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The scale, forms and distribution of volunteering amongst refugee youth populations in Uganda

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Abstract

Geographies of volunteering have examined the relationships between people, places and forms of voluntary action, but there has been limited geographical scholarship on the scales, forms and distribution of volunteering amongst specific populations in different settings, particularly in the global South. While in the global North there are some established quantitative data sets, often produced by humanitarian and development organisations, these are largely absent in the South. Where they do exist, they often reflect Western-centric ideas and concepts, meaning that volunteering behaviours that do not fit Western norms—such as amongst young refugees in the global South—can be excluded, or captured in ways that are partial or unrepresentative. This paper provides an important challenge to existing geographies of volunteering, expanding them through an account of volunteering amongst young refugees in Uganda, and how it articulates with social inequalities within and between the spaces and places where young refugees live. We analyse quantitative data from 3053 young refugees surveyed on their volunteering experiences in rural and urban settings in Uganda. The data provides new evidence of *who* these volunteers are, beyond their refugee status, *why*, *where* and *how* they conduct their activities, and reveals how these are connected to livelihoods and community development. Through this survey analysis, the paper argues for the need to establish grounded conceptualisations of volunteering that consider the scales, distribution, and various forms of volunteering within specific groups. In doing so, the paper offers a new framework for better understanding the relationships between volunteering and refugee lives through four interlocking factors: place, (im)mobility, income and gender. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these findings for wider geographies of volunteering and research on refugee youth and displaced populations.

KEYWORDS

livelihoods, refugees, survey, uganda, volunteering, youth

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1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the scale, forms and distribution of volunteering amongst young refugees in Uganda. It does so with the aim of challenging existing norms and conceptualisations of volunteering that portray its practice in terms that appear universal, but are in reality highly partial, leading to volunteering practices outside Western norms being excluded from analysis or captured in ways that are partial or unrepresentative of key trends, practices and experiences in particular contexts. Through an analysis of quantitative survey data grounded in the experiences of young refugees in Uganda, this paper seeks to address this knowledge gap by capturing the articulations of volunteering with place, subjectivities, and inequalities amongst refugee groups. This is particularly important given the growing prevalence of volunteering in policy-making for humanitarian and development interventions, and a perceived need to further understand the scale of individuals' experiences of and rewards from volunteering and how this affects livelihoods, especially amongst displaced populations in the global South. Household surveys in the global North often capture patterns of volunteering and other forms of civic engagement across age groups regularly (e.g., Americorps, 2023; UK Government, 2023), but there is a recognised gap of consistent information on such trends in the global South, particularly in Africa and Asia (ILO, 2018). In common, however, is the overall challenge of disaggregating data from large-scale surveys, where they exist, according to migratory status (UNHCR, 2020). This means that there is limited information on patterns of volunteering and civic engagement amongst refugee populations, wherever they live on the globe.

Given the lack of such data sets, the need for interdisciplinary research on volunteering, citizenship and development in the context of displacement has become increasingly significant in recent years, with scholarship particularly exploring the role of volunteering in processes of integration and inclusion in Europe (Healey, 2006; Ramachandran & Vathi, 2023). But despite the often anecdotal evidence of the importance of volunteering to the practices of refugee-led organisations and development actors, there has been limited research on voluntary action by refugees themselves (although, for exceptions see Alio et al., 2020; Betts et al., 2021; Carlsen et al., 2022), and especially survey data that can quantify its scale, prevalence and forms within particular populations in the global South. This also reflects broader inequalities in research on the geographies of volunteering between global South and North (Laurie & Baillie Smith, 2018) and the importance of recognising the relationships between volunteering, migration and mobility. To date, there is a dependence on data sets that are ill-suited to where some of those policies are implemented in the global South and how they consider the agency of displaced populations (Baillie Smith, Mills, et al., 2022). This has limited geographers' capacities to offer alternative and more critical geographies to those presented by humanitarian actors and States as they seek to celebrate and promote volunteering, whether for its value to communities or as a cheap way to deliver services or enhance employability of young people.

In this paper, we offer a different geography of volunteering, enlivening debates around volunteering, migration and mobility by exploring the relationship between volunteering and the socio-spatial dynamics of refugee lives and the livelihoods of displaced populations. We do this through an analysis of a survey data set on volunteering by young refugees in Uganda. In section two, we locate our research in relation to existing scholarship as well as setting out the specific country context in which we undertook the work. In section three, we detail our methodology, particularly how we considered context-specific knowledges in operationalising our quantitative survey. In section four, we present and analyse detailed data on participation in volunteering by young refugees in Uganda, discussing who engages in what kinds of volunteering, where it takes place and how it is facilitated, including in terms of income generation. We conclude the paper by proposing a move towards a different geography of volunteering which can capture how its forms, scale and distribution are entangled with refugee lives and the challenges of displacement, as well as exploring what our findings can contribute to broader scholarship in this area.

2 | BACKGROUND

Volunteering has been increasingly mainstreamed within humanitarian and development policy-making, with the United Nations identifying it as critical for the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda, 2020). Organisations including the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV) have made growing efforts to quantify and measure volunteering (ILO, 2022; UNV, 2022), as part of providing a rationale for this mainstreaming and demonstrating its value, but this has often focused on the economic value of volunteers' time in line with policy advocacy strategies (e.g., Haddock & Devereux, 2016). These existing quantifications, however, provide a particular and limited geography of volunteering. This limited geography remains bound by national level data oriented to demonstrations of value anchored in ostensibly 'global norms' of volunteering that are, in reality, firmly rooted in the histories and practices of the global North. The standards and paradigms which are used to measure and assess volunteering are not, despite appearances, 'universal' or 'neutral', but reflect the experiences, practices and analytical traditions dominant in Europe and North America. This means that forms of volunteering that do not fit with, or deviate from these standards, are less likely to be recognised and measured. These quantifications largely fail to capture the social and economic geographies of volunteering amongst vulnerable populations, particularly in the global South, often invisibilising its diverse forms and leading to assessments that fail to adequately capture its distribution or scale.

