

Solidarity Beyond Borders: Understanding Local Rationales for Hosting Burundian Immigrants in Karagwe, Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper examines the motivations influencing residents of Karagwe District, Tanzania, to host Burundian immigrants, often through informal arrangements that contrast with national immigration policies. The study addresses the following question, highlighting a gap in the existing literature: How do economic, cultural, and personal factors influence the decision of residents in Karagwe District to host Burundian immigrants despite restrictive national immigration policies? This question responds to the scarcity of integrated studies that holistically examine the interplay of motivations behind informal hosting within border communities. Using a convergent mixed-methods approach, the study combines statistical analysis of 371 survey responses with thematic interpretation of qualitative data from interviews with 24 participants. The findings indicate that hosting decisions arise from a complex interplay of economic pragmatism, shared cultural heritage, and deeply rooted personal and moral convictions. Local hosts benefit from the labour and economic participation of immigrants and view hosting as an extension of traditional values and historical kinship across borders. These motivations are conceptualised through Social Capital Theory, which emphasises the role of trust, networks, and collective identity in fostering inclusive behaviour. The study concludes by recommending policy reforms that harmonise legal frameworks with the lived realities of border communities, recognising that effective governance must integrate both formal institutions and informal solidarities.

Keywords: *Cross-border solidarity, Humanitarian hospitality, social capital, Informal integration, Burundian immigrants, Karagwe District*

INTRODUCTION

Across East Africa, state borders frequently fail to align with deeply embedded socio-cultural ties connecting communities on either side. This is particularly evident in Karagwe District in north-western Tanzania, where, despite formal immigration restrictions, many residents continue to host Burundian immigrants with whom they share language, ancestry, and cultural traditions. These practices of hospitality form part of a longstanding continuum of cross-border solidarity rather than isolated incidents. This study seeks to understand the motivations underlying such hosting practices. While often dismissed by authorities as illegal or non-compliant, these decisions are driven by a combination of economic needs, historical legacies, cultural norms, and personal values. Using Social Capital Theory as a guiding framework, this paper explores how trust-based relationships and communal values influence decisions that challenge legal structures yet align with local moral codes.

This paper is informed by Social Capital Theory (SCT), which provides a compelling lens for understanding why local communities host undocumented immigrants despite associated risks. The theory emphasizes the role of social networks, trust, and shared norms in shaping collective behaviour. Initially introduced by Hanifan (1916) as the goodwill and mutual support within community life, the concept was later refined by Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). Bourdieu theorized that individuals engage in social relationships expecting tangible or symbolic returns, while Coleman highlighted how trust and social structures facilitate cooperation and collective action. In migration contexts, SCT helps explain why certain communities perceive undocumented migrants not as outsiders but as kin—particularly when shared ethnic or cultural affiliations exist. This sense of solidarity often motivates residents to offer support, driven by moral obligation and expectations of reciprocity, whether through labour, social ties, or future assistance (Putnam, 2000). In many African societies, including Tanzania, traditions of extended kinship, communal responsibility, and religious or cultural values emphasising hospitality reinforce this tendency (Mbiti, 2002). The case of Burundian immigrants in Karagwe illustrates how trust, reciprocity, and shared identity lead local communities to accommodate migrants, even amid formal state restrictions.

A growing body of empirical literature from Africa highlights the motivations behind residents' decisions to host undocumented immigrants, often rooted in economic incentives, cultural norms, and

personal attitudes. Studies such as those by Maystadt and Duranton (2021) and Verwimp and Maystadt (2020) indicate that, contrary to common assumptions, the presence of refugees can generate economic benefits for host communities. Employment opportunities, business expansion, and increased market demand—particularly when international aid is involved—often stimulate local economies. Betts, Omata, and Sterck (2021) underscore the entrepreneurial potential of refugees, noting that favourable policies enable contributions through job creation and market integration. Similar findings by Ahimbisibwe and Mfitumukiza (2022), Taylor et al. (2016), and Alix-Garcia and Saah (2010) demonstrate that refugee presence, when well-managed, can enhance household welfare and stimulate trade, albeit with some pressure on local infrastructure.

Beyond economics, cultural values significantly shape attitudes toward hosting. Research by Onyedinma and Kanayo (2013), Kyalo (2012), and Agulanna (2010) highlights African traditions of communalism, kinship, and Ubuntu, which foster a moral obligation to help others, including undocumented migrants. Faith-based studies (Magezi, Sichula, & De Clerk, 2010; Gathogo, 2008) further show that religious ethics, particularly within Christian communities, promote charity and compassion toward migrants. The Overseas Development Institute (2016) and Oucho and Oucho (2012) note that empathy and communal reputation often outweigh legal considerations in shaping public attitudes. Okello and Hovil (2020) reinforce this by demonstrating that informal integration in rural Tanzania and Uganda often relies on shared ethnicity and cultural familiarity.

On a personal level, empathy, social trust, and moral conviction also motivate hosting behaviours. Dustmann, Fasani, and Speciale (2020) and Sreter and Woolcock (2022) argue that compassion and strong community bonds encourage residents to support undocumented migrants, especially where traditional hospitality norms persist. Cunningham and Heyman (2021), then Acharya and Sotomayor (2022), showed that ideological beliefs and personal relationships with migrants often lead individuals to perceive state policies as unjust, legitimising acts of hospitality as moral resistance. Brouwer and Schinkel (2020) and Ambrosini (2017) highlight how residents, particularly those active in faith or civil society groups, frame their actions as morally superior to restrictive immigration laws. While De Genova (2018) cautions against romanticizing hosting practices—noting potential power asymmetries—

research by Adepoju (2019) and Pickering (2020) affirms that hosting in Africa often stems from deeply embedded values of shared humanity rather than legal obligation.

