The Vulnerable Graduates? Exploring the Post-bachelor's Degree Un/employment Experiences of Somali and Eritrean Refugees in Ethiopia

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Abstract: *The overall objective of this study was to explore the post-bachelor's degree un/employment experiences of refugees who participated in higher education using scholarships in Ethiopia. The study followed a qualitative research approach. Participants of this study were Eritrean and Somali refugee graduates, and staff from the Refugee and Returnee Service, and the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia. Policy and legal documents, and government directives pertinent to refugee education were also used as sources of data. Data were collected through interviews and review of documents. The findings indicated that higher education scholarships were beneficial for the individual refugees in terms of developing a critical consciousness about what they aspired to attain in the future and provided a slim option to pursue a legal pathway to move out from Ethiopia. For the refugee community, graduates from public universities served as a pool of human capital who could volunteer as an organized group to work against social and economic problems in the camps. However, refugees' post-bachelor's degree experiences revealed that higher education opportunities could exacerbate vulnerability if experiences after graduation did not lead to employment. The study implied that refugees who were graduates of higher education and outside the predefined categories as vulnerable by UNHCR could be susceptible to harm and marginalisation due to their status. Hence, policymakers and researchers need to understand the meaning and manifestation of vulnerability from the specific experiences of the refugees who live in varying contexts.*

Keywords: refugees, vulnerability, higher education, scholarship, Ethiopia

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Introduction

Access to education for refugees remains far lower than that of non-refugee peers at all levels of education. Globally, while 68 per cent of refugee children access primary, 34 per cent secondary, and 5 per cent access higher education (UNHCR, 2021), 91 per cent, 84 per cent, and 37 per cent of non-refugee children access primary, secondary and higher education respectively (UNHCR, 2020a). Currently, UNHCR set an ambitious target of 15 per cent enrollment in 2030 for refugee higher education (UNHCR, 2019).

This target for higher education for refugees is premised on the recent global attention afforded to the sector in various international agreements. The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2016 emphasized the importance of higher education and expressed unambiguously the need to promote tertiary education, skills training, and vocational education (UNGA, 2016, para. 82). The Global compact on refugees likewise reiterates the need for expanding and improving the quality and inclusiveness of national education systems to facilitate access to all levels of education, including tertiary education (United Nations, 2018, para. 68).

Ethiopia introduced sweeping reforms in its refugee policy, particularly since 2016 following global shifts in refugee policy. Among the most relevant components of refugee policy reforms, were the nine pledges Ethiopia made during the September 2016 New York summit on refugees and migrants where education, including higher education, was the one that charted the path towards subsequent legal and policy reforms. Following the pledges, Ethiopia, for example, revised its refugee proclamation in February 2019. Article 5 (1) of Proclamation number 1110/2019 considers a person as a refugee when:

> owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion he is outside his country of nationality, and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling, to avail himself of the protection of that country; or not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence, he is unable, or owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, he is unwilling to return to it; or owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or the whole of his country of origin or nationality, he is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality (Ethiopian Federal Negarit Gazette, 2019, pp. 1178-1179).

In 2020 Ethiopia introduced a new refugee education strategy that targets achieving 15 percent access to higher education for refugees in the country. Among departures in the new proclamation is its provision to guarantee the right to work (Binkert et al., 2021). Article 26 of the new refugee proclamation of Ethiopia guarantees the right to work for both refugees and asylum seekers. The Refugee and Returnee Service (RRS) of Ethiopia issued directives to guide the proper implementation of the provision of the 2019 refugee proclamation about the right to work. These include a directive to determine the conditions for the movement and residence of refugees outside of camps under directive number 01/2019, and another directive to determine the procedure for refugees' right to work under directive number 02/2019. Particularly, directive number 02/2019 on the right to work outlines three major routes by which refugees can access job opportunities in Ethiopia: 1) joint projects, 2) wage-earning employment, and 3) self-employment. Among the routes, the joint project's route provides refugees equal status, and the same treatment as Ethiopian nationals engaged in the same project, while the remaining routes restrict refugees' engagement to areas that cannot be

covered by Ethiopian nationals (ARRA, 2019). This study explored the post-bachelor's degree employment experiences of refugees in Ethiopia.

Statement of the Problem

Several scholars studied the importance of higher education for refugees (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Fincham, 2020; Gallegher &Bauer, 2020; Morlang & Watson, 2007; Ramsay & Baker, 2019; Tamirat & Habtemariam, 2019; Woldegiorgis, 2020). Higher education for refugees provides the necessary skills and experiences for personal growth, and local and regional connections, and creates leaders and peace builders within the society (Gladwell et.al., 2016).

