

## A Critical Analysis of the Coverage of Refugee Rights by the Nation and Standard Newspapers in Kenya

Authors

James Oranga<sup>(1)</sup> ; Joseph Situma<sup>(2)</sup> 

Main Author's Email: [jamestheoranga@gmail.com](mailto:jamestheoranga@gmail.com)

University of Nairobi, Kenya.

### Cite this article in APA

Oranga, J., & Situma, J. (2026). A critical analysis of the coverage of refugee rights by the *Nation* and *Standard* Newspapers in Kenya. *Journal of media and communication*, 5(1), 8-18. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jmc.v5i1.894>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing online)

### Article history

Received: 14.11.2025

Accepted: 18.12.2025

Published: 26.01.2026

Scan this QR to read the paper online



**Copyright:** ©2026 by the author(s). This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyse print coverage of refugees' rights by print media in Kenya, in order to determine if it is fair. This focus is born out of awareness that experts have observed that human beings in exceptional circumstances and bearing 'exceptional' features are often marginalised. Refugees fall in this category. The 1951 Refugee Convention spells out the rights of refugees and the obligations of duty-bearers. International law also spells out the rights and, pertinent to this study, media ethics infers obligations of media practitioners, among them fair coverage, constructive agenda setting, and building. The question this study set out to answer is: Does print media cover refugee rights fairly? To answer this question, the study focused on *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard* coverage of refugee rights between 1st January 2023 to 30th July 2024 and analysed samples of refugee rights coverage. Quantitative analysis determined the tally of coverage, positioning, and the amount of space given to refugee rights. Qualitative analysis of texts assessed slanting of coverage, agenda setting, and building. Related to the question of fairness of coverage, the study sought to determine whether media coverage of refugee rights enables the UNHRC, the state, and human rights institutions to protect and promote refugees' rights. Moreover, the study sought to determine whether media coverage captures the diversity of refugees. The study analysed samples of coverage using the parameters of media values and found that *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* coverage of refugee rights was fair and, despite a few instances of unwarranted negative coverage, comprehensive.

**Key Terms:** Fair media coverage, journalistic responsibility of media, news framing, refugee rights, situational vulnerability.

## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, human beings thrive in states that are committed to human rights principles, norms, and values, as spelt out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights protocols. The commitment ought to be manifest in the provision of security, access to public goods, and protection of fundamental liberties. However, the nature of most contemporary states is such that there are cleavages and competition for resources and opportunities. In some states, the competition is brutal, and in some instances, the state machinery is captured and harnessed for the benefit of some ethnicities, classes, religious affiliates, and races at the expense of other groups. The result is overt or covert conflict and a category of displaced people known as refugees. Refugees are found across the globe.

Within international law, refugees are protected by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol (Global Compact on Refugees). As per these instruments, refugees are not supposed to be forced back to their countries of origin, and as returnees, they are supposed to be protected by the State. Refugees are entitled to housing, work, and education, and they have the right to all the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the UDHR and regional human rights treaties.

Human beings end up being refugees due to diverse adverse circumstances that arise in their countries of origin. Adverse circumstances include state oppression, political upheavals, socio-economic crises, and ethnic/religious and racial conflicts. Depending on the nature of the causal factors and how they unfold, refugees are bound to be in varied states of deprivation. Mostly, they are without financial resources, identity papers, academic certificates, family, social security, and access to basic needs.

Refugees are human beings who have fled their countries to escape conflict, violence, or persecution and have sought safety in another country (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR]). As a category, refugees are distinguished by multiple and serious deprivations, which means that their human rights are compromised or open to compromise. States have the core obligation to protect and promote the refugees' fundamental rights; however, states undertake their obligations variably. States' fulfilment of their human rights obligations is diversely impacted by political goodwill, communities' view of refugees, and international community support.

The capacity of the state to fulfil its duty concerning refugees' rights is conditional on these factors, and these factors vary across time and space. Whether and how the primary duty-bearer and other duty-bearers, communities, and the international community become informed and aware of the vulnerabilities and their nuances is crucial to the formation and sustenance of political goodwill, the formation of a positive view of refugees, and states' support of specific UNHRC's refugee programs. Professional media practitioners and media entities have the responsibility of framing the vulnerabilities of refugees positively, highlighting duty-bearers' actions towards securing refugees' rights and ensuring that duty-bearers promote refugees' rights.