Despite these insights, several gaps persist. Most existing studies rely on quantitative, macro-level data (e.g., Taylor et al., 2016; Maystadt & Duranton, 2021), offering a limited understanding of subjective motivations or community-level dynamics. Moreover, district-specific research in Tanzania remains scarce. Much of the literature focuses on formal refugee camps, leaving informal, undocumented hosting practices—like those in Karagwe—underexplored. The unique socio-economic and cultural conditions in Karagwe, shaped by historical migration, cross-border kinship, and limited state presence, are largely absent from academic inquiry.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating the motivations of Karagwe residents in hosting Burundian immigrants. It integrates economic, cultural, and personal dimensions to provide a holistic understanding of hosting behaviours. Specifically, it explores how social capital operates within these practices—through networks of trust, shared identity, and informal reciprocity—and how such grassroots solidarity complements or challenges state-led refugee governance.

To guide this inquiry, the following central question was posed: *How do economic, cultural, and personal factors influence the decision of local residents in Karagwe District to host Burundian immigrants despite restrictive national immigration policies?*

The conceptual framework for this study positions the decision to host as the dependent variable, shaped by three interrelated independent variables: socio-cultural factors (e.g., kinship and shared traditions), economic factors (e.g., livelihood opportunities and mutual aid), and personal attitudes (e.g., trust, empathy, and moral responsibility). Together, these dimensions help explain the underlying logic of solidarity observed in Karagwe's border communities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a pragmatic research philosophy, supporting the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand complex social phenomena. Pragmatism was deemed appropriate due to its flexibility in examining the multiple, intertwined factors—economic, cultural, and

personal—that influence residents' decisions to host undocumented Burundian immigrants in Karagwe District. This philosophical orientation prioritises practical inquiry and real-world applicability (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Research Approach

A mixed-methods approach was employed to capture both measurable trends and deeper motivations behind hosting practices. By integrating qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions with quantitative data from surveys, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the informal hosting of immigrants. This approach addressed the question of how various factors influence hosting behaviour (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

Research Design

A cross-sectional convergent mixed-methods design was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data concurrently in time and space. This design enabled exploration of not only what motivates residents to host immigrants but also why they make such decisions, offering both breadth and depth. Collecting both types of data simultaneously facilitated effective triangulation and helped uncover previously unexamined factors influencing hosting behaviour (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

Study Area, Target Population, and Sample

The study was conducted in Karagwe District, Kagera Region, Tanzania. The district borders Burundi and has historically been a key location for both spontaneous and organized refugee hosting. Its geographical position and shared cultural and ethnic ties with Burundians make it an ideal context for exploring informal hosting motivations. The target population included residents of Karagwe District, particularly those who had hosted or were currently hosting Burundian immigrants. The study also involved local leaders and government officials who provided insights into broader policy dynamics and community responses to immigration.

Sampling involved both random and purposive techniques. Random sampling involved 371 survey respondents, and it ensured representation across diverse socio-economic backgrounds and levels of interaction with immigrants. Purposive sampling targeted 24 individuals with specialized knowledge, including immigration officers and community leaders. Stratification was applied based on geographical location (urban or rural), type of economic activity, and degree of engagement with immigrants.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from primary and secondary sources using a triangulated approach involving three distinct methods. At that juncture, field surveys were administered using structured questionnaires containing both closed and open-ended items. The questionnaires were designed to capture quantitative data on respondents' socio-economic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, occupation, income), their perceptions of immigrants, and their attitudes toward hosting practices. A total of 371 surveys were distributed across urban and rural sub-wards in Karagwe District using a combination of random and stratified sampling to ensure demographic and geographic representation. Data were collected face-to-face by trained research assistants fluent in both Kiswahili and the local language, with each survey taking approximately 20–25 minutes to complete.

On top of that, key informant interviews (KII) were conducted using a semi-structured protocol. A total of 24 interviews were held with purposively selected participants, including local council leaders (8), village elders (6), religious figures (4), immigration officials (3), and residents with extensive hosting experience (3). Interview guides included open-ended questions exploring personal narratives, cultural and ethical reasoning, economic incentives, and perceptions of national policies. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, was conducted in Kiswahili, and was audio-recorded with consent before being transcribed and translated into English. Additionally, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 10 influential community members (5 per FGD) to explore collective norms and community-level rationales.

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were generated to summarise socio-demographic variables and hosting attitudes. Inferential analyses, such as correlation tests and multiple regression, were applied to examine relationships between variables such as economic status, cultural affinity, and willingness to host. Reliability of the Likert-scale instruments was confirmed via Cronbach's Alpha scores exceeding 0.7, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and

field notes; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing a structured analytical narrative. NVivo software (Version 12) was used to facilitate coding and theme management. Key themes included “economic reciprocity,” “cultural kinship,” “moral duty,” and “legal dissonance.”