A challenge to existing geographies of volunteering (Laurie & Baillie Smith, 2018; Milligan, 2007; Smith et al., 2010) is needed to understand volunteering in the context of social change and humanitarian response amongst marginalised groups, such as refugee

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populations, and particularly how volunteer activities are distributed and influenced by different factors (e.g., location, gender, and income). Household surveys in the global North, such as the Community Life Survey in the United Kingdom (UK Government, 2023) or the Volunteering and Civic Life research in the United States (Americorps, 2023), have been capturing national patterns of volunteering over the years to show levels of participation, as well as other types of civic engagement and charitable giving. These data sets have largely provided insight for geographies of volunteering, and wider volunteering research in the global North. However, there is limited information on such trends in the global South and, where demographic data on volunteering exists, it tends to be irregular or outdated, especially when it comes to African and Asian countries (ILO, 2018). At the same time, national census or large-scale surveys often devote limited, if any, attention to the particular experiences of forcibly displaced persons; and the disaggregation of data according to migratory status, particularly in relation to refugees, is challenging (UNHCR, 2020). This is especially relevant in the context of a growing global population of refugees, as the United Nations emphasises the need for enhancing data collection mechanisms that can better inform decision-making in refugee settings (UNHCR, 2023a). There is also an identified need in refugee literature to promote critical questioning of displacement realities from the perspectives of refugees themselves (Schiltz et al., 2019). Accordingly, there remains an unevenness of geographies of volunteering, whereby scholarship on voluntary labour in the global South, and particularly by displaced populations, cannot draw on data on its scale, forms and distribution in the way that research in the global North is able to do.

As Salamon et al. (2011) note, there is often reduced capacity to undertake quantitative research on volunteering in the global South, and the ways volunteering has been traditionally measured do not necessarily align with practices and experiences outside the global North. This means that not only do we lack significant numbers of data sets on the scale and distribution of volunteering in the global South, particularly amongst refugees, but that those data sets often do not reflect understandings of volunteering within those settings. For example, a UNV-led multicountry Gallup survey mapping volunteering trends in the global South before, during and beyond Covid-19 (UNV, 2021) worked to a definition of volunteering as necessarily unpaid, despite growing evidence of the importance of diverse forms of compensation for volunteering, particularly in African countries (Baillie Smith, Fadel, et al., 2022; Prince & Brown, 2016). Furthermore, because the UNV survey was undertaken digitally rather than face-to-face, volunteers without access to appropriate technology could not be included, which means it could not capture the volunteering experiences of populations who were more likely to be economically poor. These omissions and gaps reflect broader unequal resourcing for research between the global South and North, as well as the dominance of knowledge systems and ideas rooted in histories and geographies in the global North. In this context, research on volunteering patterns largely reflects experiences and implications of active citizenship in Europe and North America (Purdam & Tranmer, 2014), and also by work on international volunteering and youth engagement in 'gap year' activities (Hustinx et al., 2022; Laurie & Baillie Smith, 2018).

While there are limited incentives, capacities and conceptual framings supporting the measurement of volunteering in the global South, volunteers in these settings have long been seen as pivotal to low-cost service-delivery (Boesten et al., 2011; Hunter & Ross, 2013), particularly when health, social and welfare institutions have been hollowed out by the demands of neoliberalism (Georgeou, 2012; Santhosh, 2016). Research on youth volunteering has also revealed how volunteering is increasingly aligned to job seeking (Baillie Smith, Mills, et al., 2022; O'Higgins, 2020), set against a wider context of significant underemployment and unemployment (Barford et al., 2021) and global trends of social and economic change for youth populations (Smith & Mills, 2019). Hence, tackling the gaps in existing geographical scholarship and the discrepancy between policy mainstreaming of volunteering and limited evidence, requires critical new data sets that can expand current conceptualisations to encompass diverse types of activities and ways of understanding volunteering across and within settings.

Of particular significance for this paper are the connections between volunteering, citizenship and development in the context of migration and mobility. While much geographical research has focused on the mobilities of often affluent international volunteers, such as through experiences of 'gap year' or short-term international volunteer placements (Lough et al., 2018; Tiessen et al., 2021), more recent scholarship has increasingly addressed the role of volunteering by newly arrived migrants in helping support their integration (Greenspan et al., 2018; Ramachandran & Vathi, 2023). Volunteering has also received growing popular and scholarly attention in the context of the influx of refugees to Europe (Domaradzki et al., 2022). Researchers have particularly explored the roles of volunteers in supporting humanitarian service-delivery as people arrive on the continent after crossing the Mediterranean (Sandri, 2018; Stavinoha & Ramakrishnan, 2020).

In this context, Platts-Fowler and Robinson (2015) emphasise the importance of engaging with geographical understandings of space and place, including in relation to cooperative activities, to analyse the interplay of factors affecting refugee integration processes. There is also a recognised need to understand the 'proactive existence' of refugees (Sipos, 2020) influenced by different factors which include their forms of participation in civic and community life, challenging narratives dominated by volunteering *for*, not *by* refugees (e.g., Meijeren et al., 2024). Emerging scholarship has also been increasingly exploring the roles of voluntary labour when displaced populations cannot undertake paid work (Shand et al., 2021; Tazzioli, 2022) and wider research has shown the significance of volunteering in the context of State absence or weakness (Baillie Smith, 2016; Herrick & Brooks, 2020), as well as in relation to refugees' externalised and internalised coping strategies (Healey, 2006). This suggests volunteering may be a critical, although often invisible, feature of the livelihood strategies and experiences of refugee populations. But to date, we lack consistent evidence on the scale and forms of these practices across diverse contexts and with an approach attentive to social difference and demographic change.

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In this paper, we focus on data collected in Uganda, one of the world's youngest countries (ILO, 2023) and the largest refugee-hosting country on the African continent (fifth in the world by the end of 2023), hosting over 1.5 million refugees and asylum-seekers, most of them under the age of 24 years old (UNHCR, 2024). Whilst the definition of youth can vary across countries, in this study we follow the United Nations definition comprising the ages of 15–24 (both inclusive) due to its global scope and relevance (United Nations, 2013). Uganda is identified as having a relatively liberal refugee regime (Ahimbisibwe, 2020), affording refugees a right to work and providing a plot of land (Uganda Refugees Act, 2006) in line with an emphasis on 'self-reliance' (Betts et al., 2019). Refugees in Uganda are not housed in *camps* but in *settlements* in rural areas, which exist alongside host country populations, as well as within urban settings. This is then different to contexts where refugees are not formally allowed to work, meaning volunteering cannot be understood as something that happens as a consequence of a legal prevention from earning an income. However, the mainstreaming of refugees into various government policies in Uganda remains a challenge, and allowing refugees to work is not a panacea, given the administrative barriers to obtaining work permits and access to financial services, the prevalence of the informal economy, and generally limited employment opportunities (ILO, 2023). Research on refugees in the country has also particularly highlighted the challenges of securing work for young people (Shand et al., 2021; van Blerk et al., 2021), matching a challenge also experienced by young Ugandans (Action Aid, 2012). This is exacerbated by the growing impact of climate change on livelihoods in the country, with evidence suggesting that young people are often 'problem solving in the absence of wider support mechanisms' (Barford et al., 2023, p. 191).

