.00	3.8	3.67	4
N	18	8	20	34	12

With regards to the level of perceived security within the community, similar to the household-level data we observe an overall high level, with slight differences between areas. Specifically, communities surrounding Kiziba have the highest average score for perceived security (4, indicating “good” security), while Gihembe and Kigeme score slightly lower (3.8 and 3.61, respectively). Comparing short-and long-distance communities, again we only see a moderate difference, with short-distance communities rated on average 3.67 (between medium and good), while long-distance communities rated on average 4 (good).

**Table 5 Perceived level of trust within local communities, based on community survey (by area and distance)**

	Closest refugee camp to local community			Community's distance from refugee camp	
	Kigeme	Kiziba	Gihembe	<10 km	>20 km
Trust scale (% within area)					
Very low (=1)	0.00	0.00	5.00	2.94	0.00
Low	0.00	0.00	10.00	5.88	0.00
Average	22.22	37.50	35.00	23.53	50.00
High	55.56	62.50	50.00	55.88	50.00
Very high (=5)	22.22	0.00	0.00	11.76	0.00
Average trust score (1-5)	4	3.63	3.3	3.68	3.5
N	18	8	20	34	12

The community survey data presents a slightly less positive picture on perceived level of trust within the community than the household data. We observe the main difference in the case of Gihembe, in which 15 percent of surveyed surrounding communities report low or very low levels of trust on a scale from 1 to 5. The Kigeme area in this case has the highest average level of trust (4, “high”), followed by Kiziba (3.63, between “average” and “high”) and Gihembe (3.3, above “average”). Comparing communities by proximity to refugee camps, we observe a slightly higher score for short-distance communities, which have an average of 3.68 (between “average” and “high”) compared to long-distance communities’ average score of 3.5.

**Table 6. Involvement of international organizations, NGOs, charitable organizations in local communities, based on community survey (by area and distance)**

	Closest refugee camp to local community			Community's distance from refugee camp	
	Kigeme	Kiziba	Gihembe	<10 km	>20 km
Share (%) of communities where at least one international organization involved (vs. none)	66.67	62.5	50	61.76	50.00
Average number of organizations involved	1.33	0.88	0.85	1.1	0.83
N	18	8	20	34	12

Finally, we look at community survey data with regards to the presence of international organizations, NGOs, charitable organizations with programs or projects that benefit the community. Comparing areas, we observe that the presence of such organizations is highest in Kigeme and lowest in Gihembe, although differences are small. For instance, communities surrounding Kigeme have an average of 1.33 organizations involved, and 66.67 percent of surveyed communities report at least one organization’s presence. For Kigeme and Gihembe, these figures are 0.88 organizations and 62.5 percent of communities, as well as 0.85 organizations and 50 percent of communities, respectively. Comparing communities by their distance from refugee camps, we note a somewhat higher involvement of NGOs in short-distance communities: 61.76

percent (compared to 50 percent of long-distance communities) are involved with at least one international organization; an average of 1.1 organizations are involved in 10-km communities versus 0.83 in 20-km communities. Overall, from the community survey data we see some noteworthy differences across areas that should be kept in mind when interpreting results of the analysis.

## **Empirical results**

We now further examine the potential links between refugee camp proximity and social cohesion indicators by conducting logistic regression analyses. Results are first presented for subjective safety and social networks, followed by those for trust indicators. Table 7 and 8 present the odds ratios calculated with logit models for the two groups of binary indicators. For each outcome, two sets of odds ratios are presented: the first column shows the general effect of living in a ‘short distance’ community versus a ‘long distance’ one on the odds of a given outcome, while the second column presents the disaggregated effect by refugee camp. Here, the interaction variables calculate the proximity effect for each refugee camp separately. A coefficient greater than one points to a positive association. Standard errors are listed in parentheses. All models include controls for the covariates presented in Table 2: gender, marital status and literacy of the respondent; employment, share of children and income within the household; and the closest refugee camp.

### *Subjective safety and social networks*

Beginning with subjective safety, Table 7 shows that there is no statistical difference in communities that are within 10 km from a refugee camp; not even when looking at the proximity effect separately for each camp. With regards to control variables, being female has a significant negative association with subjective safety, while households in higher income quintiles are significantly more likely to report feeling safe in their community. Finally, respondents living in a community in the area of the Gihembe refugee camp – regardless of proximity – are over twice as likely to report feeling safe than respondents in the area of the Kiziba refugee camp. On the other hand, living in the area of the Kigeme camp shows no statistical difference along safety outcomes in relation to those associated with the Kiziba camp area.