To ensure validity, method triangulation was employed by cross-verifying findings from surveys, interviews, and observations. Additionally, research instruments were pre-tested in a neighbouring district with similar socio-cultural characteristics, and adjustments were made to improve question clarity and contextual relevance. Reliability was strengthened through the training of research assistants in consistent data collection protocols and inter-coder reliability checks during the qualitative analysis phase.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly followed. Research clearance was obtained from The Open University of Tanzania, followed by official permissions from authorities in Kagera Region and Karagwe District. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any stage. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study, in line with ethical guidelines for social science research (Silverman, 2016).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents’ Demographic Characteristics

The target population consisted of two major groups: 371 local residents of Karagwe District, including those who had hosted Burundian immigrants, and 24 local government officials and community leaders, who offered insights into broader regional policies and attitudes towards immigration. A total of 371 respondents were used to collect survey data from the targeted demography. The table below indicates the demographic characteristics of the selected sample.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 371)

Variable	Category	Code	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	—	215	58.0
	Female	—	156	42.0
	Total	—	371	100.0
Age	18–25 years	—	80	21.6
	26–35 years	—	125	33.7
	36–45 years	—	84	22.6
	46–55 years	—	54	14.6
	56 years and above	—	28	7.5
	Total	—	371	100.0
Education Level	Never attended school	—	30	8.1
	Primary education	—	60	16.2
	Ordinary Level (O-Level)	—	70	18.9
	Advanced Level (A-Level)	—	25	6.7
	Certificate	—	45	12.1
	Diploma	—	55	14.8
	Bachelor's Degree	—	50	13.5
	Master's Degree	—	25	6.7
	Other	—	11	3.0
Cadre	Total	—	371	100.0
	Immigration Officers	ImO	60	16.2
	Immigrant Hosts	ImH	100	26.9
	Local Government Officials	LGO	45	12.1
	Burundian Immigrants	BI	110	29.6
	Community Leaders	CL	56	15.1
Total	—	—	371	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2025

This section outlines the background of the people who took part in the study, helping us understand the range of perspectives reflected in the findings. Out of the 371 respondents, 58% were male, and 42% were female. While the gender balance is fairly even, the slightly higher number of male participants may subtly influence how certain issues, such as security, economic decisions, or leadership in the hosting process, are represented in the results.

When it comes to age, the data shows that the majority of respondents were young. Over half (55.3%) were between 18 and 35 years old, suggesting that younger voices played a strong role in shaping the overall narrative. This group is likely to focus on future opportunities, employment, and the potential for long-term coexistence. That said, older respondents were also represented, offering more experienced views that

may be grounded in tradition, memory of past migration waves, or established community roles.

In terms of education, there was a wide range of levels among participants. Most respondents had at least some formal schooling, with the largest groups completing O-Level (18.9%), primary education (16.2%), or diploma and certificate programs (a combined 26.9%). Around 13.5% held a university degree, and a small number (6.7%) had a Master's degree. Meanwhile, 8.1% had never attended school. This variety matters because people with different levels of education may see hosting through different lenses—some through formal policy and economic reasoning, others through lived experience, cultural values, and local knowledge. Together, these perspectives offer a more layered and realistic view of why people choose to host.

The roles that respondents play in their communities were also diverse. The study included immigration officers, local government officials, community leaders, immigrant hosts, and Burundian immigrants themselves. Interestingly, Burundian immigrants made up the largest group (29.6%), followed by those who actively host them (26.9%). These two groups are central to the issue and offer firsthand insight into what hosting means on a day-to-day level. Their views are supported by those of officials and leaders, whose experiences bring in the policy and coordination side of hosting.

Overall, this mix of ages, genders, education levels, and community roles creates a strong foundation for interpreting the study's findings. It reflects both personal and institutional viewpoints, offering a more complete picture of what drives people to welcome others into their homes and communities. However, it's worth noting that the study had relatively few respondents with advanced academic backgrounds. As a result, perspectives from scholars or policymakers may be less visible here—but could be a valuable focus in future research.

Economic Benefits Motivating Hosting

This is the first objective of the study sought to analyse the economic benefits gained by local residents that motivate them to host Burundian immigrants.

Table 2*Descriptive Statistics on Economic Benefits of Hosting Burundian Immigrants*

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Hosting Burundian immigrants provides economic benefits to the host household.	371	4.39	0.632
Burundian immigrants contribute to the local economy by providing affordable labour.	371	3.98	1.104
Burundian immigrants are hosted because they help in agricultural or business activities.	371	4.04	1.079
Renting houses or land to Burundian immigrants provides a good source of income.	371	3.76	1.059
Burundian immigrants positively impact local trade and business.	371	4.29	0.817
Valid N (listwise)	371	—	—

Source: Field Data, 2025

The findings presented in Table 3.2 offer important insights into the economic motivations that influence local residents in Karagwe District to host Burundian immigrants. Each statement captures a distinct yet interrelated way in which hosting immigrants supports local livelihoods. The mean scores, all above 3.7, suggest a generally positive perception, while relatively low standard deviations reflect consistency in responses across participants.

Firstly, the statement “*Hosting Burundian immigrants provides economic benefits to the host's household*” received the highest mean score of 4.39. This indicates that many hosts recognize the direct, day-to-day economic advantages—such as help with farming, household labour, and informal business support. In rural Tanzania, informal economic cooperation is often essential for survival, and hosting arrangements appear to reinforce this reality. This finding challenges the common assumption that immigrants are economic burdens; instead, they are viewed as active contributors to household welfare.