Volunteering by refugee populations in Uganda is acknowledged by policy-makers and humanitarian actors, and more broadly, promoted by the African Union in strategies for African development and youth empowerment and skills development (Baillie Smith, Mills, et al., 2022). But the national policy framework for volunteering in the country is restricted to the Graduate Volunteer Scheme under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, which particularly targets 'Ugandan graduates as they transit from school to work' (Uganda Ministry of Gender Labour & Social Development, 2017). There is no comprehensive Ugandan volunteering policy beyond this framework, and no systematic collection of data on volunteering amongst Uganda's refugee population—despite its large numbers in the country and proclaimed role in supporting refugees lives and livelihoods. This reflects the challenges of gathering quantitative data mentioned earlier, but also the emphasis on volunteering *for* refugees, and the ways discourses and practices of volunteering from the global North are operationalised in Uganda.

The objective of this paper is to analyse quantitative data on the scale, forms and distributions of volunteering amongst young refugees in Uganda, particularly showing *who* the young refugees volunteering in Uganda are, and *why*, *where* and *how* they do it to establish grounded conceptualisations of volunteering that consider the scales, distribution, and various forms of volunteering within specific groups. Through this, we develop new lenses to understand the geographies of volunteering, identifying how place, (im)mobility, income and gender interlock to shape volunteering and its entanglement with refugee lives, inequalities and displacement.

3 | METHODOLOGY

This paper analyses findings from a large-scale quantitative survey as part of the ESRC/GCRF project 'Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda' (RYVU), an interdisciplinary collaborative research project examining volunteering by young refugees and its impacts on their skills, employability and the inequalities they experience. From 2019 to 2022, researchers from two universities in the UK (Northumbria University and Loughborough University) and two universities in Uganda (Uganda Martyrs University and Mbarara University of Science and Technology) worked with refugee communities in four sites in Uganda: Kampala City and the refugee settlements of Bidibidi, Nakivale and Rwamwanja (Figure 1). These were selected as the most populous settlements outside of Kampala (at the time the study was designed) for each of the four main refugee groups in the country (South Sudanese, Burundian, Congolese and Somali), to enable analysis of volunteering in urban and rural settings.

The project adopted a mixed-methods approach, including a large-scale in-person survey focused on youth refugees (3053 eligible responses); an online survey focused on employers (78 eligible responses); 80 qualitative interviews across participant groups; and participatory photography involving 20 young refugees. Overall, it engaged with young and adult refugees, employers, government officials, and stakeholders from humanitarian and development agencies and community-based organisations (CBOs) for data collection and also co-analysis workshops to provide their insight at different stages of the project. In this paper, we analyse data only from the in-person survey of young refugees' voluntary work. Youth Advisory Boards of 6–9 young refugees in each site were formed to advise on the project design and approaches. This echoes interdisciplinary efforts that highlight the need to critically understand meaningful youth participation in research activities (Proefke & Barford, 2023), including their particular roles as advisory members (Spencer et al., 2023), and the challenges and opportunities in this process (see also Okech et al., 2024 for more methodological information on our project's Youth Advisory Boards). Working with the Boards and wider stakeholders enabled the operationalisation of a specific definition of volunteering in the research, and this paper, that reflects young refugees' own ideas and experiences, rather than those of donors and global North scholars, as follows:

> Any time spent or expertise provided with the purpose of contributing to the refugee youth's community or other communities. This can happen occasionally or regularly, through their own initiative or with organisations (such as community groups, NGOs or UN agencies), and it can be unpaid or for a per diem or other incentive.

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FIGURE 1 Map of Uganda highlighting study areas.

To be eligible to participate in the survey, respondents had to meet three criteria: (1) be between the ages of 15 and 24 (both inclusive), following the UN definition of youth (United Nations, 2013); (2) belong to one of the four main nationalities of refugees living in Uganda (UNHCR, 2024), namely Burundian, Congolese, Somali and South Sudanese; and (3) live in one of the four research settings within the RYVU project, that is, the rural refugee settlements of Bidibidi, Nakivale and Rwamwanja or the urban setting of Kampala. For respondents below the age of 18, consent from a parent/guardian was sought in addition to assent from the respondent themselves. For the purposes of this survey, we adopted a representative sampling strategy across the four settings where a household was defined according to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) as 'a group of persons who normally live and eat together' (UBOS, 2001, p. 6).

The research team carried out a pilot survey from November to December 2020, testing design and implementation on the ground with the support of the Youth Advisory Boards. In total, during the pilot survey 213 unique responses were collected from all four settlements (Bidibidi: $n = 53$; Nakivale: $n = 49$; Rwamwanja: $n = 43$ and Kampala: $n = 68$). Following advice from the Boards, the survey questionnaire was made available to respondents in 12 languages that reflected the diversity of languages spoken by the refugee groups targeted by the study (Arabic, Bari, Dinka, English, French, Kinyabwisha, Kirundi, Luo, Nuer, Runyakitara, Somali, and Swahili). The pilot allowed us to gather sufficient responses to understand the

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questions that translated well from English, and those that did not and which could cause confusion or ambiguity. By testing the framing of specific questions and gathering feedback from the Boards on how they were perceived by youth respondents, and whether they reflected their lived realities, we were also able to improve the survey flow and design. This also gave the research team insights into how to improve the design and operationalisation of the survey, and allowed us to strengthen capacities of the team of young refugees who were engaged as enumerators in the project. The pilot was particularly relevant given that the project had been conceptualised long before Covid-19. It provided a critically important opportunity to understand the impact the pandemic could have on our ability to engage with enumerators and those taking part in the survey, which was planned to be in-person.

After the pilot stage, and following all Covid-19 precautions and guidelines in place at the time, the main survey data collection took place between February and March 2021. The study received full ethical approval from Northumbria University's Ethics Committee, the Mildmay Research Ethics Committee (MUREC), and the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), and clearance and local support from the Ugandan Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) to access the refugee settlements. A team of 71 paid enumerators, all young refugees themselves, were trained in implementing the survey. Extensive preparation sessions covered the research objectives and terminology, an explanation of each of the survey questions, the sampling strategy, and the Kobo Toolbox software, a free open-source tool used for mobile data collection in this study. The final survey was composed of 40 questions in total, examining the demographic characteristics, past volunteering and current volunteering practices of the respondents. All questions in the survey were mandatory, however the survey flow varied depending on respondents' answers in relation to their refugee status and volunteering history. The survey flow and the full survey data set are available in the supplementary materials.

Of the 3133 unique survey responses collected (Bidibidi: $n = 697$; Nakivale: $n = 913$; Rwamwanja: $n = 852$ and Kampala: $n = 671$), 19 respondents were ineligible according to the eligibility criteria of age ($n = 14$) and nationality ($n = 5$). During data processing, an additional 61 respondents were considered ineligible for data analysis because they had only answered the demographic questions in the questionnaire.[1] Therefore, the final data set of 3053 eligible respondents (Bidibidi: $n = 697$; Nakivale: $n = 898$; Rwamwanja: $n = 832$ and Kampala: $n = 626$) was coded in and analysed using SPSS.