Due to various reasons, Ethiopia provides an interesting case to study the value of attaining a university degree for refugees. In Ethiopia, refugees who can fulfil the university entry requirements can access university education through three modes: scholarship programs, self-sponsorship study, and teacher education programs (Woldegiorgis, 2020, p. 220). This study focuses only on the scholarship option and two scholarship programs are available for refugees in Ethiopia: the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship and the Government of Ethiopia scholarship implemented by the Refugee and Returnee Service (RRS) of Ethiopia. The Ministry of Education (MoE) of Ethiopia issued circular number 11/1-3456/1098/35 on October 25, 2010, to all regional education bureaus (REB) and the Addis Ababa City Government education bureau to facilitate refugees' access to higher education using three pathways: 1) placement examination administered to those refugees without documents and who claim achieving some higher education level in their country of origin, 2) authentication for equivalence of passing scores to what is required in Ethiopia to join university for refugees with a secondary school completion certificate from their country of origin, 3) passing grade in university entrance national examination administered by the Ethiopian MoE for refugees who completed their secondary education in Ethiopia. Those qualifying refugees are treated in the higher educational

institutions of the country under the same conditions as nationals (Woldegiorgis, 2020; Tamrat & Habtemariam, 2019), and refugee students in universities are entitled to receive the 25 per cent tuition fee scholarship either from RRS or DAFI. The remaining 75 per cent is covered by the Ethiopian government for all categories of scholarship holders.

However, there remains a persistent knowledge gap concerning the post-bachelor's degree employment experiences of refugees who completed their university education. In Ethiopia, higher education for refugees is afforded limited scholarly attention. Available studies focus on access to higher education and the experiences of students during their stay in universities. Woldegiorgis's (2020) study, drawing on reports and policy documents and emphasizing on higher education, has laid out the broader landscape for access to education for refugees in Ethiopia. Tamrat and Habtemariam's (2019) study focuses on the self-sponsored Eritrean refugees attending tertiary education in private medical colleges in Addis Ababa and investigates the challenges refugee students face during their college studies. Massa (2021) in her investigation of the experiences of 'waiting' of Eritrean refugee students attending universities in Ethiopia explained how attending university in protracted asylum is primarily a way to fill time in the present and make the present meaningful. This study focuses on the post-bachelor's degree un/employment experiences of Eritrean and Somali refugees in Ethiopia. The study addressed the following research questions.

- How do Eritrean and Somali refugee graduates in Ethiopia explain their post-bachelor's degree experiences of opportunities or barriers to transition from higher education to employment?
- What options do Eritrean and Somali refugee bachelor's degree graduates consider if attaining a university degree in Ethiopia cannot lead to job opportunities?

Vulnerability and un/employment experiences of refugee graduates: Literature Review

The concept of vulnerability traces its roots in environmental sciences (Mendola & Pera, 2021), and currently, the concept has become 'a new keyword' in refugee contexts (Sozer, 2019; Turner, 2021; Wolfens & Bekyol, 2021). The concept of vulnerability is utilized as an important lens for explaining the state of susceptibility to harm, powerlessness, and marginalization of individuals, groups, or systems (Adger, 2006). In the refugee context, vulnerability arises from multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality, and from structural and social dynamics that can lead to diminished and unequal levels of power and enjoyment of rights (UNGA, 2018). Vulnerability as a concept can be employed in diverse uses with a variety of dimensions (Mendola & Pera, 2021). Mendola and Pera (2021) and Sozer (2019) have presented expanded categories into which the notion of vulnerabilities can be understood. Refugees' vulnerability can be inherent or situational. The inherent vulnerability of refugees is universal due to the intrinsic characteristics of human beings who are biologically perishable and socially dependent (Sozer, 2019). Hence, refugees can be exposed to inherent vulnerability by the virtue of their being human, for instance, as women, men, children, or the elderly. The situational vulnerability which can be a particular condition of refugees results due to the external context to which refugees are forcibly exposed as the result of personal, social, political, and/or environmental circumstances (Mendola & Pera, 2021; Sozer, 2019). Vulnerability can also be a potential or actual condition for refugees. A state of proneness to harm, powerlessness, and marginality in a physical or social system is a potential state but with a possibility to avert it.

Refugeehood by its very nature can expose individuals to a potential vulnerability that can metamorphose into an occurrent vulnerability if it is not averted. Circumstances of refugees, therefore, depend on a powerful mix of inherent and situational vulnerability, both potential and actual (Mendola & Pera, 2021; Sozer, 2019). For many years humanitarian

institutions considered refugees as collectively vulnerable. Flegar (2002) discusses vulnerability in the context of a multitude of diverse and overlapping labels the refugee discourse mobilizes to frame and institutionalize who should be prioritized in providing protection and services. Through time, vulnerability as a collective condition of all forced migrants has evolved and shifted towards denoting a category of forced migrants who are designated as vulnerable. As a result, currently, vulnerability as a notion does not denote the specific conditions of refugees; rather it becomes a label classifying refugees into deserving and undeserving categories (Sozer, 2019). International organizations like the UNHCR currently have a pre-identified list of groups among refugees who could be considered vulnerable (Felgar, 2018). This listing and order resulted, as Sozer (2019) argues, in a shift from the age-old humanitarian concern with forced migrants' vulnerability to concern for vulnerable forced migrants. Turner (2021) argues that particularly since the 2010s humanitarian actors have started to assess the most vulnerable among refugees using various frameworks so that attention and resources can be focused on these groups. Hence, vulnerability becomes a new crucial label for classifying refugees with strong implications for accessing preferential treatment to services and opportunities.