Secondly, the statement “*Burundian immigrants contribute to the local economy by providing affordable labour*” had a mean score of 3.98. In areas where formal labour markets are limited, the availability of affordable and willing workers is critical. Immigrants help meet labour needs in agriculture, construction, and informal trade. While such dynamics can sometimes generate tension, particularly in competitive job markets, respondents in this study appear to view it largely as a benefit.

The third item, “*Burundian immigrants are hosted because they help in agricultural or business activities*,” scored a mean of 4.04, reinforcing the earlier points. Given that much of Karagwe’s economy is based on small-scale farming and informal enterprise, this labour is not only welcome—it’s essential. Hosting thus becomes both a cultural tradition and a strategic response to labour shortages, especially during peak farming seasons.

The fourth statement—“*Renting houses or land to Burundian immigrants provides a good source of income*”—received a slightly lower mean of 3.76. Yet, it still reflects moderate agreement. This suggests that property rental to immigrants is a meaningful source of income, particularly in areas with established housing infrastructure. However, the slightly lower score may reflect that not all residents have property to rent, limiting direct benefit to a subset of the population.

The final statement — “*Burundian immigrants positively impact local trade and business*”—achieved a high mean score of 4.29, indicating strong consensus that immigrants contribute to local commerce. Their roles as traders, consumers, and labourers stimulate rural markets, increase demand, and broaden economic interactions across communities. Their presence enhances economic vibrancy and expands opportunities for locals involved in retail, farming, and services.

Support from Literature and Theory

The study findings are supported by recent research across Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, Maystadt and Duranton (2021) found that communities near refugee settlements in Rwanda experienced growth in employment and business opportunities. Similarly, Betts, Easton-Calabria, and Omata (2020) highlighted the entrepreneurial capacities of refugees in Uganda and Tanzania, showing that many actively contribute to job creation and market expansion. Verwimp and Maystadt (2020) noted that while competition for local resources may exist, the net economic effect on host communities is often positive, especially when development aid strengthens local markets.

The analysis is further enriched when viewed through theoretical lenses. Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000) posits that shared trust and networks lead to mutual benefit and cooperation. In this context, hosting immigrants reflects a social contract—hosts offer shelter or land, and in return, gain labour, income, or trade opportunities. These informal

exchanges strengthen local resilience and reduce the need for formal enforcement mechanisms.

Rational Choice Theory also applies here. It assumes that individuals make decisions based on the weighing of costs and benefits. Hosting Burundian immigrants appears to be a deliberate, strategic choice: locals assess that the economic benefits—cheap labour, rental income, and trade—outweigh any risks or costs. As Kusakabe and Pearson (2020) argue, such refugee-host arrangements in Southeast Africa are often economically rational partnerships with mutual benefit at the core.

Qualitative Responses: Economic Perspectives from the Ground

To complement the survey data, interviews and focus group discussions were held with participants, including immigrant hosts (ImH), community members (CoM), local government officials (LGO), community leaders (CL), and Burundian immigrants (BI). Their reflections offer a more personal and nuanced view of the economic dynamics of hosting. One 65-year-old host from Lukole Village (ImH) shared:

“I have four farms—each over 14 hectares—where I grow beans, maize, bananas, and coffee. My success grew when I began hosting Burundian immigrants. I don’t exploit them—we exchange labour for housing, food, and basic goods. My father started this in the 1970s; I continued in the 1990s. Some have lived here for more than 40 years. Their labour is reliable, and they are strong and trustworthy. Hosting has brought not just wealth, but long-standing friendship rooted in shared history—even before colonial borders divided us (Interview with ImH, July 2025).”

In Omkimea village, a 47-year-old kerosene trader (CoM) explained:

“Most locals are moving to solar and electricity, but Burundian immigrants still depend on kerosene. If they stopped coming, my business would collapse. They’re my main customers. Their economic situation is different from ours, so they still rely on traditional energy. I don’t see their presence as a burden at all—it keeps my business alive (Interview with CoM, July 2025).”

A 53-year-old landlord from Rulalo village (CoM) added:

“I have two houses rented out to Burundian immigrants. Here in the village, renting isn’t common—people have their own homes. But immigrants stay long-term and need housing. I don’t charge much, but the income is steady. Without them, those houses might stay empty (Interview with CoM, July 2025).”

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data clearly show that economic factors strongly influence the decision to host Burundian

immigrants. These benefits—ranging from affordable labour and rental income to enhanced market activity—are deeply embedded in local livelihoods. Rather than viewing hosting solely through a humanitarian lens, the study reveals how economic pragmatism and social relationships work together to shape positive host-immigrant dynamics. These insights align with broader academic research and underline the need for policies that recognize and support local economic interdependence between host communities and immigrant populations.