The media plays a significant role in enabling duty-bearers, stakeholders, and communities to act positively towards ameliorating the plight of refugees. The media's ability to undertake its responsibility is bound to vary from one media entity and jurisdiction to another. In effect, this means a media entity can enable or disable duty-bearers, stakeholders, and communities to enable refugees to enjoy their fundamental rights and fundamental freedoms.

This paper is structured into Introduction, followed by the problem of analysis and research questions, the conceptualisation of vulnerability, fairness, and media coverage, the research methodology, the findings from the analysis of print coverage of refugee rights in the *Nation* and *The Standard*, and then the conclusion and recommendation section.

## Research Questions

1. Has positive media framing of refugees' rights enabled UNHRC, states, and stakeholders to progress toward achieving the Agenda for Protection?
2. Does media coverage of refugee rights meet the threshold of fairness?
3. How does media coverage of refugees' rights impact the UNHRC's capacity to undertake its mandate?
4. How can media coverage of refugees' rights capture the diversity of refugees' vulnerabilities?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptualisation: Vulnerability, Fairness, and Media Coverage

Human beings are vulnerable to scarcity, insecurity, and loneliness (MacIntyre, 2004; Martin, 2023), but refugees are vulnerable in unique ways and in various specific respects (Derluyn et al., 2019). Being in countries other than the ones in which they were born, nurtured, and in which they formed communal and fraternal bonds exposes them to voids, uncertainties, and risks. Adults are without income and a reasonable hope of securing one. Additionally, they are vulnerable to “theft, harassment, discrimination and aggression, and problems associated with their physical and mental health” (Gilodi et al. 2022). Not surprisingly, Vu et al. (2014) analysed 19 unique studies and found that the prevalence of sexual violence among women was 21.4 per cent and concluded that one in five refugees or displaced women experienced sexual violence. Vu et al. inferred the possibility of the percentage being an underestimation “given the multiple barriers associated with disclosure”. Other than affirming, Vu et al. (Lugova et al., 2020) analysed

government policies in DRC and found them deficient in programs to address survivors' specific concerns and characterised by policy enforcement problems. Gilodi et al. (2022) assert that unaccompanied and separated refugee children are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, military recruitment, and child labour. The 2003 UN High Commissioner for Refugees underlines the necessity for “meeting the protection of women and children” (UNHCR, 2003, 10). Generally, all refugees are open to violation, abuse, marginalisation, and exclusion from accessing public goods (Pavenello et. Al.2020). WHO defines vulnerability as “the degree to which a population, individual, or organisation is unable to cope with, resist, and recover from the impacts of disasters”.

In extreme situations, refugees protest against the state's failure to protect their lives (UNHCR, 2024) and to put in place systems to transition them from being refugees to permanent citizens (ASRC, September, 2024). In view of the vulnerabilities of refugees, media practitioners have to adopt investigative strategies in order for them to access and report refugee violations, abuse, and harassment in refugee camps, households, and communities. Fair coverage requires not only reporting events but also investigating people's conditions and challenges.

How does the media cover events in refugee camps and in refugees' lives, given the nature of consequences that arise from vulnerability, namely silence and concealment in the face of SGBV violations, harassment, and abuse by law enforcement agents? Media coverage of refugees' lives, activities, and vulnerabilities ought to be in accordance with the principle of fairness. However, Altmeppen et al. (2012) argue that since fairness and justice are not “keywords in journalism and journalistic research”, analysis of fair coverage should use “common concepts like media ethics, objectivity, or journalistic professionalism”. While Altmeppen et al assert that it is difficult, if not impossible, for the media to be fair in coverage of an aspect, granted the many considerations that are involved in the production of news coverage, the concept of framing (Schultz, 1976; Goffman, 1974; Fairhurst and Sarr, 1996; Nzibet, 2009) provides recourse.

How does framing offer recourse for fair coverage of refugees, given their vulnerabilities? Pavelka (2014) argues that, “Topic selection, the manner in which the topic is dealt with as well as the order of presenting the topics in print, electronic and digital media must follow a number of norms and criteria.” Pavelka uses the concept of news values to refer to the considerations and traces the concept to Stieler (1695), who asserted that news values include importance, nearness, dramatic character, and negativity. Pavelka appears to be in concord with Galtung and Ruge (1965), who conceived news values to consist of: threshold, frequency, negativity, unexpected newness, unambiguity, personalisation, meaningfulness, and reference to elite nation, reference to elite persons, consonance, continuity, and composition.