Studies have documented the benefits of higher education for refugees in preparing for gainful employment (Crea & McFarland, 2015; Gladwell et.al., 2016). Nonetheless, refugees are not allowed to work in around 50 % of asylum countries (UNHCR, 2018). Several studies have documented that unemployment can expose refugee graduates to multiple vulnerabilities including skill decay (Arthur et.al., 1998; Klostermann et.al., 2022), continued dependence on aid and adopting negative coping mechanisms such as secondary movement (Zetter & Ruaundel, 2016). Abur and Spaaji (2016, p. 109) documented the impact of unemployment on refugees stating that unemployment, 'if unresolved, is likely to negatively influence settlement, health, and well-being. The International Labor Organization (ILO) considers someone unemployed

if the person has no work, is available to work, and is seeking work (ILO, 1982).

Schuetter and Caron (2020), and Zetter and Ruaudel, (2016, 2018) identified multiple factors that can complicate ensuring the right to employment for refugees. For example, Schuetter and Caron (2020) and Zetter and Ruaudel (2018) identified that restrictive policy and legal provisions, a complicated and lengthy bureaucratic process required to get work permits, restrictions on other rights of refugees like the right to movement, and labour law conditions in host states that discriminate refugees from accessing employment in some sectors are among the major factors challenging refugees right to work. There are also many real obstacles and challenges that refugee-hosting nations can encounter to include refugees in the labour force, ranging from political economy concerns to labour market capacity and conditions, and the resources and skills of the refugees themselves (Zetter & Ruaundel, 2016). However, these factors influence refugees' right to work in different national contexts differently and the importance of the factors differs from one national context to another.

In some national contexts, while refugees' right to work is guaranteed, a plethora of requirements to get a work permit practically limit ensuring this important right. Such requirements may include getting a residence permit, securing a job offer, clearing that the employment position the refugee is going to occupy cannot be covered by the citizens, and the job is not in the list of prohibited sectors for foreign nationals including refugees (Zetter & Ruaundel, 2018). In contexts where refugees are required to live in camps, there are multiple ways by which refugees' right to movement can be limited. Accessing ration assistance can be contingent on a camp residence, pass permits can be required to move outside the vicinities of the camps and refugee camps can be located in remote locations with poor infrastructure (UNHCR, 2018). The interplay among such factors can limit movement and access to the labour market for refugees. It can also leave refugee graduates in camps in a vulnerable situation with limited access to job opportunities.

Lack of the right to work usually means working (if at all) in the informal sector; this is likely to increase the vulnerability of refugees and diminish their potential contribution to the host country's economy, especially in conditions of protracted displacement (Brown et al., 2018). Staying unemployed or underemployed for a long period has dire consequences for young refugee graduates. Arthur et.al. (1998) and Klostermann et.al. (2022) have argued that skills and knowledge can be lost due to continued non-use and hence skill decay takes place. Skill decay can expose graduates to the inability to retrieve the formerly acquired knowledge or skill and has the consequence of decreased performance when the particular skill is put into practice. Zetter and Ruaundel (2016, p. 24) reported that in a context where the right to work for graduate and skilled refugees is limited, refugees are prone to 'lose out' their knowledge and skills and hence become vulnerable to unemployment or underemployment. Restrictions on the right to work for refugees, and particularly graduate refugees, can drive decisions for risky secondary movement with all the accompanying protection concerns and susceptibility to harm. Such a decision is particularly significant in contexts where refugees are required to live in camps with limited possibility to get employment (Zetter & Ruaundel, 2016).

Methodology

Methodologically, this research was qualitative. The study was guided by analytical principles rather than universal rules (Becker, 2009). The study employed a case study design. Yin (2011) proposed that case study design can be appropriate when the research poses ‘why’, ‘how’ or ‘what’ questions, when the researcher has little control over the issue under investigation, and when the focus of the research is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.

The convenience sampling method was employed to select participants from Somali and Eritrean refugees from Addis Ababa and the refugee camps. Key informants and pertinent documents were selected using purposive sampling (Patton, 2002). Data were collected through

interviews and document reviews. A total of sixteen interviews were conducted: four key informant interviews were conducted with actors who were actively involved in refugee higher education at different levels in the MoE and RRS of Ethiopia, and twelve in-depth interviews with Eritreans and Somalis refugees who graduated from public higher education institutions in Ethiopia. Eritrean and Somali refugees were included in this study because they accounted for the largest number of refugee higher education students in Ethiopia (Tamirat, 2019). In-depth interview data were collected from a small sample of Eritrean and Somali refugee graduates who were willing and available to share their post-bachelor's degree experiences. In addition, national refugee policy and legal documents directly related to refugee education and employment were reviewed and used to supplement data generated through interviews.

Interviews with refugee graduates raised several issues. Examples of issues focused on in the interview included the expectations of the graduates from university education and the scholarship; post-bachelor's degree experiences of un/employment; personal and refugee community-level consequences of being unemployed; options unemployed refugees commonly consider, their long-term plans in life, and the strategies they follow to achieve their plans. During key informant interviews the policy and the legal context in Ethiopia and how these explain the provision of higher education scholarships and refugee post-bachelor's degree employment experiences were emphasized. In addition, the overall positive or negative impact of higher education scholarship on the refugees and the host community were focused on. The trustworthiness of the data was ensured by generating data on related questions using many instruments of data collection.