Cultural Values Influencing Hosting

This section addresses the second objective of the study, which sought to examine how cultural values influence local residents' motivation to host Burundian immigrants.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics on Cultural Values Influencing the Hosting of Burundian Immigrants

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Cultural beliefs in this community encourage hospitality and the welcoming of immigrants.	371	4.32	0.782
Burundian immigrants share similar cultural values and traditions with the host community.	371	3.95	1.090
Hosting Burundian immigrants strengthens social relationships within the community.	371	4.09	0.973
The community has a long history of welcoming immigrants from Burundi.	371	4.01	1.035
It is a moral duty to assist Burundian immigrants in times of need.	371	4.32	0.782

Source: Field Data, 2025

The findings in Table 3.3 highlight a strong cultural inclination toward hospitality and moral responsibility within the host communities in Karagwe District. Two statements received the highest mean score of 4.32: "The cultural beliefs of people around here encourage hospitality and welcoming of immigrants" and "It's a moral duty to assist Burundian immigrants in times of need." These results reflect deeply rooted values of communal care, moral obligation, and shared humanity, which shape not only interpersonal relationships but also the broader willingness to host.

Such cultural orientations are consistent with research across the region. Deardorff and Hamid (2021) emphasize the influence of Ubuntu

philosophy in East Africa, which centers on mutual support and collective well-being. Similarly, Nshimbi and Moyo (2020) note that in many African societies, particularly among Bantu-speaking populations, hospitality is not just an act of kindness but a reflection of moral standing and social prestige.

Another important dimension is the strengthening of social relationships through hosting, captured in the item “*Hosting Burundian immigrants strengthens social relationships in the community*” (Mean = 4.09, SD = .973). This suggests that hosting is viewed not only as a benefit to immigrants but also as a practice that fosters community cohesion and reciprocity. This aligns with Nyamnjoh (2021), who argues that hosting practices often serve to reinforce social safety nets, affirm kinship, and sustain cultural continuity within African communities.

The fourth statement — “*My community has a long history of welcoming immigrants from Burundi*”— recorded a mean of 4.01, reinforcing the idea that these cultural practices are not recent or reactive, but historically rooted. Ngowi and Mkumbwa (2022) document cross-border interactions between Kagera and Burundi, illustrating how long-standing mobility has fostered hybrid identities and traditions of openness. In this way, the act of hosting reflects a continuum of transborder solidarity, rather than an isolated or contemporary response.

The final item — “*The Burundian immigrants share similar cultural values and traditions with us*”— scored a slightly lower but still significant mean of 3.95, with a higher standard deviation (SD = 1.090). This indicates general agreement, but also some variation in perception, possibly influenced by differences in ethnicity, language, or generational experience. As Tshitereke and Mupakati (2023) explain, perceived cultural similarity is a key factor in successful grassroots hosting, especially where formal integration mechanisms are limited.

Theoretical Reflection: Social and Cultural Capital

These findings align well with social capital theory, which emphasizes the role of networks, norms, and trust in enabling collective action (Putnam, 2000; Szczerba & Woolcock, 2022). The high agreement levels on moral duty, shared values, and historical openness reflect a dense network of trust-based relationships, where cultural expectations drive action. Hosting in this context is less a formal obligation and more a community-embedded norm.

In addition, cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Nowicka, 2021) helps explain how symbolic knowledge, values, and traditions inform behaviour. Local residents appear to draw upon a cultural repertoire that emphasizes hospitality, interdependence, and shared ethnic heritage, especially with neighbouring Burundian communities. These shared cultural assets facilitate smoother integration and mutual respect, acting as resources for both coexistence and cooperation.

As Bourdieu and Passeron (2020) argue, cultural capital is often passed on informally through family, schools, and religious institutions. In the Karagwe context, this includes values such as respect for elders, the importance of communal celebration, and responsibilities toward neighbours—all of which support a non-confrontational, inclusive approach to migration.

Qualitative Insights on Cultural Integration

To complement the quantitative findings, participants were asked: “*How do Burundian immigrants integrate into the local community’s cultural and social activities?*” Responses consistently indicated that Burundian immigrants are welcomed not only due to shared heritage but also because of their ability to contribute to community life through participation in churches, ceremonies, traditional dances, and healing practices.

An Immigration Officer from Karagwe (38 years old) shared:

“Burundian immigrants find ways to integrate by joining local churches. Church leaders often embrace them warmly, treating them as special guests. This makes them feel welcomed and encourages them to stay longer (Interview with ImO, 16 May 2025)”

A Community Leader from Chonyonyo village noted the role of entertainment in cultural acceptance:

“Burundian immigrants are good entertainers during our local ceremonies. They dance to traditional songs like Omutolo and Empamba, introduced by the Haya people. Their energy and involvement make them widely accepted, and many have earned strong reputations in our villages because of these contributions (Interview with CoL, 12 May 2025)”

These examples underscore how cultural integration is practiced and reinforced in everyday life—through music, worship, and community gatherings. The capacity of Burundian immigrants to participate meaningfully in these spaces not only earns them social acceptance but also strengthens bonds with host communities.

Personal Attitudes Influencing Hosting

This section addresses the third objective of the study, which was to explore the personal attitudes that motivate local residents to host Burundian immigrants.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics on Personal Attitudes Influencing the Hosting of Burundian Immigrants

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
It is a personal sense of responsibility to help Burundian immigrants.	371	4.10	1.047
Burundian immigrants deserve a safe place to live.	371	3.59	1.153
There is no harm in hosting Burundian immigrants despite legal restrictions.	371	4.11	0.865
People in this area have personal relationships (friendship, marriage, etc.) with Burundian immigrants.	371	4.02	1.112
Hosting Burundian immigrants improves my social status in the community.	371	4.32	0.782

Source: Field Data, 2025

The data in Table 3.4 provides valuable insight into how personal convictions influence the decision to host Burundian immigrants. The mean scores, all above 3.5, reflect a generally positive attitude among respondents. These findings help us understand how personal ethics, relationships, and perceived social benefits inform the hosting behaviour observed in Karagwe District.