In this paper, we present findings on volunteering participation amongst all survey participants before focusing on the largest sample group that reported volunteering activity at the time of survey data collection (i.e., 'current refugee volunteering' for the purposes of this paper). We begin by presenting their demographics to understand *who* the current volunteer respondents are, followed by data analysis on *why*, *where* and *how* they perform volunteering activities in Uganda. The independent variables of gender and settlement location were selected for the statistical analyses in this paper due to their conceptual relevance for providing a critical overview of the lived experiences of young volunteers in Uganda. This was informed both by the insights gathered from stakeholders during coanalysis workshops in the project, as well as wider geographies of displacement and the increasingly recognised significance of gender and place in understanding volunteering in different contexts (Cadesky et al., 2019; Onyango & Elliott, 2022; Wemlinger & Berlan, 2016).

4 | THE LANDSCAPE OF REFUGEE YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN UGANDA

Our findings highlight the importance of developing geographies of volunteering that capture the ways specific socio-spatial dynamics articulate to shape the scale, forms and distribution of volunteering amongst particular demographics in the global South. The survey data reveal a high level of volunteer participation amongst refugee youth in Uganda in this sample, with over 70% of respondents reporting some form of volunteering experience (see Table 1). This presents a challenge to established discourses around volunteering and displaced populations, whereby volunteering is largely an activity done *for* rather than *by* refugees. Our data suggest that volunteering is a significant feature of the lives of young refugees in Uganda. While this may align with wider rhetorics, a critical geography reveals a set of important factors that shape volunteering and its roles in people's lives. In our research, we identified four categories of respondents based on their volunteering experience: (1) *current refugee volunteers*, who were engaged in volunteering at the time of completion of the survey; (2) *past refugee volunteers*, who had engaged in volunteering after arriving in Uganda as refugees, but were not volunteering at the time of completion of the survey; (3) *pre-refugee status volunteers*, who engaged in volunteering before arriving in Uganda as refugees, but have not volunteered as refugees; and (4) *never volunteers*, who reported no volunteering experience either as refugees or before

TABLE 1 Overview of volunteering experience amongst survey participants.

Volunteering experience	Total $N = 3053$ (%)
Current refugee volunteering	1843 (60.4%)
Past refugee volunteering	275 (9%)
Only pre-refugee volunteering	46 (1.5%)
No volunteering experience pre-refugee and as refugees	889 (29.1%)
Total	3053 (100%)

[1]Due to the survey flow, after reporting having *always* been refugees (i.e., youth who were born in displacement) and not having had any volunteering experience during their life course, this category of respondents were not prompted to answer the survey questions beyond their basics demographics. This differs from the group or respondents with 'no volunteering experience prerefugee or as refugees' (see Table 1) as this category of respondents answered the set of questions related to experiences and barriers to volunteering before they became refugees.

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becoming refugees. Current volunteers constituted the majority of respondents (*N* = 1843).

This paper focuses on the primary group of refugees who were volunteering at the time of the survey data collection. As seen in the table above, they constituted the majority of survey respondents, demonstrating a high level of participation in volunteering amongst refugee groups in our sample.

4.1 | Who are the youth refugee volunteers?

The high levels of volunteering participation amongst refugee youth provide an important counterpoint to the invisibilising of the agency of refugees and other vulnerable communities in both refugee and volunteering scholarship. But given the significant social inequalities within refugee populations, it is important to understand more precisely *who* volunteers, beyond their refugee status, to challenge the powerlessness often associated with the refugee labelling (Vigil & Abidi, 2018). This also provides a means to go beyond national level data which cannot capture the specific social geographies of volunteering within particular vulnerabilised populations, such as refugees (Baillie Smith, Mills, et al., 2022). Table 2 provides an overview of the demographics of the refugee youth in Uganda who reported current volunteering engagement.

The majority of current volunteer respondents were over 18 years old, with a higher percentage of male current volunteers compared to women, patterns that were also observed in the overall sample. A higher number of men volunteering in comparison to women brings an interesting counterpoint to most volunteer studies focused on global North settings which have showed more women than men engaging in volunteering (e.g., Einolf, 2011; Musick & Wilson, 2008). As we discuss later, gender affects access to volunteer opportunities for young refugees, and also relates to income generation through volunteering. Most current volunteers also reported being refugees for at least 3 years in Uganda at the time of survey completion, which hints at how the connections and relationships built over longer periods of time might affect refugee involvement in volunteering. In this way, we can start to see how the relationship between volunteering and displacement relates not simply to place, (im)mobility or refugee status, but also to the temporalities of displacement and how social relations and connections change over time for refugees within their place of settlement.

Although Table 2 shows a majority of Congolese current volunteers, nationality was not seen as such a determinant factor in this analysis because respondents from the Democratic Republic of Congo also accounted for nearly half of the total survey sample. Therefore, statistically, the nationalities were similarly distributed across the types of participants. The overall dominance of Congolese participants in this study also reflects the fact that Uganda is the primary country of destination for the vast majority of Congolese refugees facing active conflict in their country of origin (UNHCR, 2023b), whilst the choice of Uganda as a primary

TABLE 2 Demographic characteristics of current refugee youth volunteers in the study.

Demographics	Current Volunteers, *N* = 1843 (%)
Age, N (%)	
15–17 years old	592 (32.1%)
18–24 years old	1251 (67.9%)
Gender, N (%)	
Male	1054 (57.2%)
Female	788 (42.8%)
Other	1 (0.0005%)
Time as refugee in Uganda, N (%)	
0–12 months	69 (3.7%)
1–2 years	117 (6.3%)
3–5 years	776 (42.1%)
More than 5 years	866 (47%)
Don't know	12 (0.006%)
Prefer not to say	3 (0.001%)
Nationality, N (%)	
Burundian	199 (10.8%)
Congolese	944 (51.2%)
Somali	169 (9.2%)
South Sudanese	531 (28.8%)
Settlement, N (%)	
Bidibidi (rural)	584 (31.7%)
Rwamwanja (rural)	236 (12.8%)
Nakivale (rural)	477 (25.9%)
Kampala (urban)	546 (29.6%)
Education, N (%)	
Primary	849 (46.1%)
Secondary	626 (34%)
Diploma	55 (3%)
Vocational School Certificate	49 (2.7%)
Degree	63 (3.4%)
Postgraduate	10 (0.005%)
None	187 (10.1%)
Prefer not to say	4 (0.002%)
Current employment status, N (%)	
Full-time employed	195 (10.6%)
Part-time employed	208 (11.3%)
Unemployed—looking for work	328 (17.8%)
Unemployed—not looking for work	103 (5.6%)

(Continues)

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TABLE 2 (Continued)

Demographics	Current Volunteers, N = 1843 (%)
Self-employed	310 (16.8%)
Seasonal employment	158 (8.6%)
Ad hoc employment	113 (6.1%)
Full-time student	402 (21.9%)
Prefer not to say	26 (1.4%)
Monthly household income, N (%)	
Less than 100,000 UGX (~26 USD)	916 (49.7%)
100,000–299,999 UGX (~26–78 USD)	403 (21.9%)
300,000–500,000 UGX (~78–130 USD)	125 (6.8%)
More than 500,000 UGX (~130 USD)	32 (1.7%)
Don't know	305 (16.5%)
Prefer not to say	62 (3.4%)

TABLE 3 Motivations of current refugee volunteers in the study.