The import of framing is that the media practitioner is actively involved in converting events and states into news. Certainly, framing of refugee rights violations can elicit empathy and even outrage, or indifference and even hostility, depending on how it is slanted. Responsible media coverage will frame news on refugees’ rights in ways that do not stir phobias. Thus, Šramova (2012) argues that information ought to be “treated carefully in the media environment to avoid provoking anxiety, helplessness and panic reactions.”

Frost (2011) points out a different vulnerability of refugees. He argues that in media coverage of “groups...who are made particularly vulnerable to media abuse or oppression because they have had their ability to control their lives substantially reduced by the circumstances in which they find themselves and (those) vulnerable to media victimisation,” journalists should “consider reporting their stories in as sensitive a way as possible”.

## METHODOLOGY

The study analysed a sample of print media coverage of refugee rights and interviews media practitioners on coverage of refugee rights. Concepts of vulnerability and fairness, and parameters of fair coverage were used to evaluate media coverage and framing of refugee rights. The study evaluated the impact of

coverage on realising the goals of the Agenda for Protection (2003). This is vital because of the gap between the human rights duties that states undertake to fulfil and their actions (Crisp, 2018).

Moreover, the study used iterative search in electronic media databases, whereby phrases “refugees in Kenya”, “socio-economic rights of refugees in Kenya”, and “refugee rights in Kenya” were used to investigate *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* coverage of refugee rights. The focus on the two print media during the specified period was based on their large circulation and readership, which stood at 35 per cent and 21 per cent for *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, respectively (Media Council of Kenya, 2023).

Moreover, the choice was based on the logic that, unlike broadcast outlets, which tend to be transient, print media guarantees more in-depth coverage of critical societal issues (Hamel, 2010) and provides more analytical narratives, leaving a more powerful impact embedded in the public psyche. The period for this study was 1st January 2023 to July 30th 2024. This period was selected to give the study immediacy and timeliness. Media coverage of refugees’ rights was sampled using the frames used to report on refugee rights, the fairness employed in reports, the impact of coverage on political will and the coverage of diverse vulnerabilities.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

During the period under study, reports on refugees in general and refugee rights in particular in both *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers appeared against the backdrop of the enactment of the Refugees Act of 2021, which marked a transition from the 2006 Refugee Act. The latter act, reiterated in 2012 in policy, restricted refugees to the camps and contravened Articles 17 and 26 of the United Nations Refugee Convention. Refugee Act 2021 culminated in the *Shirika* Plan in May 2023. According to the Department of Refugee Services, the essence of the *Shirika* Plan is “to promote the socioeconomic inclusion of refugees in

Kenya by transforming camps into integrated settlements for both refugees and asylum seekers. It also seeks to alleviate pressure on hosting communities and enhance self-reliance for both refugees and host communities.”

The Refugee Act 2021 and *Shirika* Plan were applauded by stakeholders, including development partners, civil society groups, human rights advocates, and the national intelligentsia as a pivotal legal framework that not only prescribed mechanisms on how the government of Kenya should address challenges associated with the refugee question but also ensured that refugee rights were enshrined in law. However, reports in the two newspapers were laden with socio-political undertones, which included sceptical public perceptions of the political will to effectively address the refugee problem, concerns about the amount of public resources the government had to commit to refugees, and discriminatory perceptions (especially towards refugees from particular nationalities). In some instances, perceptions bordered on xenophobia.

## Findings on Prominent Frames in Coverage of Refugee Rights

Against the background of the Refugees Act 2021 and the *Shirika* Plan, three prominent frames emerged. The first was the frame of policy reform. The two newspapers portrayed policy reforms necessitated by the 2021 Refugee Act and *Shirika* Plan as positive and enabling the integration of refugees into Kenya’s social and economic space, which would prevent violations associated with stigma and discrimination. Media reports, maybe in response to public concerns about resources, highlighted the major funding breakthroughs that the government had marshalled to finance refugee programs. A prominent example was the frequent mention of the *Shirika* Plan. However, the financial aspect of the policy shift was covered variably by *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*.