The highest-rated item — “*Hosting Burundian immigrants improves my social status in the community*” ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .782$) — reveals a belief that hosting carries a form of social prestige or moral approval. In many rural and collectivist communities, acts of generosity enhance one’s standing and are interpreted as signs of leadership or virtue. This aligns with Ager and Strang (2021), who observed that in such societies, community contribution is closely tied to social capital and status.

Closely following is the belief that “*There is no harm in hosting Burundian immigrants despite legal restrictions*” ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .865$). This suggests that many respondents prioritize moral judgment over legal limitations, especially when the law is seen as inadequate in addressing humanitarian realities. Jacobsen (2020) describes this as a form of moral agency, where communities respond based on shared ethics rather than external enforcement, particularly in contexts with limited state presence.

Another highly rated attitude — “*It’s a personal sense of responsibility to help Burundian immigrants*” ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.047$) — underscores an internalized moral duty to assist those in need. This echoes findings by Betts et al. (2021), who found that communities in East Africa often host immigrants not out of obligation, but from a deep-seated sense of historical solidarity, religious duty, or cultural empathy.

The statement “*People around here have personal relationships (friendship, marriage, etc.) with Burundian immigrants*” ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.112$) also scored highly. These interpersonal bonds help reduce social distance, encourage trust, and normalize long-term cohabitation. Landau and Morand (2020) emphasize that such relationships — whether through trade, kinship, or shared community life — are key drivers of social integration and resilience in host communities.

The lowest-rated item, “*Burundian immigrants deserve a safe place to live*” ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.153$), still indicates moderate agreement, though with a broader spread in responses. While the notion of deservedness is acknowledged, it may be less influential than motivations rooted in personal benefit, social relationships, or community traditions. This is consistent with Bohnet and Schmitz (2022), who argue that in many rural African contexts, pragmatic or relational considerations often outweigh abstract humanitarian ideals.

These findings reflect the complex interplay of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. According to Putnam (2000), social capital comprises the networks and norms that enable people to act collectively and support one another. The strong endorsement of personal responsibility, social ties, and reputational gain suggests bonding capital, close-knit relationships and shared values within the host community. The personal relationships between locals and immigrants point to bridging capital, which connects people across social and cultural boundaries, fostering inclusion and cooperation. Meanwhile, the high acceptance of hosting despite legal barriers may reveal a gap in linking capital, the vertical connections between community members and formal institutions. Where laws or governance structures fail to align with community values, people tend to rely on informal norms and moral reasoning. As Cleaver (2021) notes, in many African settings, informal structures, such as family networks, religious teachings, and traditional leadership — are often more trusted and effective than formal law in shaping social behaviour.

To complement the statistical findings, respondents were asked: “*What personal motivations or beliefs influence people’s decision to host Burundian immigrants?*” The responses were overwhelmingly grounded in human empathy, cultural values, and spiritual beliefs. One immigrant host explained:

“*We are all human beings. Whatever we do to others affects our children and grandchildren. We share the same ancestry. If someone needs help, we should give it. That’s our tradition* (Interview with ImH, July 2025)”

A community member expressed a similar sentiment:

“*One of the biggest reasons we host Burundian immigrants is our sense of hospitality. Karagwe people are known for kindness. When someone is suffering, you help them. You never know who might bury you in the future* (Interview with CoM, July 2025)”

Another participant reflected on the tension between law and humanity:

“*Even though there are legal restrictions, I can’t stop helping. These people didn’t come here by choice. They’re running from war and poverty. As a human being, I have to do something* (Interview with ImH, July 2025)”

Decision to Host Burundian Immigrants

This section presents findings related to the dependent variable of the study: the overall decision by local residents to host Burundian immigrants. Table 4.5 summarizes participants’ perceptions regarding moral, cultural, and economic motivations behind this decision.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics on Decision to Host Immigrants

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
People feel a moral obligation to assist people who flee from conflict.	371	4.39	0.632
Hosting Burundian immigrants can promote cultural exchange.	371	3.98	1.104
People believe Burundian immigrants contribute positively to the local economy.	371	4.04	1.079

Source: Field Data, 2025

The findings in Table 3.5 offer valuable insight into the key drivers behind the decision to host immigrants, as perceived by local residents. All three indicators scored above 3.9, suggesting a generally favourable disposition toward hosting Burundian immigrants, though with variations in the strength and consistency of agreement.

The strongest consensus was found in the statement: “*People feel a moral obligation to assist people who flee from conflict*” (M = 4.39, SD = .632). This high level of agreement underscores the centrality of humanitarian values in the hosting decision. It reflects the community’s belief that providing shelter and support to those in distress is not just an option, but a moral imperative. As Acharya and Sotomayor (2022) argue, moral reasoning plays a critical role in refugee-hosting decisions across Sub-Saharan Africa, often driven by deeply held cultural and religious beliefs. This perspective also reflects bonding social capital, wherein strong internal ties foster solidarity and a willingness to help vulnerable others (Putnam, 2000).