Motivations of volunteers	Current Volunteers, N = 1843 (%)
To help the community	976 (53%)
To learn or gain new skills	745 (40.4%)
To get money	618 (33.5%)
To make friends	645 (35%)
To get a job	506 (27.5%)
To get more work experience	489 (26.5%)
To maintain existing skills	477 (25.9%)
To build professional networks	345 (18.7%)
To get recognition from community members	191 (10.4%)
To pass the time	191 (10.4%)
For my skills to be noticed by others	156 (8.5%)
To get formal recognition for my professional identity	116 (6.3%)

Note: Numbers and percentages do not add up to the total number of respondents or 100% because survey respondents could select multiple options.

destination is less dominant for the other nationalities in our sample. In terms of education level, most of the current volunteer respondents reported primary schooling only, followed by those with secondary education complete. Forced displacement affects refugees' schooling opportunities in diverse ways, with existing studies in the region suggesting multifold impacts (Fransen et al., 2018), including in terms of young people's aspirations for future employment (Bellino, 2021). In this context, volunteering can be perceived as an opportunity to build skills and enhance qualifications to the job market (Tukundane & Kanyandago, 2021). Our data also show variation in employment status amongst those who say they volunteer. While in other contexts, we could extrapolate from this a relationship between current paid work and volunteering participation, in Uganda this is more complex, since for many young people volunteering is seen *as* a form of work due to the remuneration associated with it (see also Overgaard, 2019).

Finally, almost half of the current volunteers are from households earning less than 100,000 Ugandan Shillings (UGX) per month, or approximately 26 US dollars (as of May 2024), which falls below both Uganda's poverty line and the international poverty line (Development Initiatives, 2020; The World Bank, 2022). This highlights the level of vulnerability experienced by refugee youth and their households in terms of monthly revenues and is a counterpoint to State narratives claiming that 'a poor man cannot volunteer' (Okech et al., 2021). It also shows the importance of data on the volunteering demographics of specific groups, particularly within the global South, as this challenges the scope of existing geographies of volunteering, highlighting the relationship between specific experiences of poverty, different forms of volunteering, and the benefits that these might bring.

4.2 | Why do refugee youth volunteer?

The most common motivations to volunteer reported by respondents—shown in Table 3—were a desire to be socially connected (e.g., volunteering to help community and to make friends) or to use volunteering as a gateway for professional development (e.g., to learn or gain new skills and maintain existing skills, earn money, get a job or gain work experience). Most of the respondents (73%) selected more than one motivation to volunteer, which suggests that the reasons for volunteering amongst youth refugees are not singular and can overlap and change over time. This is particularly important in the context of displacement, where precarity can place shifting demands on young people. This means that the scales, forms and distribution of volunteering amongst refugees depart from traditional ascriptions of volunteer motivations to demographic characteristics that are often—but not always—less fixed in global North contexts.

Whilst the motivations of helping the community and learning or gaining new skills align with wider literatures on volunteer motivation (Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995), the third most commonly selected motivation for refugee volunteers was 'to get money'. In the context of the low household income of most respondents (see Table 1), and qualitative research revealing the importance of volunteer remuneration in the global South (Baillie Smith, Fadel, et al., 2022), the survey findings highlight the importance of recognising the livelihoods dimensions of volunteering in the global South, alongside more established dimensions (see also Section 4.5 in this paper).

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4.3 | Where do refugee youth volunteer?

The data show that there was an overall prevalence of volunteering in areas geographically close to where respondents live, as described in Table 4. This offers a different scale of (im)mobility to much geographical scholarship on volunteering and development. It also underlines the significance of socio-spatial dynamics in understanding volunteering amongst refugees.

We have further analysed the data above on the distance travelled by current volunteers to perform their activities in relation to gender and settlement, as described in Table 5.

The predominance of women volunteering 'at home' might be affected by multiple factors, such as the dominance of female domestic labour or other forms of caring responsibilities (Jenkins, 2009); safety and security concerns (Cadesky et al., 2019), particularly in relation to travelling far from home; and potentially reduced access to their own means of transport. Our data show the importance in volunteering geographies not only of mobilities, which has been a frequent focus in the context of global development, but also immobilities at much smaller scales, and the ways these are shaped by gender, social class and education particularly amongst young adults (see also Haldimann et al., 2021). The high rates of volunteering in refugees' own living areas speaks to the importance of analysing social transformation through the lens of locality (Williamson et al., 2022). While dominant narratives of volunteering in humanitarian and development contexts have privileged the mobility of international volunteers, our findings highlight the significance of these different scales of (im)mobility, returned to in our later discussion.

TABLE 4 Distance travelled by refugee youth to volunteer.

Distance travelled to volunteer	Current Volunteers, *N* = 1843 (%)
Within my village	1342 (72.8%)
Up to 10 km from my home	196 (10.6%)
At home	168 (9.1%)
Different zone	64 (3.5%)
Up to 30 km from my home	37 (2.0%)
Beyond 30 km from my home	36 (2.0%)

Note: Numbers and percentages do not add up to the total number of respondents or 100% because survey respondents could select multiple options.

4.4 | How do refugee youth volunteer?

Academic and policy literatures on volunteering predominantly use the terminology of *formal* and *informal* volunteering as a way of distinguishing between volunteers' types of involvement in the sector (Overgaard, 2019; Whittaker et al., 2015). This distinction is also reflected in survey work on volunteering (e.g., UNV, 2022). However, our dialogues with Youth Advisors from the inception of this project highlighted how this language is not necessarily recognised amongst refugee groups in Uganda. Therefore, a more inclusive terminology was required, and one which did not risk working from a framing

TABLE 5 Distance travelled by refugee youth to volunteer according to gender and settlement.