In an article on the same issues, *The Standard*, on June 21st, 2024, published an article with the headline “*Refugee Integration plan to cost taxpayer KSh 130 billion.*” The Permanent Secretary in charge of the State Department of Immigration and Citizen Service, Julius Bitok, asserted that “... the integration plan will guarantee several benefits, including minimising the

temptation of refugees to resort to unlawful means of earning a living.” The Ksh130 billion cost is, therefore, first and foremost framed as money well spent. Secondly, it is revealed that the money would be sourced from multiple sources, including private and public sector partnerships and bilateral funders, and would therefore not be a strenuous burden to the exchequer. The headline is, therefore, misleading, and the nature of it has the potential to stir animosity towards refugees. Responsible journalism would have framed the story accurately. Another article titled “*Kenya gets 28 billion for refugee transition*”, published by the *Nation* on June 21st, 2023, reveals how the transition of refugees attracted funding outside government coffers and therefore is an exercise that is not detrimental to public finance. This news report is framed to address citizenry misperceptions of the government using state resources on refugees while underfunding the provisions of public goods and services.

Still, on the refugee policy shift, *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* framed it in terms of rational calculation to fulfil the state’s obligation to uphold refugees’ human rights and reduce refugees’ dependency on the state and donors. The media also framed the policy shift as humanistic and, in the long term, beneficial to host communities and Kenya. In an article with the headline “*Why Kenya agreed to grant special status to refugees*” published by *Daily Nation* on Sunday, June 23rd, 2024, the emphasis is on the fact that the government resolved to elevate the status of more than 700,000 refugees from living under stringent restrictions to being entitled to, among other fundamental rights, the freedom of movement and the right to seek job opportunities. The news report included reports that portrayed such policy reforms as humane and constructive to the integration of refugees into Kenyan society.

The second frame is the constructive and coveted status of Kenya as a major player in the regional and even international management of the refugee problem. The two mainstream newspapers portrayed Kenya as a haven for displaced persons from its neighbouring countries. Kenya is also portrayed as not only stable but also capable of providing secure hosting arrangements and credible rehabilitative

responses to refugees. Kenya was therefore portrayed as a regional big brother at the forefront of safeguarding the rights and welfare of those seeking refugee status within its borders. On June 20th, 2024, *The Standard* article titled “*Kenya’s path to refugee integration*” asserts as follows about Kenya’s credentials as a refugee-hosting nation: “Kenya stands out as a significant player, showcasing its dedication through robust policies and collaborative efforts ...” The article also underscored that Kenya’s refugee management was headed by the Cabinet Secretary for Interior Kithure Kindiki, who was portrayed as a vocal and renowned advocate for refugee rights whose position and actions confirmed and solidified Kenya’s commitment to fulfilling its human rights obligations to refugees.

The third frame is a less enthusiastic one. It portrays the management of refugees and the initiation of programs intended to guarantee refugee rights as a challenging and uphill task. It is portrayed by some articles that echo the risks associated with refugee management, including security risks such as the proliferation of small arms, which is partially blamed on refugees from warring regions like Ethiopia and Somalia, and food insecurity. These challenges compel some pundits to recommend the denial of some human rights. Pundits argue, for instance, that curtailing the movement of refugees is strategically beneficial in the security operation to minimise the movement and distribution of small arms. Worse still, several reports dwell on the inadequacies and deplorable situations in refugee camps, including insufficient food, lack of clean water, insecurity, and a broken healthcare system. Two articles that sum up this portrayal in emphatic fashion include “*Thousands at risk as malnutrition numbers in refugee camps soar*” – *Daily Nation* on August 15th, 2023, and “*Tension in Kakuma as refugees protest reduced food ration*” – *The Standard* on April 24th, 2024. The situation is painted as grave and gloomy.

On 29th July 2024, *Daily Nation* carried a news report titled, “*Refugees flee to Ruiru after deadly clashes claim four lives at Kakuma.*” In the case involving the Anuak Community of Ethiopia and the Nuer of South Sudan, not only were lives lost, but property was looted, houses destroyed, and refugees forced to flee to

churches and a police station. The scribe reported that in the aftermath of the clash, UNHCR and the Department of Refugee Services officials directed refugees to return to the camps, but the refugees declined. This incident and reported prolonged tension between various refugee groups is a warning sign of the fragile state of co-existence of communities, some of them with animosities arising from their pre-refugee status. Against a background of the Kenyan government’s failure to contain banditry, the clash casts doubt on the state’s ability to secure the refugees. The incapacity of Kenya to protect and adequately care for the needs and welfare of refugees stands in contrast to the Big Brother portrayal in the second frame.