Looking at social network outcomes, we observe different proximity effects for the individual refugee camps. In the case of formal networks, proximity is not statistically significant. The camp-specific effect (derived by interacting camp location and proximity), however, reveals that living at a short distance (as opposed to a long distance) from the Kigeme camp increases the chances of having a formal network by a factor of 2.45; for Gihembe, on the other hand, living in the vicinity lowers the odds of having a formal network by a factor of 0.35. The proximity is not statistically significant in the case of the Kiziba camp. With regards to significant controls, being married has a negative association, while literacy and higher household income have a positive association with having a formal network.

Consistent with the descriptive differences, informal network for assistance is the only outcome that shows a statistically significant difference for general proximity to a refugee camp. Living in a 10 km as opposed to a 20 km distance community increases the chances of having an informal network by a factor of 1.48. Turning to camp-specific proximity effects, for both Kigeme and Kiziba living in a short-distance village is linked to higher odds – 2.31 and 1.55 times higher, respectively – of the respondents having someone within their informal network whom they can count on in time of need. Gihembe also appears to have a negative association, but it is no longer statistically significant when differentiating for distance from the camp (through the interaction). Literacy, a higher share of children in the household, and a higher household income have statistically significant positive associations with the likelihood of having an informal network.

### *Trust*

Table 8 presents the odds ratio results of our logit regressions for trust outcomes. As in the case of formal networks, neither of the three outcomes shows a significant effect for proximity to a camp in general, but noteworthy associations are found in the individual camps' proximity effects. Generally speaking (that is, regardless of proximity), the Gihembe area is associated with higher odds of trusting people from one's own community as compared to Kiziba (by a factor of 1.65 and 2.23 in the first and second model, respectively). However, residing in the vicinity of the Gihembe refugee camp is associated with having lower odds of own-community trust by a factor of 0.58. Proximity to the Kigeme and to the Kiziba camp shows no significant effects. In addition, women and literate respondents show lower odds of having trust in the community.

With regards to attitude towards refugees in Rwanda, in the case of the Kiziba camp we see that living at a short distance from it increases the odds of trusting in refugees by a factor of 2.27. Proximity to the Kigeme and Gihembe camps, on the other hand, shows no significant link with trust towards refugees. We observe no significant differences in the outcomes across the three areas. On an additional note, literacy seems to decrease the odds of trusting refugees.

Finally, living close to Kigeme camp decreases the odds of reporting trust in international organizations and NGOs by a factor of 0.59. Households from communities closer to the Kiziba and to the Gihembe camp show no discernible difference compared to further away communities. Looking at general area differences, compared to the Kiziba area the Gihembe area is associated with 1.8 times higher odds of trust in international organizations and NGOs. Additionally, female respondents also seem more likely to trust in such organizations.

**Table 7. Subjective safety and social networks (Odds ratios presented)**

	Subjective safety		Formal network		Informal network for assistance	
Lives in proximity of refugee camp	1.11 (0.24)		0.90 (0.15)		1.48** (0.24)	
Short distance from Kigeme		0.87 (0.37)		2.45*** (0.54)		2.31*** (0.54)
Short distance from Kiziba		1.20 (0.34)		0.84 (0.16)		1.55* (0.40)
Short distance from Gihembe		1.44 (0.69)		0.35*** (0.09)		0.91 (0.25)
Female	0.64*** (0.11)	0.66** (0.11)	0.85 (0.14)	0.76 (0.13)	1.02 (0.17)	0.98 (0.18)
Married	0.78 (0.15)	0.77 (0.15)	0.76* (0.13)	0.75* (0.12)	1.10 (0.22)	1.10 (0.22)
Literate	0.82 (0.18)	0.82 (0.18)	1.32** (0.17)	1.32** (0.17)	1.67*** (0.26)	1.67*** (0.26)
At least one employed HH member	1.69 (0.64)	1.69 (0.65)	1.57 (0.56)	1.61 (0.54)	0.63 (0.26)	0.63 (0.26)
No. of children / no. of adults in HH	0.99 (0.13)	0.99 (0.13)	1.05 (0.10)	1.04 (0.10)	1.18* (0.11)	1.18* (0.10)
Income quintile (household)	1.10 (0.07)	1.10* (0.07)	1.21*** (0.06)	1.20*** (0.06)	1.12** (0.07)	1.11* (0.07)
Household size	0.97 (0.05)	0.98 (0.05)	1.05 (0.04)	1.04 (0.04)	0.96 (0.04)	0.96 (0.04)
Kigeme	1.18 (0.30)	1.38 (0.54)	1.20 (0.24)	0.71 (0.15)	0.71* (0.13)	0.57*** (0.12)
Gihembe	2.46*** (0.64)	2.26*** (0.69)	0.81 (0.16)	1.24 (0.29)	0.64** (0.13)	0.84 (0.22)
Kiziba	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)
Constant	4.23*** (1.63)	3.89*** (1.56)	-0.31*** (0.12)	0.36*** (0.13)	0.60 (0.28)	0.62 (0.31)
Pseudo R2	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.04	0.04
Observations	933	933	933	933	933	933