		Within own village	Up to 10 km from home	At home	Different zone	Up to 30 km from home	Beyond 30 km from home	Total
Bidibidi current volunteers (*n* = 584)	Female current volunteers	165	28	24	7	2	11	237
	Male current volunteers	249	41	23	12	10	12	347
Kampala current volunteers (*n* = 236)	Female current volunteers	77	13	15	3	3	3	114
	Male current volunteers	98	4	8	3	5	4	122
Nakivale current volunteers (*n* = 476)	Female current volunteers	159	25	24	12	2	2	224
	Male current volunteers	181	34	15	14	7	1	252
Rwamwanja current volunteers (*n* = 546)	Female current volunteers	160	16	29	5	3	0	213
	Male current volunteers	252	35	30	8	5	3	333
Total		1341	196	168	64	37	36	1842

Note: The single respondent who selected 'Other' when asked about gender was removed from this table to avoid any risk of identification and breaching their anonymity in the study. This is why the total reported in the table is 1842 rather than 1843.

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derived from scholarship and experiences in the global North. Instead, survey respondents were first asked about any institutional affiliation participants they had for *volunteering with organisations or established groups*. We later conceptualised this type of involvement as 'programmed volunteering', reflecting its role in the activities of organisations engaged in humanitarian and development programming and service-delivery, with associated audits and reporting. This was followed by a second question exploring a range of options of *other types of volunteering* that occur outside the confines of such institutions, which we later conceptualised as 'refugee and community-led everyday volunteering' (see also Baillie Smith, Mills, et al., 2022).

Our findings reveal that 42.7% of respondents ($N = 786$) are involved in some form of programmed volunteering (see Table 6). At the same time, the data show a stark prevalence of refugee and community-led everyday forms of volunteering amongst refugees, with a total of 95.5% of current volunteers ($N = 1761$) reporting involvement in activities that do not require institutional affiliation. This includes 704 participants who have reported also performing programmed volunteering activities. This means that the types of volunteer engagement are not *either-or* and highlights the importance of understanding how they vary across different needs and motivations, as well as unequal access to opportunities, shaped by factors such as gender, place, mobility and income. In the following sections we develop this argument by analysing programmed and everyday forms of volunteering in further detail.

4.4.1 | Programmed volunteering

When examining the types of institutional affiliation of volunteers engaged in 'programmed volunteering', Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) ranked highest amongst current youth refugee respondents, followed by faith-based organisations (FBOs), youth groups and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), as shown in Table 7 below.

Amongst those performing programmed volunteering, there was a diverse range of activities reported by volunteers. The largest group reported on activities of community mobilisation, which largely reflects youth refugees' embeddedness in their communities and the utility this presents for organisations, followed by those working in translation, youth groups, and sports and recreation (see Table 8).

TABLE 6 Forms of volunteering of refugee volunteer participants in the study.

Forms of volunteering	Current volunteers, $N = 1843$ (%)
Refugee and community-led everyday volunteering only	1057 (57.3%)
Both programmed & refugee and community-led everyday volunteering	704 (38.3%)
Programmed volunteering only	82 (4.4%)
Total	1843 (100%)

TABLE 7 Types of organisations where refugee volunteers performed programmed volunteering.

Types of organisations	Current volunteers performing programmed activities, $N = 786$ (%)
Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)	337 (42.9%)
Faith-Based Organisation (FBO)	247 (31.4%)
Youth group	218 (27.7%)
Community-Based Organisation (CBO)	193 (24.6%)
Local association	88 (11.2%)
International organisation	42 (5.3%)
Private sector	49 (6.2%)
Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)	32 (4.1%)
Ethnic/tribal group	34 (4.3%)

Note: Numbers and percentages do not add up to the total number of respondents or 100% because survey respondents could select multiple options.

An analysis of young refugees' organisational affiliation and activities according to gender and settlement location is also revealing. These were selected as independent variables on the basis of their conceptual relevance to the study and also insight from stakeholders, as explained earlier. These were important because we sought to move beyond simply homogenising volunteers, acknowledging the different spaces and social relations depending on where they live in Uganda. We found statistically significant associations both between gender and settlement in relation to the types of organisations that participants volunteer with, as well as the types of activities they perform.

First in terms of gender, the result of the chi-square test of independence shows a statistically significant association conducted between gender and the types of organisations participants volunteered with: $\chi^2(9) = 17.87$ $p = 0.037$ (small association, Cramer's $V = 0.118$) (Cohen, 1988). The cross-tabulation analysis found that there were fewer female volunteers than expected in youth groups and private sector organisations, and more than expected in FBOs. At the same time, there were fewer male volunteers than expected in FBOs and more than expected in youth groups and the private sector. The chi-square test of independence that was conducted between gender and types of volunteering in organisations also identified a small statistically significant association, $\chi^2(9) = 29.67$, $p < 0.001$ (Cramer's $V = 0.141$). The cross-tabulation analysis showed more female volunteers than expected performing clerical activities and counselling as opposed to fewer male volunteers performing the same activities; it also showed fewer than expected female

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TABLE 8 Types of programmed volunteering activities performed by refugee volunteers.

Types of programmed volunteering activities	Current volunteers performing programmed activities, *N* = 786 (%)
Community mobilisation	257 (32.7%)
Translation	198 (25.2%)
Sports and recreation	193 (24.6%)
Manual labour	161 (20.5%)
Teaching	176 (22.4%)
Counselling	157 (20%)
Agriculture	86 (10.9%)
Clerical	53 (6.7%)
Health work	50 (6.4%)

Note: Numbers and percentages do not add up to the total number of respondents or 100% because survey respondents could select multiple options.

volunteers, as opposed to more male volunteers, in sports and recreation. This analysis of gender demonstrates divisions of labour that are consistent with findings from wider volunteering studies stating that 'men are more likely to engage in sports and recreation volunteering, while women are more likely to volunteer for religious, human services, and educational organisations' (Einolf, 2011, p. 1094). However, the particularity of place amongst refugees is critical here, meaning that while the gendered distribution may appear similar, there are different socio-spatial dynamics informing it (for more on gendered roles in this context, see Okech et al., 2024).

Second, in terms of the settlements where volunteers live in Uganda, the chi-square test of independence conducted between settlement and types of organisations found a statistically significant association, $\chi^2(27) = 68.34$ $p < 0.001$ (small association, Cramer's $V = 0.133$). The cross-tabulation analysis showed that, in Bidibidi, there were less participants than expected volunteering with NGOs and more participants than expected involved in CBOs and international organisations; in Kampala, there were fewer volunteers than expected working with local associations and more participants than expected volunteering with NGOs; in Nakivale, there were less participants than expected volunteering with local associations and more volunteers than expected involved with FBOs; and finally, in Rwamwanja, there were fewer volunteers than expected working with CBOs and FBOs, and more volunteers than expected with local associations and ethnic/tribal groups. Such differences reflect the larger presence of humanitarian and development actors and NGOs in urban Kampala, where the headquarters of organisations are often located, but also the particular humanitarian architecture surrounding Bidibidi which is the largest refugee settlement in Uganda.