The second item — “*Hosting Burundian immigrants can promote cultural exchange*” — received a mean of 3.98 (SD = 1.104), indicating moderate to strong agreement, albeit with more variation. This suggests that while many residents value the opportunity for intercultural interaction, others may be more reserved. Differences in personal experience, education, or generational views could explain the wider spread of responses. Kunz and Böhmelt (2021) note that the perception of cultural enrichment often correlates with prior bridging social capital — trust and cooperation across group boundaries. In contexts where such capital is present, cultural exchange can enhance community harmony and long-term integration.

The third statement — “*People believe Burundian immigrants contribute positively to the local economy*” — scored a mean of 4.04 (SD = 1.079), reaffirming the view that economic considerations matter. Respondents recognize immigrants as participants in agricultural labor, informal trade, and local service economies. Though not as universally emphasized as moral obligation, the economic rationale remains a practical driver of community support. As Dustmann et al. (2020) suggest, when immigration is seen as beneficial to livelihoods and local productivity, public acceptance tends to increase. In terms of linking social capital, this reflects a recognition of the role that immigrants can play within broader economic and institutional frameworks (Sreter & Woolcock, 2022).

To deepen the analysis, participants were asked: “*What personal motivations or beliefs influence people’s decision to host Burundian immigrants?*” Most responses emphasized sympathy, cultural duty, and spiritual beliefs. Many residents expressed that they feel compelled to act

out of shared humanity or ancestral connection, even when legal frameworks discourage it.

One immigrant host shared:

“We are all human beings. We come from the same ancestors. Whatever bad actions we take against others today, our children might suffer tomorrow. So, we have to take care of them (Interview with ImH, July 2025)”

Another community member emphasized local values:

“One of the big reasons we host Burundians is our tradition of hospitality. Karagwe people are kind-hearted and civilized. When someone is struggling, they deserve help. You never know who will be there for you one day (Interview with CoM, July 2025)”

Participants also linked their beliefs to religion and moral conscience. In response to the question *“Do you believe that Burundian immigrants should be given a safe place regardless of legal restrictions?”* many noted that religious teachings encourage helping others, regardless of their background.

An immigrant host stated:

“Even though there are legal restrictions, I can’t stop helping. These people didn’t come here by choice. They fled because of political and economic problems. They need help—and I have to give it (Interview with ImH, July 2025)”

These reflections highlight how local moral reasoning often supersedes formal legal norms, especially when laws are perceived as disconnected from the community’s sense of justice and tradition.

Regression Analysis

To examine how well the key factors—social-cultural values, economic benefits, and personal attitudes—predict local residents’ motivation to host Burundian immigrants, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted.

Model Summary

The regression model summary is presented in Table 4.6 below.

Table

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.915	0.836	0.835	0.236

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social-Cultural Factors, Economic Factors, Personal Attitudes
Source: Field Data, 2025

The model yielded an R value of 0.915, indicating a very strong positive correlation between the independent variables and the dependent variable—motivation to host Burundian immigrants. This suggests that as social-cultural integration, economic opportunity, and positive personal attitudes increase, so too does the willingness among community members to host immigrants.

An R Square value of 0.836 indicates that approximately 83.6% of the variation in the motivation to host can be explained by the combination of the three predictors. This high proportion highlights the significance of these factors in shaping community attitudes. The remaining 16.4% of variation could be attributed to other influences not captured in the model, such as past trauma, political perceptions, environmental constraints, or national media narratives.

ANOVA: Model Significance

To assess the statistical significance of the overall regression model, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed. The results are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 3.7: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	97.525	3	32.508	737.411	0.000
Residual	19.063	367	0.051	—	—
Total	116.588	370	—	—	—

a. Dependent Variable: Decision to host immigrants

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social-Cultural Factors, Economic Factors, Personal Attitudes

Source: Field Data, 2025

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model is statistically significant. With an F-statistic of 737.411 and a p-value of .000, there is clear evidence that the predictor variables—social-cultural factors, economic considerations, and personal attitudes—jointly have a meaningful effect on the decision to host Burundian immigrants. The very low significance level indicates that the likelihood of these results occurring by chance is extremely small.

Coefficients

Table 3.8 presents the results of a multiple linear regression analysis aimed at identifying the key factors influencing the decision of local residents to host Burundian immigrants in Karagwe District.

Table 3.8: Regression Coefficients

Model	Predictor Variable	B (Unstandardized)	Std. Error	Beta (Standardized)	t-value	Sig.
1	Constant	0.105	0.113	—	0.924	0.356
	Social-Cultural Factors	0.471	0.047	0.455	10.119	0.000
	Economic Factors	0.415	0.043	0.377	9.738	0.000
	Personal Attitudes	0.145	0.026	0.169	5.603	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Decision to host Immigrants

Source: Field Data, 2025

Firstly, the intercept (constant) is 0.105 with a standard error of 0.113. This suggests that when all independent variables are zero, the baseline level of willingness to host immigrants is positive but not statistically significant, as indicated by a p-value (Sig.) of 0.356, which is greater than the conventional threshold of 0.05. Therefore, the constant term does not have a meaningful influence on the decision-making process in isolation.