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10. Kiziba is the reference camp. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the community level.



**Table 8. Social and institutional trust and proximity to refugee camps (odds ratio)**

	Trust in people from own community		Trust in refugees in Rwanda		Trust in int'l organizations / NGOs	
Lives in proximity of refugee camp	0.78 (0.16)		1.07 (0.27)		0.91 (0.17)	
Short distance from Kigeme		0.73 (0.30)		1.02 (0.42)		0.59** (0.14)
Short distance from Kiziba		1.05 (0.31)		2.27** (0.84)		1.13 (0.32)
Short distance from Gihembe		0.58* (0.19)		0.60 (0.22)		1.25 (0.57)
Female	0.63** (0.11)	0.64** (0.12)	0.88 (0.20)	0.89 (0.20)	1.49** (0.28)	1.58** (0.30)
Married	0.87 (0.19)	0.87 (0.19)	0.79 (0.17)	0.79 (0.17)	1.01 (0.36)	1.01 (0.36)
Literate	0.65*** (0.11)	0.65** (0.11)	0.60*** (0.11)	0.60*** (0.11)	0.84 (0.17)	0.84 (0.17)
At least one employed HH member	0.80 (0.25)	0.80 (0.25)	1.36 (0.48)	1.35 (0.46)	0.71 (0.37)	0.71 (0.36)
No. of children / no. of adults in HH	0.99 (0.16)	0.98 (0.16)	0.93 (0.11)	0.91 (0.11)	0.97 (0.13)	0.96 (0.13)
Income quintile (household)	0.94 (0.06)	0.93 (0.06)	0.93 (0.05)	0.92 (0.06)	0.99 (0.09)	0.99 (0.10)
Household size	1.11 (0.08)	1.12* (0.07)	1.00 (0.05)	1.01 (0.05)	1.01 (0.09)	1.02 (0.09)
Kigeme	1.24 (0.33)	1.50 (0.61)	0.63 (0.20)	0.89 (0.36)	1.06 (0.23)	1.50 (0.41)
Gihembe	1.62** (0.38)	2.23** (0.77)	0.78 (0.24)	1.48 (0.50)	1.87** (0.47)	1.80** (0.48)
Kiziba	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)	Ref. (.)
Constant	7.03*** (3.24)	6.01*** (2.88)	9.22*** (4.27)	6.69*** (2.94)	13.08*** (8.70)	10.85*** (7.22)
Pseudo R2	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02
Observations	933	933	933	933	933	933

Note: \*\*\* p<0.01; \*\* p<0.05; \* p<0.10. Kiziba is the reference camp. Standard errors in parentheses are clustered at the community level.

## Conclusion

This paper examines the social effects of Congolese refugee presence on Rwandan host communities. We observe potential differences in social cohesion by looking at a range of indicators including feelings of safety, organizational membership, and having a network for financial help. In addition, we look at trust indicators related to one's own community, refugees, and international organizations and NGOs. Our method of comparing outcomes from households residing within a 10-kilometer and beyond a 20-kilometer distance from a refugee camp allows us to assess whether a different degree of exposure to refugees is reflected in different social cohesion-relevant outcomes among locals.