The chi-square test of independence that was conducted between settlement and types of programmed volunteering activity also identified a small statistically significant association, $\chi^2(27) = 114.17, p < 0.001$ (Cramer's $V = 0.160$). The cross-tabulation analysis showed that, in Bidibidi, there were considerably fewer volunteers than expected in agriculture, fewer volunteers than expected in manual labour and health work, and more volunteers than expected in sports and recreation; in Kampala, there were fewer volunteers than expected in teaching, and more volunteers than expected in manual labour; in Nakivale, there were more volunteers than expected in health work; and, finally, in Rwamwanja, there were fewer volunteers than expected in sports and recreation as well as community mobilisation, more volunteers than expected in teaching and manual labour, and considerably more volunteers than expected involved in agricultural activities. This data highlight the diversity of voluntary labour in refugee settings and the multiple ways volunteers are engaged in their communities. Through this, we draw attention to the importance of different geographies in understanding forms of volunteering, and this applies not only to forms of 'programmed volunteering', but also 'refugee and community-led everyday volunteering'.

4.4.2 | Refugee and community-led everyday volunteering

Our research shows that forms of volunteering that did not involve institutional affiliation were prevalent in the survey sample, with the majority of current refugee volunteers performing a diverse range of volunteering activities. The largest group reported helping their faith community, followed closely by those who reported ad hoc community activities, which reflects the social embeddedness of voluntary activities. The least mentioned option was digital online activities, which points towards the challenges of digital access in this context (see full list in Table 9).

As in the previous section, the analysis of sociodemographic variables found that both gender and settlement had statistically significant associations in relation to the types of everyday volunteer activities reported by participants. First in terms of gender, the chi-square test of independence that was conducted between gender and types of volunteering in non-organisational settings identified a small statistically significant association, $\chi^2(13) = 125.62$, $p < 0.001$ (Cramer's $V = 0.176$) (Cohen, 1988). The cross-tabulation analysis showed considerably more women than expected in cooking and food preparation, and also more female volunteers than expected helping their faith community, whilst there were more male volunteers than expected providing transport for people and helping community environment, and considerably more men involved in organising sports and activities.

Second, in terms of place, the chi-square test of independence found a statistically significant association between settlements where young refugees live and the types of organisations they volunteer with, $\chi^2(39) = 259.55$, $p < 0.001$ (small association, Cramer's $V = 0.146$) (Cohen, 1988). The cross-tabulation analysis showed that, in Bidibidi, there were fewer volunteers than expected doing ad hoc community activities, and

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TABLE 9 Types of refugee and community-led everyday volunteering activities performed by young volunteers.

Types of refugee and community-led everyday volunteering activities	Current volunteers performing refugee and community-led activities, *N* = 1761 (%)
Helping with my local faith community	817 (46.4%)
Ad hoc activities in my community	780 (44.3%)
Caring for community members	565 (32.1%)
Community organising	302 (17.1%)
Language and communications help to community members	288 (16.4%)
Education and learning outside formal school	225 (12.8%)
Cooking and food preparation	220 (12.5%)
Organising sporting activities	212 (12%)
Helping with the community environment	201 (11.4%)
Mentoring and support to community members	175 (9.9%)
Providing transport for people	59 (3.4%)
Digital and online activities	32 (1.8%)

Note: Numbers and percentages do not add up to the total number of respondents or 100% because survey respondents could select multiple options.

helping the community environment, and more volunteers than expected involved in education activities outside school, mentoring support, and organising sporting activities. In Kampala, there were fewer volunteers than expected doing ad hoc community activities, and more volunteers than expected involved in education activities outside school, and providing language help. In Nakivale, there were fewer volunteers than expected involved in education activities outside school, and mentoring support, and more volunteers than expected helping their faith community, and helping community environment. Finally, in Rwamwanja, there were considerably fewer volunteers than expected involved in education activities outside school, fewer volunteers than expected providing language help and mentoring support, and considerably more volunteers than expected doing ad hoc community activities, as well as more volunteers than expected caring for community members. While geographies of volunteering have tended to focus on institutional relationships and economies, its everyday forms amongst refugees also highlight the embeddedness in neighbouring helping relations (Fong & Hou, 2017). Alongside the importance of proximity highlighted earlier in the paper, this begins to reveal the need for different lenses on the geographies of volunteering that can capture its socio-spatial dynamics amongst vulnerabilised communities.

4.5 | How does income generation relate to refugee youth volunteering?

Finally, our survey data highlight how important the relationship between income generation and volunteering is for vulnerable populations in the South (see also Prince & Brown, 2016), what a substantial role it plays for a significant number of young refugees, and how this varies across gender and place. Our data reveal that just over half of the current refugee youth volunteer respondents (50.4%) reported some form of income originating from volunteering, either fully or partially, as detailed in Table 10.

The importance of the income associated with volunteering amongst refugee youth not only troubles the established ideas of volunteering that underpin existing geographies, but it also reveals the relationship between volunteers' own vulnerabilities and why and how they volunteer. Whilst the boundaries between *work* and *volunteering* become increasingly blurred when payment is involved (Overgaard, 2019), our research also shows how the types of remuneration and access to opportunities with financial rewards are not evenly spread across groups. The analysis of sociodemographic variables from our survey data set found that both gender and settlement had statistically significant associations in relation to income generation through volunteering reported by participants.

First, in terms of gender, the chi-square test of independence that was conducted between gender and income generation through volunteering identified a small statistically significant association, $\chi^2(2) = 9.25$, $p = 0.010$ (Cramer's $V = 0.07$) (Cohen, 1988). The cross-tabulation analysis showed that more men than expected received part of their income through volunteering, whilst fewer than expected male volunteers receiving none of their income from volunteering compared to female volunteers. Hence, our data show how gender inequalities already identified in wider volunteering research (Meyer & Rameder, 2022; Wemlinger & Berlan, 2016) are particularly manifested for young refugee women in less access to remunerated volunteering opportunities relative to men in Uganda. This inequality of access and participation is a critical part of developing a geography of volunteering amongst populations that moves beyond its economic value to governments or other actors and captures who volunteers, where they live and how these factors articulate with each other.

Second, the chi-square test of independence that was conducted between volunteers' settlement and their income generation through volunteering identified a small to medium statistically significant association, $\chi^2(6) = 143.06$, $p < 0.001$ (Cramer's $V = 0.197$). The cross-tabulation analysis showed there were more volunteers than expected with all their income originating from volunteering in Bidibidi and Kampala; and less than expected in Rwamwanja. At the same time, there were fewer volunteers than expected receiving no income from volunteering in Kampala; and more volunteers than expected who did not report receiving any income from volunteering in Rwamwanja. Although further research is needed to understand the particular programming strategies employed in Bidibidi and Rwamwanja that might relate to the types of remuneration offered (or not)

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TABLE 10 Income generation through volunteering amongst refugee youth refugees.