The study engaged in analyzing the collected data from various sources following the practical steps proposed by Yin (2016). A verbatim transcription of all interviews conducted in a language other than English was made in the English language. Data analysis in this research started with data collection because the researcher while collecting data

simultaneously transcribed interviews, organized and summarized the transcripts, and engaged in understanding the initial meanings of the data. Coding was undertaken by passing through the successive stages of repeated reading of the transcripts and highlighting important issues related to the research questions, presentation of important ideas from each participant in line with the questions in the key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and assembling important ideas of each participant in the research about the data collection guides used. This led to the generation of important themes that guided the organization of the findings. Research with vulnerable groups like refugees requires attending to specific ethical concerns and implementing sensitive ethical considerations (Jacobsen & Landau, 2003). In this study, all the ethical considerations including informed consent, the anonymity of participants, and confidentiality of information were carefully considered.

Findings

Table 1: Characteristics of participants[2]

Name	Country of Origin	Sex	Years of Stay in Ethiopia	Name	Country of Origin	Sex	Years of Stay in Ethiopia
Dani	Eritrean	Male	8	*Hadi*	Somali	Male	16
Hagos	Eritrean	Male	12	*Hassen*	Somali	Male	19
Fikremariam	Eritrean	Male	9	*Hamse*	Somali	Male	24
Seyat	Eritrean	Female	9	*Abdiselam*	Somali	Male	16
Hareg	Eritrean	Female	8	*Muna*	Somali	Female	21
Joti	Eritrean	Female	10	*Hawi*	Somali	Female	21

Characteristics of Participants

Participants in this study are Eritrean and Somali refugees who have already completed their bachelor's degrees and graduated from Ethiopian public universities. All the refugee participants are beneficiaries of the higher education scholarship scheme supported

[2] All the names used in this study are pseudonyms.

either by the government of Ethiopia or DAFI. Among the participants 5 (42 percent) are female. On average Somali refugee graduates in this study have stayed 19.5 years in Ethiopia while the average stay in Ethiopia for Eritrean refugees was 9.3 years. Some of the Somali refugee graduates were born in refugee camps in Ethiopia and lived all their life in Ethiopia. Among the 12 refugee graduates who participated in this study, 9 (75 per cent) of them benefited from the higher education scholarship supported by the Ethiopian government while the remaining 3 (25 per cent) were beneficiaries of the DAFI scholarship. In addition to refugee graduates, four experts (all male) working on refugee education in the Ministry of Education and RRS participated in this study. The findings of this study are organized into four themes—expectations, worries, life after graduation, and the future - that emerged during the analysis of data.

Expectations: Employment and further education

Joining a university to pursue education at the bachelor's level is often one of the important moments in the life of the youth that comes with expectations. Refugees who joined public universities in Ethiopia using scholarship opportunities from DAFI or the government recall their expectations and the efforts they exerted to achieve what they expected after graduation in various ways. Analysis of data suggests that the expectations of refugee graduates are mainly shaped by the arrangements of the scholarships. These arrangements include such things as refugees attending the same university course as Ethiopians, the support of the Ethiopian government for the scholarship, and promises from the government refugee agency. Due to the interplay among these factors, refugee graduates repeatedly emphasized equal treatment with Ethiopians in their expectation for employment upon graduation. They also assert their expectations as a deserving person with merits. Supporting this view, Dani, an Eritrean refugee, for example, shared the short-term and long-term expectations he had after graduation by saying, *I was thinking to pursue education at master's level and beyond. Another expectation I had was I would get an employment*

opportunity. I thought I could be assigned to jobs like any other Ethiopian. A similar view was echoed by Hadi, a Somali refugee who stated: *As a human being I had expectations. My goal was to earn a bachelor's degree and continue with a master's degree. I had expectations to get employment just like other Ethiopian students in the university.*

The frame of their expectation constructs clear anticipation of the way through life and the changes that aspired to happen upon graduation (Pickhardt, 2011). Expecting further education and employment opportunities are quite normal after pursuing higher education; however, in the refugee contexts like Ethiopia where there are multiple roadblocks for refugees towards both, understanding what shaped the expectations is important.

For the earlier cohorts of Eritrean refugee graduates who joined universities from 2010-2015, their expectations were mainly shaped by the initial attention given to the refugees' higher education and promise from the Ethiopian Refugee Agency. The first cohort of 140 Eritrean refugees joined Mekelle University in the Tigray region in 2010 (Gebreiyosus, 2018). Several news agencies reported this as a landmark event. For instance, *Sudan Tribune* in its October 15, 2010, report stated that *hundreds of Eritrean refugees who have for years been camped at various refugee camps in Northern Ethiopia, for the first time began joining Ethiopian-owned higher institutions* and quoted a Mekelle University staff who, on condition of anonymity, said that *there will be an official welcoming ceremony at Mekelle university.* Analysis of interview data shows some bold promises from the Ethiopian government refugee agency for Eritrean refugees regarding opportunities after graduation. In an interview, for instance, Dani, an Eritrean refugee graduate, recalls the list of promises from the government refugee agency, and these include *getting employment immediately and resettlement opportunities because developed countries prefer educated refugees*.

Analysis of data from documents suggests that the list of issues refugee graduates shared during interviews as promised by the government aligns with the aims of policies for the provision of higher education for refugees in Ethiopia. For instance, on October 27, 2010, the Ethiopian MoE issued a directive that determined conditions to accommodate Eritrean refugee students in the Ethiopian education system including in universities. In this directive, one of the aims for expanding the opportunity for education for Eritrean refugees is to *ensure that refugees can lead a better life in the future using the knowledge and skills they gain during their stay* in Ethiopia. The 'better life' stated in the Ethiopian 2010 directive is assumed to be achieved, as refugee graduates expect, through access to employment.