## Findings on Fairness in Reporting Refugee Rights in Kenya

Fairness, together with accuracy, impartiality, decency, and responsibility, is a key pillar of journalistic ethics (Kovac, 2007). The Media Council of Kenya Code of Ethics for Kenyan Journalists, the Society for Professional Journalists (SPJ), and the Reuters Trust Principles define fairness in more or less the same way. Journalistic fairness is the deliberate attempt to avoid parochial references, including racist, ethnic, sexist, jingoist, or religiously discriminatory expressions in news reports. Also, the professional provision of context to every news report and giving an opportunity to subjects to respond to criticism is considered professionally fair in journalistic practice.

In reporting refugee rights between January 2023 and July 2024, the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers endeavoured to put a human face and reality to the stories of refugees. Most stories provided the necessary contextual backgrounds to enable readers to understand and appreciate the situations reported. There was an appreciable attempt to report not only on the struggles and challenges faced by refugees but also on their successes, unique victories, and breakthroughs. This underscored the right of refugees not just to fair media coverage but also to be accorded dignity in publicity, which could also inculcate admiration and appreciation from various stakeholders. The most remarkable example was the story of Abdullahi Mire, a Somali refugee who won the UNHCR Nansen award for his tireless efforts

to promote education among refugees at the Dadaab refugee camp. In a story titled “*Somali education champion wins UN refugee prize*”, published by *Daily Nation* on the 28th day of November 2023, the media not only presents contributions that determined refugees can lend to society, but also the constructive contributions that refugees, despite their disadvantaged positions and circumstances, can give to the host communities.

In another article published by *The Standard* titled “*Use evidence to boost financial inclusion for the world’s refugees*”, a sentiment popularised by several other articles is expressed in powerful terms. The writer quips: Refugees migrate to urban areas in search of opportunities. Their limited financial inclusion stands in the way of their successful integration to facilitate active participation in urban commercial value chains. By providing refugees with access to formal financial services, mutually reinforcing efforts by local and international actors can unlock their potential, foster self-reliance, and contribute to the overall stability and economic development of the region (Priscilla Dembetembe, *The Standard*, 17th October, 2023).

The article presents a solid and logical argument for the rights and necessity of refugees not just to access credit but also to be accorded the crucial facilitation and space to engage in business and commerce. Between January 2023 and July 2024, *the Daily Nation and The Standard* newspapers’ coverage clarified misconceptions, countered negative publicity, and corrected falsehoods, misinformation, disinformation, and fake news about refugees and their fundamental rights. They published some informative articles that not only enlightened the public on how to identify fake news but also on the dangers of such news, especially when it touched on communities with vulnerabilities, such as refugees.

The instances affirm the principle of protecting and promoting the rights of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in society. One positive way to affirm this principle is through debunking the myth that the vulnerable are valueless. In an article published by *Daily Nation* on the 23rd of June, 2023, titled “*Why Kenya agreed to grant special status to refugees*”, the

media outlet clarified that there are refugees with useful qualifications and talents that could be useful for the country, and that not all refugees are needy and helpless individuals with nothing to give and everything to take.

During the period under study, *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* manifested impressive and fair sourcing of articles on refugee rights. The majority of articles presented stories sourced from diverse origins, including government officials, development partners, refugees, non-governmental organisations, opinion leaders, scholars and academics, donors, the political class, and political analysts. This fostered a balanced, in-depth, and holistic perspective on refugee rights.

## Findings on Impacting Political Will

The period January 2023 – July 2024 witnessed coverage from *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* that informed the public on the difficulties endured by the refugees in Kenya. Many times, refugees were reported to live in situations that denied them basic rights such as access to food, water, education, and healthcare. For example, on the 22nd of May 2024, *The Standard*, in a feature article titled “*Refugees in Kakuma at risk of Red Eye disease*”, narrated how the outbreak of the disease in the region of the refugee camp put the refugees at risk, in view of the fact that poor hygiene and overcrowding were precipitants of the spread of the disease. Worse still, the feature article pointed out that while washing hands with clean running water was one of the preventive measures against the disease, water was a rare commodity in the camp. On the 23rd of January 2023, another feature article in *The Standard* titled “*Malnutrition crisis at Dagahaley refugee camp*” warned of a spike in the number of refugee children with severe malnutrition owing to increased refugee numbers and reduced food rations.

It is worth noting that correct and consistent reporting of the needs and vulnerabilities of refugees has a big impact not only on public opinion but also on stakeholders’ actions. By constantly shedding light on the plight of refugees, attention was drawn to the extent to which Kenya, as a signatory to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and other human rights instruments, fulfilled its obligations.