Income generation and volunteering	Current volunteers, *N* = 1843 (%)
All income originating from volunteering	251 (13.5%)
Partial income originating from volunteering	676 (36.9%)
No income originating from volunteering	916 (49.6%)
Total	1843 (100%)

to volunteers in these rural settlements, these findings reveal a higher likelihood of income generation through volunteering in Kampala.

This suggests how the forms and distribution of volunteering articulate with wider geographies of displacement and refugees' livelihood strategies. 'Self-settled' urban refugees tend to fall between the gaps of refugee protection systems and face different and often acuter socioeconomic challenges compared to those in rural settlements (Dryden-Peterson, 2006). These challenges are 'exacerbated by programming which creates volunteer roles with significant time commitments that cannot be scheduled alongside other activities' (Steed & Valentini, 2018, p. 40). In revealing the multiple interlocking factors that shape the forms, distribution and scale of volunteering amongst young refugees in Uganda, we have demonstrated the value of a different geography of volunteering to those currently produced through existing census and surveys. In particular, we have demonstrated the need for greater attentiveness to the ways specific socio-spatial dynamics shape who volunteers, how and where. In the next section we build on this analysis and identify key features of a geography of volunteering that can enrich conceptualisations of volunteering as well as understandings of young refugees' lives, particularly in the global South.

5 | REFUGEE VOLUNTEERING, VULNERABILITIES AND LIVELIHOODS

The high levels and diverse forms of participation in volunteering by young refugees in our survey provide a counterpoint to claims that volunteering is an act of benevolence by the 'better off'. This challenges dominant perspectives that tend to categorise refugee populations only as aid recipients, overlooking specific forms of volunteering that emerge from these communities. However, our data also challenge the unproblematic celebration of volunteering by refugees as signs of their agency or in support of 'self-reliance'. By developing a geography of volunteering that builds from young refugees' own experiences and is attentive to the specific socio-spatial dynamics that affect their lives, our data also reveal how volunteering is entangled with the inequalities and vulnerabilities faced by them, and how their struggles for livelihoods are manifested in different settings (see also Baillie Smith, Mills, et al., 2022; Okech et al., 2024). This highlights the importance of questioning homogenising assumptions around volunteering in the global South, and how geography has a contribution to make in ensuring future census and surveying in this area is attentive to the nuances of place, space and social inequalities in volunteering. To move towards a different geography of volunteering which captures how its forms, scale and distribution are entangled with refugee lives and the challenges of displacement, we outline the significance of four key interlocking factors that shape who is volunteering and how. This new framework importantly captures:

(1) *Place:* the specific characteristics of the locations where refugees live shape volunteering opportunities and participation, with the presence of humanitarian and development organisations providing a different volunteering environment across refugee settlements and urban locations;
(2) *(Im)mobility:* the means and capacities to move within and between places significantly affect refugees' access to particular volunteering opportunities and the types of benefits they can bring;
(3) *Income:* the challenges of earning an income in refugee settings position volunteering firmly within the livelihoods strategies of refugee youth, making remuneration a critically important feature of their volunteering and challenging established ideas of volunteering as *necessarily* unpaid work;
(4) *Gender:* differences in volunteering activity by male and female refugees reflect the intersection of gender, (im)mobility, and opportunities for income in the specific areas where young refugees live.

These four interlocking factors provide a new framework that offers a critical challenge to the geographies that underpin established policy framings and measurements of volunteering to date. Furthermore, this approach demonstrates the importance of measurements that are attentive to the specific circumstances of different vulnerable populations. Through a focus on place, we are able to move beyond the subjectivities of those participating in volunteering and counter homogenising claims for 'refugee volunteering' or volunteering in the global South. Instead, we can explore how volunteering varies within and between places, shaped by different humanitarian and development architectures and the ways these articulate with social dynamics and relationships within those places. Through a focus on (im)mobility, we are able to capture geographies of access to, and participation in, volunteering, that are invisibilised by a focus on elite international mobilities. Capturing the relationships between volunteering and income, and in particular, gathering data across a larger population that demonstrates its significance, confirms the need for geographies of the global South to investigate

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the relationships of volunteering to livelihoods strategies, particularly amongst vulnerable groups. Whilst recognising that the gendered dynamics of volunteering is by no means new, by situating it in the context of the other interlocking factors of income, (im)mobility and place, we are able to highlight that there is a geography to the ways it shapes participation in and reward from volunteering. This once again calls for a push back against homogenising accounts that decontextualise the lived experiences of specific groups. Hence, this framework provides critical insights that are essential to understanding volunteering amongst vulnerable populations, particularly in the global South.

We now turn to our concluding remarks outlining the wider relevance of this framework, and the paper overall, for research on the geographies of volunteering and for scholars studying refugee lives and displaced populations.

6 | CONCLUSION

To date, there has been a disconnect between scholarship on volunteering in the global South, which has largely been qualitative and at micro scale, and the geographies of volunteering that underpin humanitarian and State actors' measurements and assessment of volunteering. This has meant that geographers have had limited scope to offer a critical analysis of those geographies, despite their significant influence in shaping whose work is valued, recognised, rewarded and supported. This paper has examined the scale, forms and distributions of volunteering by young refugees in Uganda, contributing to address a lacuna in scholarly work on volunteering, migration and mobility, particularly in the global South. It responds to an urgent need for extensive quantitative data on these (often hidden) practices by young refugees, given their important connections to livelihoods and community development.

The paper's analysis of survey data in the context of Uganda and our wider discussion have then offered a potential new framework for better understanding the relationship between volunteering and refugee lives that is focused on four interlocking factors: place, (im)mobility, income and gender. We have highlighted how dominant conceptual framings and methodologies often do not account for—or help us understand—volunteering in the contexts of lives that might fall outside of the demographics and geographies that have shaped much of the literature to date. Growing qualitative data on volunteering in the global South is providing rich new insights, but this also needs to be combined with data on the scale, forms and distributions of volunteering in different contexts. This is important because existing measurements of volunteering underpin policy-making and public discourses that both invisibilise the forms of voluntary labour that many young refugees undertake and privilege the forms of voluntary labour that align with established State and donor needs and agendas.

More broadly, volunteering is often seen conceptually and practically as something universal, ubiquitous in efforts to address vulnerabilities, and presented in ways that are detached from volunteers' own livelihoods challenges. However, this paper has shown how geographies of volunteering need to be much more firmly located in volunteers' specific spaces and moments of everyday life, particularly in the context of displacement. This approach applies to quantitative research as well as qualitative, ensuring that its conceptualisation respects diverse histories and experiences of volunteering, better capturing the global diversity of volunteer experiences in academic and policy debates.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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