Analysis of data from government offices also explains how the initial government decisions and actions to introduce higher education scholarships for refugees promoted expectations of employment after graduation. For example, staff from the government agency in an interview commented that *higher education opportunities for refugees were initially expanded to create conditions for meaningful engagement of refugee youth against the idle conditions in the refugee camps.* He added *the demand for refugees to practice their right to work and employment has increased after the February 2019 refugee proclamation of Ethiopia which provides for these rights.*

However, the policy landscape and legal provisions in Ethiopia within which refugees expect employment after graduation are complex and elusive. Unlike the promises from the government refugee agency, refugees have extremely limited or no possibilities to get employment or be resettled in developed countries except working as incentive workers in the camps. In an interview, staff from a government agency emphasized the common employment opportunity for refugee graduates saying, *that refugee graduates usually get employment in various sectors in the refugee camps as incentive workers.* However, the demand for employment can be felt in the office of the government

agency responsible for refugees with an increasing accumulation of unemployed or underemployed graduates over several years.

Worries related to graduation

Refugee graduates in this study remember the graduation period from the universities with mixed feelings. On the one hand, they share feelings of accomplishment and relief, on the other hand, they narrate the feelings of worries they suffered. The feeling of worry, as the analysis of interview data from refugee graduates shows, was accentuated by the gap between expectation and reality informed by unsuccessful experiences from earlier cohorts of graduates. Confirming this view, Hagos, an Eritrean refugee, for instance, recalls the year when he was a graduating class student and his worries as follows.

> It was not just the graduation day, but the whole year when I was in graduating class was very worrying. It was a very difficult year. One of the reasons for this was we are carefully following what happened to the earlier cohorts of graduate refugees from the same scholarship program. Because what happens to them indicates whether our expectations can come true or not. (Interview, December 2021)

In addition, analysis of data suggests that the anticipated *termination* with the graduation of various valued experiences, packages of support, and most importantly, rights associated with the scholarship prolonged the period of worry. Compared to life in refugee camps, universities have played a significant role in redefining life for refugees. The following data from Hassan, a Somali refugee, that compares the conditions that await refugees during their return to camps with his experience in the university campus can validate the above finding.

> The question in my mind was where would I go after the end of the course? How will I continue living in the refugee camp again? The quality of life in the university was by far better and more

> advanced compared to what I will face while I go to the camp. At the university, we had free Wi-Fi, clean bedrooms, and sufficient and good food. It is in the middle of the city with electricity and clean water. After graduation, we are supposed to go back to the camp located in a rural place with a very hot and harsh climate. I was worried and I was tortured with the idea of moving from campus to the camp after graduation. (Interview, February 2022)

Similarly, Seyat, an Eritrean female refugee, compares her life in the refugee camp and on the university campus by saying:

> Life on the campus was much better than the refugee camp. Life in the refugee camp was very difficult. In the university, at least, we are not worried about food. And to have food and higher education was one of the best opportunities. (Interview, December 2021)

The above portrayal of life on the university campus and in the refugee camps by Hassen and Seyat is reminiscent of a stark contrast between these two places where refugee graduates in this study have firsthand experiences. These worries are informed by the collective experiences of refugee graduates whose right to work did not materialize. The university's academic requirements allowed them to invest their time in meaningful activities. Typical days of the refugees in universities are marked by a series of activities with a certain structure and content (Massa, 2020).

Analysis of interview data from the refugee graduates indicates that some of the Eritrean refugees consider other options to avoid returning to camps after graduation. Supporting this view, Seyat commented on the options refugee graduates consider by stating that *they* (refugee graduates) *move to Addis Ababa and start to share a small room and live together.*

Thus, analysis of data points out that upon graduation what comes next is joining the earlier cohorts of graduates who returned to camps and staying idle in the camps or cities. However, for refugee graduates returning to camps was not only a shift in geographic place from the university campus to a refugee camp. It rather entails a much more meaningful shift in terms of quality of life and access to modern infrastructure. As Massa (2022) highlighted, attending universities in Ethiopia has allowed refugees to enjoy some of the rights which are otherwise complicated and/or impossible to practice. For example, it allows refugees to live outside camps legally in the cities obtaining housing and food. Higher education scholarships for refugees facilitate access to additional financial support in the form of pocket money, and transportation and clothing allowances. Graduation, hence, was exciting for it could mark the completion of study for a bachelor's degree, but it was mainly worrying for scholarship students from refugee camps because with graduation the special privilege they had to live outside camps terminates immediately.