Notwithstanding this fact, in the aftermath of that alarm, the government prioritised national security over the well-being of refugees.

Following fears of Al Shabab militants, *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* occasionally set and built their refugee agenda around the prioritisation of public safety, with such inhumane recommendations as the closing down of some refugee camps. In a story published by *Daily Nation* on May 10th, 2023, with the headline “*Daadab, Kakuma refugee camps to transition into integrated settlements,*” enforcement of security was emphasised, and the welfare of refugees was muted. The news report quoted a government officer who called into question the rationale for having refugee camps and integrated settlements, instead of a harmonised settlement. Moreover, in the news report, the Permanent Secretary for Interior announced the formation of an intergovernmental steering committee that would be ‘heightening border security and screening to prevent the influx of refugees and to increase enforcement of law and order.’

*Daily Nation* coverage accurately reported the government of Kenya’s decision and provided the background, including highlights of past terrorist incidents and intelligence findings that terrorists infiltrated and operated in refugee camps. A year later, on 25th June 2024, *Daily Nation* carried a news report titled, “*NGO backs out of Camp Policy for Refugees,*” which largely featured the position of a director of a United States NGO against encampment. The news report is a case of media agenda-setting that impacts political will. Other than the highlight being an indirect, emphatic endorsement of the government’s *Shirika Plan*, it quoted the director’s argument that Kenya stood to benefit immensely from the talents of refugees. In addition to characterising the *Shirika Plan* as a win-win policy, the news article reported that the director of the US NGO’s conviction was that encampment dehumanises refugees, as it violates human dignity and fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Despite the government’s security concerns that accompanied the announcement of the integrated settlement, *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* reported one of the most impactful developments on refugee

rights: High Court Judge Justice Mugure Thande barred the government from shutting down Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps on grounds of lack of participation of the refugees and the vulnerable state of refugees. Whereas Justice Thande, like other stakeholders, may have derived her knowledge from other sources, the newspapers’ coverage of the plight of the refugees must also have struck a chord with the government’s political will. *Daily Nation*’s news report on the 28th of March, 2024, was backed by a detailed explanation of the merits of the judgment and emphasis of the judge’s recognition of the fact that refugees had the right to access protection and security from their host nation. The story read in part: The judge reiterated that it would be unfair for Kenya to welcome those who are fleeing war and human degrading scenarios only for them to be kicked out of their haven.... The government ought to follow the law on repatriation to the letter and ensure that dignity and human rights are central to the whole exercise (Kamau Muthoni, *The Standard*, 28th March, 2024).

In this coverage, the agenda set and built was one of justice and humanitarianism as opposed to the security prioritisation that had dominated previous reports. Other than news coverage, both *The Standard* and *Daily Nation* accorded refugee issues fair coverage in their news features. Over the period under study, both media outlets carried feature articles on refugees. The *Nation* on 8th March 2024, carried Deraso Dokhole’s feature article titled, “*International Women’s Day: Invest in Refugees and Internally Displaced Women*”, which highlighted obstacles that women refugees and IDPs faced, and argued that “despite their adversities, refugees and IDP women demonstrate resilience, resourcefulness, and untapped potential that can drive transformative change if adequately invested in”.

In same vein, *The Standard*, on 20th June 2024 carried Mercy Kahendo’s feature article under the title, “*Unlocking the Power of Education for Refugees through Unique Programs.*” The feature article highlighted a refugee child’s education in a program that accelerated learning, the program’s funding, and its aim of creating an “enabling environment for socio-economic inclusion of refugees through education,

employment, protection, and critical infrastructure to build self-reliance and overall resilience”.

The two newspapers also featured opinion editorials. On December 18th, 2022, *The Standard* published Haithar Somo’s opinion editorial titled, “By Hosting Refugees, Kenya Promotes Brotherhood.” *The Standard* also featured the opinion editorial by Deaso and Nhial Deng in April 2024 titled “The Imperative of Refugee Education: Empowering Africa for the 21st Century”. The opinion editorial foregrounded its argument with the African Union’s 2024 theme: “Educate an African fit for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant in Africa.