The most influential variable is the social-cultural factors, with an unstandardised coefficient (B) of 0.471 and a standardised Beta of 0.455. This means that for every one-unit increase in the perception of social-cultural support or alignment (e.g., shared language, customs, religious ties), there is a 0.471 increase in the likelihood or strength of the decision to host immigrants, holding other factors constant. The standardised Beta value indicates this is the strongest predictor among the three variables. The high t-value of 10.119 and a significance level of 0.000 confirm that this relationship is statistically significant. This underscores the crucial role of cultural familiarity and shared social values in influencing host community behaviour.

Secondly, economic factors also show a strong positive effect, with an unstandardised coefficient of 0.415 and a Beta of 0.377. This implies that improved perceptions of economic benefits—such as job opportunities, access to markets, or mutual economic cooperation—are significantly associated with a greater willingness to host immigrants. The t-value (9.738) and significance level ($p = 0.000$) confirm that this effect is statistically robust. This finding highlights that economic incentives or perceived mutual gain motivate local residents to accommodate and integrate immigrants into their communities.

Finally, personal attitudes—though the weakest among the three predictors—still have a significant impact, with an unstandardised coefficient of 0.145 and a Beta of 0.169. The relatively lower Beta suggests that while individual beliefs and values matter, they play a more modest role compared to social-cultural and economic factors. Nonetheless, the variable remains significant ($t = 5.603$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that individual perceptions, empathy, and openness also contribute meaningfully to the hosting decision.

Summary of Key Findings

Overall, hosting Burundian immigrants in Karagwe is a multidimensional phenomenon driven by intertwined economic, cultural, and personal factors within a social capital framework. However, it is crucial to recognise that hosting practices are not devoid of ambivalence or costs, a perspective underscored by more critical migration scholarship. While our data highlighted predominantly positive narratives, sporadic accounts pointed to underlying tensions, such as occasional strains on household resources, concerns over market competition in specific sectors, and anxieties about legal repercussions for hosts. These underscore echo De Genova's (2018) caution against romanticising informal hospitality, reminding us that power asymmetries and the potential for exploitation can exist even within kin-like networks. The moral economy of hosting, while resilient, operates within a context of structural scarcity and legal precarity, where acts of solidarity can also entail significant material and social risks for the hosts. This critical lens tempers the overwhelmingly positive findings and underscores the complex, sometimes contradictory, reality of informal hosting arrangements.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This study is limited by its typical cross-sectional design, which captured motivations at a single point in time, limiting our ability to analyse how these rationales evolve as hosting relationships mature or as the broader socio-political context changes. The reliance on self-reported data also presents inherent biases. Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies tracking hosting dynamics over time to understand sustainability and change. Comparative work across different border regions in East Africa could also illuminate how varying state policies, historical relationships, and economic conditions shape similar solidarities.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the decision by residents in Karagwe to host Burundian immigrants is shaped by a complex interplay of economic benefits, cultural values, and personal attitudes. In response to the research question, the findings show that economic incentives such as access to affordable labour and collaborative participation in agriculture and small-scale business are significant drivers. These practical benefits enhance household livelihoods and contribute to the broader local economy, underscoring the importance of economic pragmatism in hosting decisions. Cultural and social values emerged as equally influential, reflecting the community's deeply rooted traditions of hospitality, moral responsibility, and social solidarity. Hosting immigrants is not viewed merely as an economic transaction but as an act embedded in social norms that reinforce trust, belonging, and shared identity. This cultural framing strengthens communal cohesion and validates the continuation of these practices across generations.

Additional explanation is pointed to the roles of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Strong bonding capital manifests in tight-knit relationships and shared values, motivating support out of empathy and moral duty. Bridging capital appears in interpersonal ties between locals and immigrants, facilitating social inclusion across cultural boundaries. However, the high acceptance of hosting despite restrictive legal frameworks highlights a gap in linking capital, indicating that formal institutional connections and governance do not always align with community values and practices. This misalignment often leads residents to rely on informal norms and moral reasoning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the sustainable hosting of Burundian immigrants in Karagwe District:

- i) **Formalise Economic Integration:** Local and national authorities should recognise and support the economic contributions of immigrants by facilitating legal frameworks such as work permits and temporary employment documentation, particularly in sectors like agriculture and small-scale trade. Such formalisation will protect workers' rights, enhance productivity, and strengthen economic ties between hosts and immigrants.

- ii) **Preserve and Promote Cultural Values:** Community-based initiatives that celebrate the region's traditions of hospitality and moral responsibility should be prioritised. Educational programs and intercultural exchanges can reinforce shared heritage and social solidarity, fostering greater social cohesion and inclusive attitudes toward immigrants.
- iii) **Align Legal Frameworks with Local Moral Norms:** Policy reforms should bridge the gap between formal immigration laws and the community's ethical imperatives by developing community-supported immigration schemes or **humanitarian** corridors. Training for law enforcement and administrative personnel should emphasise culturally sensitive approaches to reduce tensions and encourage compassionate governance.
- iv) **Strengthen Support through Civil Society and International Agencies:** Targeted interventions from NGOs and development partners should focus on enhancing community resilience, facilitating joint economic ventures, and promoting dialogue across cultural lines. Assistance programs **must** also address potential resource competition and service access challenges through participatory planning and inclusive governance.
- v) By integrating economic pragmatism, cultural heritage, and moral consciousness, these recommendations **aim** to build on existing social capital within Karagwe. This approach will support both immigrant well-being and community development, ensuring that the spirit of hospitality remains a foundation for regional stability and growth.

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