Life after graduation: Encounters with reality, readjustment, and options

For some of the refugee graduates, experiences of life in refugee camps or Addis Ababa city after graduation are mainly narrated in terms of facing reality on the ground and making the best out of what is available. For those refugees who returned to camp the initial days, weeks, and sometimes months were filled with struggles to readjust to the social and physical environment. Adjusting to the physical environment in terms of the weather conditions and availability of basic infrastructure, for instance, was non-optional. However, the social environment of family, friends, and the organizations that provide various social and basic services present several options to carefully evaluate and follow. As time went on in the refugee camps, analysis of data showed, refugee graduates were gradually immersed into the social and economic fabric in the camps. Supporting this view, Fikremariam, an Eritrean refugee, described his experience after moving back to the camp in the following manner:

> I started to think about what to do after I moved to camp. Together with a friend who is also a graduate, we decided to start working as incentive teachers. I have not even checked with authorities about the pay because I learned from the earlier cohorts of graduates that they were assigned as incentive teachers for small money. For me, it was like a dead case, and I did not check. I applied to start working as an incentive teacher enclosing my Ethiopian certificate and the administration invited me to start the job the next day. (Interview, December 2021)

Similarly, Hamse, a Somali refugee who got his bachelor's degree in 2020, said, *I am currently a teacher in a refugee camp school. I also volunteer in awareness-raising activities against, for instance, drug addiction for the youth and mobilize the community to send children to school.*

Analysis of data suggests that moving to Addis Ababa can give refugee graduates the opportunity to follow up on the resettlement process, connect easily with family and friends abroad, and continue experiencing city life. However, affording the house rent, food, and transportation costs in the city is challenging. For example, Seyat, in an interview pointed to the difficulties she and other fellow refugee graduates encountered in Addis Ababa by saying *we try to find jobs but also we try the process for resettlement. Being in Addis Ababa is very important to try job opportunities though it is extremely challenging in terms of supporting oneself.* Analysis of data further revealed that refugees who moved to Addis Ababa after graduation can hardly access even the incentive work which is available in the camps. The following narration from Seyat regarding the challenges refugee graduates face in Addis Ababa explains the above finding.

> I tried almost every vacancy I read. My experience was of several rounds of disappointment. Nobody calls me even for an interview. I am usually left out during the initial screening. I even tried to work for a broadcasting company as a sales promoter on the

> roads of Addis Ababa for commission payments. It was a disappointing experience. None of my friends are successful in securing a job. Currently, they are in deep depression and feeling stuck. Expecting remittances from family and friends every day is hurting. (Interview, December 2021)

The above data can also shed light on how difficult it can be to navigate Addis Ababa to apply for vacancies but also to get resources to cover the cost of living and transportation.

Analysis of data revealed that incentive work in the camps served as an initial psychological anchor for some of the refugee graduates to further explore more opportunities. Supporting this view, Dani, for example, narrates how, together with his friend, he ventured into the unconventional path for graduate refugees in the camp as follows:

> While working as an incentive teacher I, together with my friend, started looking into options to start a small business in the camp. For this, we constructed a small mud-break house with the roof covered by a plastic sheet. We were lucky to get the start-up capital from the money we saved from the per diem payment for attending a workshop on pedagogy outside the camp. Then we started selling snacks and other breakfast food. In a relatively short period, the business becomes successful. We expanded the business and started serving juices and operating a DSTV live streaming that shows soccer games. (Interview, December 2021)

Data from Somali refugee graduates have also shown similar experiences of using incentive work to explore more opportunities. In an interview, Abdiselam, for instance, shared his experience of how he eventually got employment in the Somali region of Ethiopia as follows:

> I submitted lots of applications. I even requested to work as a volunteer in many government organizations. But because of my status as a refugee, it was difficult to get employment. Finally, I

> got employment in Jigjiga- the capital city of the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia. (Interview, February 2022)

Analysis of data further suggests that depending on the context the strategy refugee graduates follow to access employment can be informal. For example, Abdiselam, a Somali refugee, resorted to the tradition of the Somali community and mobilized, as he said during the interview *an influential elderly clan leader to convince the organization of my current employer.* Compared to the national origin where a Somali person came from, clan and sub-clan dynamics largely mediate the Somali community structure and support system (Lewis, 2003).

However, analysis of interview data from Eritrean refugees suggests that such informal networks that some Somali refugees used to access employment are the most irritating aspect of the job search experience of Eritrean refugees. Supporting this, Seyat, an Eritrean refugee, for example, shared how she used all the available options to apply for jobs in Addis Ababa and her disappointment with the informal networks:

> I use online platforms like Ethiojobs. I check vacancies on all the possible online platforms. I also read a local newspaper called *Reporter* which has a section for vacancies. Among several challenges I faced during my job search one that irritates me most is the informal networks of relatives and friends that mediate the employment process. (Interview, December 2021)

After several rounds of application Seyat, as she noted during the interview, was 'lucky' to get employment in a private firm in Addis Ababa. But the salary she earns is low as she reported. Similarly, Muna, a female Somali refugee echoed the same challenges in their job search in Addis Ababa saying:

> I applied for jobs in different organizations. They all raise my status to deny employment. Over the last six months, I was not even invited for a job interview or examination, and currently, I am

> frustrated after a long job search with no results. (Interview, February 2022)

For refugee graduates, as the analysis of interview data shows, searching for 'wage-earning employment' often requires travelling outside camps to cities and staying away from family which has cultural, protection, and financial implications. In addition to challenges such as getting a pass permit from RRS to travel outside the camps, data analysis has revealed that being a female is another source of frustration for refugees who move to refugee camps after graduation. Confirming this finding, Muna, a Somali refugee, highlighted how being a female complicates job search by saying the following:

> When I go out to apply for a job my family is worried about my safety and the money I should pay for transportation and accommodation. Sometimes we miss the deadline for job applications while waiting for a pass permit from RRS. (Interview, February 2022)

Analysis of data suggests that higher education scholarships for refugees have created opportunities for refugee graduates to organize themselves into associations. For instance, all Eritrean refugee graduate participants in this study confirmed that they are members of 'The Eritrean Refugee University Graduates and Students Association (ERUGSA).' This association, as Dani reports in an interview, is a self-help association established to serve as a platform to discuss problems of the Eritrean refugee community and to coordinate volunteer actions of graduates against some of the critical social problems in refugee camps including, for example, youth drug addiction, illegal migration, and gender violence. Participants in this study further noted that ERUGSA is also coordinating voluntary tutorial services for high-achieving and motivated refugee children and organizing additional scholastic materials support for such students raising funds from the Eritrean diaspora. During interviews, Eritrean refugee graduates recounted that ERUGSA was a platform to network with the Eritrean diaspora to share

information about legal migration options including scholarship opportunities in the Universities in developed countries. During interviews, Somali refugee graduates mainly refer to DAFI scholarship students' associations for the exchange of information and networking.

The Future: Empowerment and Vulnerability after Graduation

The hope of international actors in supporting higher education scholarship opportunities like DAFI in the refugees' first countries of asylum like Ethiopia is that with better education refugees can begin to see their futures in these places (Dryden-Peterson, 2022). Analysis of data indicates that higher education opportunities through scholarships were successful in disrupting the rush of refugee youth to leave Ethiopia through illegal means. It has given me a window of opportunity to explore all the available options to move out from Ethiopia where there are better opportunities. It has also given additional means to try legal pathways to Europe through scholarships to pursue education beyond a bachelor's degree, and thus it is empowering. For example, refugee participants during interviews frequently mentioned scholarship opportunities through University Corridors for Refugees (Uni-CO-Re) in Italian Universities and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAA) scholarship as important legal pathways to Europe. In addition, analysis of interview data shows that the future all refugee graduate participants aspire to is almost identical and unfortunately, all of them do not see their future in Ethiopia.

Participants in this study noted that information about scholarship opportunities are shared with refugee graduates posted on the UNHCR notice boards in refugee camps, through social media platform called telegram groups that refugees establish, and through diaspora refugees who are keen to facilitate legal pathways out from Ethiopia. However, those graduates in refugee camps lament the difficulties they face in applying for scholarships and doing interviews due to internet connectivity problems. For some of the refugees in this study, multiple failures in scholarship applications to study in Europe created fatigue

and dropped altogether this as an option. However, analysis of data indicated that refugees also have skill problems in carefully respond to all the questions the scholarship application processes require. In addition, a lack of resources constrains the majority from flexibly dealing with the scholarship application process. Supporting this finding, Dani, who was an incentive teacher, with the experience running a successful micro-business, has explained how the availability of resources can promote opportunities as follows:

> I started pursuing my real dream after I created a financial capacity that can support myself from the micro-business. Because I have money I can go to the nearby city and print documents. I can use Wi-Fi and afford to pay for it. What changed my condition most and pushed me to pursue my dream is the opportunity I created to get more income. That was critical. (Interview, December 2021)

During the interview, Dani, however, disclosed that the incentive teaching job and his active role in the ERUGSA, which he describes both as a 'service to his community, and the business he paid dearly to see it successful, all gone due to the war in the Tigray region of Ethiopia where Eritrean refugees are hosted. In an interview, he said: 'all literally gone due to the war, and financially I went back to where I started.' The Tigray war which started in November 2020 exposed Dani and all other participants in this study to multiple displacements. Some of the Eritrean refugees managed to arrive in Addis Ababa in February 2021. Dani, Hagos, Fikremariam, and other participants in this study were among those who arrived.

Analysis of the interview data showed that higher education opportunities are the single most important resources that cannot be easily lost even in the context of war and multiple displacements. For example, after the loss of his entire business, Dani, an Eritrean refugee, was able to come to Addis Ababa with his educational credentials to continue his scholarship application, and finally, in early 2022, he got

accepted through the Uni-Cor-Re scholarship scheme to study in a university in Italy. The only property Dani saved from the destruction due to the Tigray war was the bachelor's degree he got from an Ethiopian university. This degree paved the way for the future Dani aspires to achieve - to move out from Ethiopia legally. Similarly, Abdiselam, a Somali refugee, was successful to be accepted into a University in Germany through the DAAD scholarship to pursue a master's degree, and Fikermariam, another Eritrean refugee, secured a Uni-Cor-Re scholarship and was accepted into the University in Italy to continue a master's degree. All these examples show the hopes and the empowering potential of higher education scholarships for refugees in Ethiopia.

Unlike the experiences of the above-discussed refugees, as the analysis of data suggests, for many, the lack of employment opportunities in Ethiopia after graduation means that there is nothing more they can wait for and see, thus exposing oneself to various vulnerabilities. Participants expressed in several ways their frustration due to the lack of opportunities in Ethiopia and the continued dependence on family and food aid. For instance, Muna, during the interview said, *I do not have money, I do not have a job. I am still a burden on my poor family. I am currently considering migrating to Turkey or Saudi Arabia*. Similarly, Hamse, during the interview said, *I am a burden on my family who are refugees themselves without income. Living in a family home is very disappointing for a graduate. I do not know how long I will continue this way*. Furthermore, Hagos, an Eritrean refugee, and Hassen, a Somali refugee expressed during the interviews their disillusionment after all their efforts to find a job in Ethiopia or to leave Ethiopia through scholarship failed repeatedly saying *I do not know what to do next*.