Against the UNHCR’s statistics that “only 65.3 per cent of refugee children attend primary school, and a mere 41.24 per cent enroll in secondary education”, the opinion editorial portrayed refugees as human beings whose education is bound to benefit societies and economies. While opinion editorials do not express the positions of media outlets, the provision of space for articulation is a mark of media commitment to fair coverage of refugee rights and promotion of freedom of expression. In considering political goodwill, the opinion editorials overtly framed the refugee issue of the moment, namely the conflict between local communities and refugees, and provided an elaborate demonstration of the benefits that local communities derive from refugees, including indirect taxes, job opportunities, diaspora remittances, trade and real estate opportunities, improved social services, and intermarriages. All the foregoing illustrate how *The Standard’s* and *Daily Nation’s* coverage of refugee rights positively influenced Kenya’s government’s political will.

## Findings on the Diversity of Coverage on Refugee Vulnerabilities

What is the relevance of the diversity of vulnerabilities in coverage to the question of refugee rights? Diversity of coverage ensures that the variety of issues covered provides the necessary information for setting and building not just constructive agendas but inclusive ones for promoting and protecting refugee rights across the board.

The *Standard* and *Daily Nation* coverage of refugees’ rights manifests awareness of the fact that while the concept of refugee covers all human beings who have been forced out of their home countries because of war, persecution, or natural disaster, they have diverse vulnerabilities. Both media entities identified the difficulties and challenges affecting refugees, including essential shortages, insecurity, xenophobia, negative publicity and perceptions, exploitation, disease outbreaks, trauma, and stigma.

They interrogated stakeholder actions toward refugees, including policy formulation and implementation, integration efforts, humanitarian actions, and provision of security and essential services, and they recommended solutions, including bigger budgetary provisions, involvement of more development partners, private and public sector partnerships, diplomatic peacemaking efforts in countries of origin, and systematic scrutiny to naturalise refugees.

In any case, Deraso Dokhole’s feature article in the *Daily Nation* highlighted women refugees’ vulnerabilities and the interventions aimed at addressing them. The *Standard’s* coverage of refugees’ right to quality education highlights the vulnerabilities of refugee children and measures undertaken by the state and donors to provide the necessary conditions, infrastructure, and human resources for accessing education. Additionally, *The Standard*, July 2024, highlighted cases of refugee students excelling under the title, “Refugee Students Defy Ravages of War and Torture, Conquer Science.” This feature article provides an inspiring case of a Muslim girl who, by being uprooted from her home environment that is extremely conservative, excelled in science subjects. The article quotes her: “I do not believe in myths that STEM subjects are difficult and that only boys excel... I wanted to do well as a career woman... I will tell girls to develop a positive mindset...” Coverage of this and similar cases is vital in inspiring confidence in other refugee children, who are otherwise vulnerable to despair.

The two newspapers also relied on diverse sources for their coverage of refugee rights, including interviews with refugees, donors, and government officers, and

books, encyclopedias, almanacs, and previous media reports. Perspectives derived from various categories of refugees are vital because they give refugees an active voice as opposed to reporting on them as if they were voiceless. News reports, news features and editorials of government positions on refugee issues, highlights of development partners and non-governmental organizations' projects, funding and plans, and coverage of pronouncements of Inter-Governmental Authority in Development's (IGAD), the Africa Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), the East African Community (EAC), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the African Union (AU), provide a holistic perspective of refugees and the extent and nature of measures taken to address refugees' vulnerabilities.

Both newspapers featured news reports and feature articles on refugees of diverse demographics and psychographics. Demographically, the news outlets provided coverage of news and insightful articles on refugees of diverse racial backgrounds, namely: African, Asian, Arabic, and European. Refugees' Ethnic, religious, racial, gender, and age diversities were duly reflected in the articles. For example, a number of stories were specific to the challenges faced by refugees of a particular demography, such as malnutrition for children, lack of sanitary towels among women, lack of special care for elders, and lack of proper academic instruction for school-going persons.

As earlier mentioned, the newspapers also employed a diversity of frames in addressing refugee rights, ranging from positive ones, such as success stories among refugees and agitation for business permits and employment of those skilled in various crafts and

disciplines, to negative frames, such as associating refugees with security concerns.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion:** Between January 2023 and July 2024, *Daily Nation* and *The Standard* newspapers employed varied genres in covering refugee rights. Stories of both hard news and soft news were used, including features, news analyses, commentaries, editorials, questions and answers, and even cartoons. Refugee rights and the just management of their affairs arguably fall in the realm of development journalism. The sentiments of Development Communication scholars such as Guranatne (1996) and Melkote (2001) more or less describe Development Journalism as media reporting deliberately intended to inculcate positive change. A fair and consistent reporting of refugee rights has the potential for such change, owing to a better and more appreciated public and stakeholder awareness and enhanced justice-seeking agenda-building. In highlighting the needs of refugees, the essential denials they have to endure and the inhuman scarcities that afflict them, a call for a more dignified response to the crisis was orchestrated. A planned closure of the refugee camp was thwarted by a judge, and the dignity of thousands of refugees was preserved.