Although our study sheds light on a number of important associations between variables, it is important to note that given the cross-sectional nature of the data, we cannot claim causal mechanisms. Another limitation to keep in mind in a study of this nature is the potential weakness of outcome variables based on perception. In case of such subjective assessments, results might be biased if respondents feel pressure to respond in a certain way. Therefore, the very high "yes" rates to trust questions detailed in our descriptive statistics, for example, may be best interpreted with some caution.

The most meaningful findings of the study are found in our logistic regressions' consistently non-negative results regarding the general effect of camp proximity on the odds of outcomes signaling social cohesion. First, perceptions of safety do not seem to be related to the proximity of refugee camps. It should be noted that subjective safety appears to be quite high among respondents in general, with approximately 86 percent of respondents feeling safe in both short and long distance communities. This suggests that not only refugee-related threats, but also other incidents causing insecurity are uncommon among communities.

Second, proximity to a refugee camp in general does not seem to have a negative connection with the presence of social networks in local communities. Looking at formal networks as reflected by membership in organizations, we see no statistical difference between short and long distance communities. More importantly, we observe higher odds of having an informal network of people to rely on (financially) in time of need in communities within a 10-kilometer radius of a refugee camp than in those beyond 20 kilometers. Third, social trust outcomes also seem to be independent of refugee camp proximity. Generally speaking, trust in one's own community, in refugees, and particularly in international organizations and NGOs is very widespread among locals, regardless of whether they live at a short or a long distance from a refugee camp.

Camp-specific effects are more heterogeneous, but still mostly non-negative. In communities surrounding the Kigeme camp, short distance to the camp is linked to higher odds of both formal and informal networks, but lower odds of trust in international organizations and NGOs. Proximity to the Gihembe camp is negatively associated with formal networks (evening out the overall

effect). Finally, in the case of the Kiziba camp, locals from nearby communities seem to be more trusting of refugees than their more distant counterparts.

Compared to previous literature, our null results on the general effect of camp proximity on subjective safety of locals fall in line with the findings on objective safety of Schmeidl (2002) and Rutinwa and Kamanga (2003) while opposing those of Codjoe et al. (2000), Jacobsen (2000), Rutinwa (1999), Porter et al. (2008), Whitaker (1999) and UNHCR (2003) in other countries. Moreover, interpreting camp proximity as a promoter of increased diversity, our non-negative results for social networks and trust within the host communities contradict the expectations of Putnam's hunkering-down thesis (2007). Most importantly, our findings help fill the significant gap in the available empirical evidence assessing the social implications of refugee hosting for host communities – a topic particularly understudied in the Central African context.

In terms of relevance for policy, two key findings stand out: hosts and refugees appear to have a peaceful – or at least non-conflicting – relationship, and the work of international organizations and NGOs on behalf of refugees does not seem to be a source of widespread resentment. Anecdotal evidence from focus group discussions can help us interpret these findings more meaningfully.

When it comes to the lack of tension among Congolese refugees Rwandan locals, it must be noted that cultural similarity is likely to play a key role. Most Congolese refugees, especially from the North Kivu area, belong to groups associated with Rwandan origin given there were no clear border between the two countries until not long ago (Stearns, 2012; UNHCR, 2014). The cultural closeness is also reflected and/or reinforced by the fact that locals and refugees often both speak Kinyarwanda (UNHCR, 2014) – which is illustrated by the fact that all of our surveys in the refugee camps themselves were also conducted in this language. As also reflected in the quote below, focus group discussants generally confirm that Rwandan locals do not see the Congolese refugees as complete strangers or outsiders.

*Those refugees have already become Rwandans. The only difference arises from the fact that they are located in the camp. Otherwise, we consider them as Rwandans (Participant 1, Kiziba community >20 km).*

However, cultural proximity was not solely responsible for good relations: a common observation among focus group discussants is the improvement of relations over time and increased (economic) interactions. Multiple participants recall conflicts or negative incidents related to refugees when they first arrived, but reported improved relations and a lack of problems in the present:

*When [the refugees] arrived here, we were afraid of them since they are refugees but now we even work with them” (Participant 7, Kiziba community >20 km).*

Participants also stressed the role of cooperation in economic activities in the strengthened relationship:

*(...) But then we share[d] the production; he gives the morning milk to his kids and then I give the evening one to mine. And this creates a bond between us (Participant 4, Kigeme community <10 km, male group).*

Backed by our quantitative findings, these accounts on the positive role of extended contact and economic cooperation provide compelling support for the Rwandan government's integrative policy towards refugees, which allows them to interact with locals in multiple aspects of everyday life.