**Recommendations:** The reporting by the two newspapers reflected what Wood and Barnes (2007) acknowledged and recommended as the role the media should play in a development journalism context such as this one, which included raising public awareness, providing an inclusive platform for public debate, and holding stakeholders to account for their actions and decisions.

## REFERENCES

- Altmeppen, K-D. Arnold, K., Klaus, and Kössler, T. (2012). "Are the Media Capable of Fair Reporting? Remarks on the Principle of Fairness in Professionalism," *Justice and Conflicts*, pp.329-343: 10.1007/978-3-642-19035-3 20.
- Derluyn, I., Ee, E., and Vindevogel, S. (2019). Psychological Wellbeing of Vulnerable Refugee Groups in (Post) Conflict contexts: An Intriguing Juxtaposition of Vulnerability and Resilience: Integrative Health care for the 21st Century Refugees," *An Uncertain Safety*, pp.213-231
- Fairhurst, G., and Sarr, R. (1996). *The Art of Framing*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Frost, C. (2011) *Journalism Ethics and Regulation*, Routledge, London.

- Galtung, J., and Ruge, M. H. (1965). "The Structure of Foreign News," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1: pp. 64-91. <http://www.jstor.org/stble/423011>.
- Gilodi, A., Albert, I., and Nienabar, B. (2022). "Vulnerability in the context of migration: A critical overview and a new conceptual model," *Arena of Movement*, vol.7: pp.620-640. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-022-00288-5>.
- Global Compact on Refugees. (2010). UNHCR Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organisation of Experience*. New York, Harper and Row.
- Gunaratne, S. (1996). New thinking on journalism and news puts emphasis on democratic values, in Bajka, Z, & Mikulowsky, J., eds.
- Hamel, G. (2010). *Great Answers*. Long Island University: CW Post Campus
- Kovac, B., and Rosentiel, T. (2007). *The Elements of Journalism: What news people should know and the public should expect*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Lolyd, M. (2023). "Embodying Resistance: Politics and the Mobilisation of Vulnerability," *Theory, Culture and Society*, vol.41, No.1: pp. 111-126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764231178478>.
- MacIntyre, A. (1999). *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Chicago, Open Court Press.
- Martin, A. (2023). *Why Vulnerability Matters*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25078-1\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25078-1_2).
- Media Council of Kenya Code of Conduct for Practice of Journalism in Kenya.
- Media Council of Kenya State of the Media Report for 2023.
- Melkote, S., and Leslie, H. S. (2001). *Communication for Development in the Third World: Theory and Practice for Empowerment*. London: Sage Publications.
- Nisbet, M. (2009). "Framing Science: A New Paradigm in Public Engagement," in L. Kahlor and P. Stout (Eds.) *Communicating Science: New Agendas in Communication*. New York, NY Routledge, pp.40-67.
- Pavelka, J. (2014). "Factors affecting Coverage of Events and the Mass Media coverage of topics," *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences*, vol.140, pp.623-629. 10.1016/j.sbpro.2014.04.482
- Society for Professional Journalists Code of Ethics.
- Sramova, B. (2012). "The Influence of Cognitive and Moral Development of Children and Youth on Understanding Media Content,' in Pertranova, D., Solik, M., and Vrabec, N. (Eds.) *Medialna vychova a kuturna Identita-Megatrendy a media*, pp.168-176, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of SS. Cyril & Methodius.
- UNHRC: The UN Refugee Agency [unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees](http://unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/refugees)
- Vu-Alexander, A., Atif, W., Andrea, P., K., Rubenstein, L., Glass, N., Beyrer, C., and Singh, S. (2014). "The Prevalence of Sexual Violence among Female Refugees in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: a Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *Plos Currents*, Vol. 6:10.1371/currents.dis.835f10778fd80ae031aac12d3b533ca7.
- Wood, A., and Barnes, J. (2007). *Making Poverty the Story: Time to Involve the Media in Poverty Reduction*. London: Panos London.
- Stieler, K. (1695). *Newspaper Pleasure and Utility*. No publisher identified.