Focus group participants also shed light on the role of international organizations and NGOs in the lack of conflict between locals and refugees. Locals seem to be predominantly supportive of refugees receiving aid not only out of sympathy for their plight, but also because they believe that the provision of aid would prevent potential security problems caused by refugees who would otherwise turn to theft and begging. This may also help explain the lack of perceived safety threats and trust problems towards refugees in short distance communities.

*I don't see anything bad with them getting support; the effects are positive. (...) if a neighbor is happy, you all are, but it is not right when they are in pain while you are rejoicing (Participant 1).*

*In addition, security is better when refugees are well treated. You understand that they can disturb the country's security; if they are dying of hunger, they can steal from people in this community, and their kids cannot study well with an empty stomach. That is the reason they really need support (Participant 2; both from Gihembe community 20 km, male group).*

Therefore, continued support for refugees is important not only to help them get back on their feet, but also to avoid negative incidents with host communities. At the same time, to avoid potential resentment from vulnerable locals feeling overlooked in favor of refugees – a phenomenon found in previous studies (e.g., World Bank, 2013) and mentioned by one focus group participant – it would be worth considering to provide assistance to the community as a whole.

Additionally, our study highlighted some potential challenges in local communities that are independent from refugee presence but should be addressed nonetheless. On the one hand, we note a continued need for female empowerment initiatives. This is reflected by women's lower odds of feeling safe and trusting their own community, contrasted by their higher likeliness to trust international organizations and NGOs – likely a reflection of the usefulness of earlier and/or current initiatives targeting vulnerable women such as the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Trust Fund for Women, the US Agency for International Development's (USAID) Women in Development program and the UNHCR's Rwanda Women's Initiative (RWI) (Baines, 2001; UNDP, 2014).

On the other hand, households in lower income quintiles appear to be less likely to be a member of community organizations and to have someone to count on for financial assistance in help of need. This relative deficiency in formal and informal networks puts disadvantaged households in

an even more vulnerable position, as having a safety net would be especially important in cases of financial insecurity. The causes and extent of this phenomenon should be explored in more detail, and, if found to be a cause for concern, efforts to reach out to vulnerable locals and encourage their participation in formal and informal support networks might be worth considering.

In conclusion, the main takeaway of our study is that hosting refugees does not necessarily reduce social cohesion in local communities: our non-negative results provide evidence of a mostly peaceful coexistence between hosts and refugees in the case of protracted displacement in Rwanda. This is an important contribution to the scarce empirical literature available on the social cohesion implications of hosting refugees in developing countries. Nevertheless, the practical relevance of our findings also highlights the need for further studies assessing the social implications of refugee hosting. For policymakers, our findings may be interpreted as evidence that even in the case of a country with limited resources, offering refuge to people fleeing conflict does not have to be problematic and can even bring important benefits to local communities in terms of social cohesion.

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## Annex

### Descriptive differences of local households by closest refugee camp

	Local communities (by closest refugee camp)						N
	Gihembe		Kigeme		Kiziba		
	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	Freq.	Perc.	
Active member in a community organization	160	51.12	146	46.79	138	44.81	444
Feel safe in the community	264	84.35	255	81.73	284	92.21	803*
Informal network for assistance	126	40.26	154	49.36	124	40.26	404*
Trust in people from own community	255	81.47	245	78.53	259	84.09	759
Trust in int. orgs. and NGOs	286	91.37	283	90.71	292	94.81	861
Trust in refugees in Rwanda	243	77.64	263	84.29	247	80.19	753

Note: \*\* indicates statistically significant mean difference across groups at the 5 percent level (Chi-squared test)

### Correlations between location and outcome variables

	Closest refugee camp			Short distance (10 km) from refugee camp
	Kigeme	Kiziba	Gihembe	
Active member in a community organization	0.056	-0.011	-0.044	-0.024
Feel safe in the community	-0.029	-0.085	0.114	0.001
Informal network for assistance	-0.042	0.089	-0.048	0.101
Trust in people from own community	-0.004	-0.047	0.051	-0.047
Trust in int. orgs. and NGOs	-0.032	-0.039	0.071	-0.003
Trust in refugees in Rwanda	-0.060	0.066	-0.006	0.002