Analysis of data indicated that unemployed or underemployed refugee graduates experience several psycho-social challenges. During interviews, participants in this study recounted their observations regarding the psycho-social challenges their friends experienced after graduation. For example, Seyat, during an interview, shared the

following general observation regarding her female friends - some of them are also graduates with bachelor's degrees.

> We have resettlement processes to follow up. The processes are not reliable. They fail and that creates frustration for female refugees. They get into negative coping mechanisms as a result. We often discuss trying secondary movement. Female refugees engage in arranged marriages as a coping mechanism which usually ends up in unpleasant experiences. They may marry a very old diaspora or person whom they do not know just to get an opportunity to leave Ethiopia. (Interview, December 2021)

Echoing the above view, Dani, during the interview highlighted the psychological challenges refugee graduates in camps suffer due to lack of opportunities saying *disappointment due to lack of opportunities is driving graduates to hopelessness, carelessness, alcohol and drug addiction, and irregular migration. One of the tasks we were engaged in ERUGSA was to give counselling services to such refugee graduates.* During the interviews, almost all participants recounted stories of friends and family members who left Ethiopia to reach Europe through illegal routes using the networks of human traffickers. Participants raised that their friends are exposed to anti-social and aggressive behaviours involving conflicts and violence. In Eritrean refugee camps, as participants recounted, graduates have pressure from family back home to show progress in life mainly through moving onward from Ethiopia.

Analysis of data suggests that unemployment or underemployment of graduate refugees has a negative impact on the motivation of refugee children to learn and the refugee families' interest in investing in children's education. During the interviews, both Dani, an Eritrean refugee, and Abdiselam, a Somali refugee, shared their observations regarding such negative impact of the lack of job opportunities for graduate refugees on the attendance and motivation of refugee children in the refugee camps. Dani, during an interview, for example, highlighted his observation by stating *yes, that motivation to engage in education is*

drastically decreasing with the availability of lots of unemployed graduates in camps. Similarly, Abdiselam, in an interview echoed the same saying 'Parents say, look, our children after graduation are coming back home and staying with us. So why do we send others to school? The youngsters do not see the future.' Thus the presence of many unemployed graduate refugee youth in the camps is setting a bad model for school children and discouraging families from investing in the education of their children.

Discussion

The experiences of refugees who graduated with a bachelor's degree from Ethiopian higher education institutions can reveal the benefits higher education can present (Fincham, 2020); but also show how higher education opportunities can exacerbate vulnerability if experiences after graduation are not rewarding. The potential of higher education in developing a critical consciousness among refugee graduates towards the problems in the refugee community and their strong sense of service and organization to deal with these problems are among the major benefits. In this regard, higher education has provided much-needed human capital for refugee communities to deal with their current problems (Dryden-Peterson, 2010). ERGUSA and its activities can embody such potential of higher education. For refugees' higher education scholarships have provided additional options to think about the future (Massa, 2022). The bachelor's degree refugees earned from Ethiopian higher education institutions opened a new avenue to apply for scholarships and try to achieve a slim legal pathway to move to Europe, in particular. These possibilities are empowering for they have brought meaning and purpose to the lives of the refugees. Some refugee graduates, in this regard, have demonstrated an example of a life filled with passion, flexibility, and commitment.

The post-bachelor's degree expectations might vary. Studies, however, show that improving employment prospects and attaining a good job are common expectations among youth pursuing bachelor's degrees (Glover et al., 2002; Cheng et al., 2021). For all refugee graduates in this study attaining employment after graduation is the major expectation. However, consistent with Schuetter and Caron's (2020) observations, in Ethiopia, several *de jure* and *de facto* obstacles can hinder refugees from achieving their right to work. The legal options for employment for refugee graduates are complicated in Ethiopia due to several requirements to obtain a work permit.

The expectations of refugees for employment after graduation mainly refer to what is termed as 'wage-earning employment' in Article 26 (1) of the Ethiopian 2019 refugee proclamation. This article provides for refugees and asylum seekers the right to engage in wage-earning employment 'in the same circumstances as the most favourable treatment accorded to foreign nationals under relevant law.' RRS directive number 02/2019 defines wage-earning employment as 'the performance of professional or manual work by a refugee or an asylum seeker who is employed permanently or temporarily in consideration for a wage' (ARRA, 2019, p. 3). In part III of the RRS directive number 02/2019 that details conditions to engage in wage-earning employment, obtaining a work permit is stipulated as the necessary condition. The work permit is issued by the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA). However, it requires refugees to pass through complex and often impossible bureaucratic processes to get a work permit. For instance, to be issued with a work permit, RRS must verify and write a letter of confirmation to MoWSA that 'the work in respect of which work permit is requested may not be covered by Ethiopians' (ARRA, 2019, p. 9). The directive further requires employers to report to RRS any communications made to the MoWSA regarding the refugee or asylum seeker employed in their organization. Obtaining a work permit is almost impossible for refugee graduates who got their degrees from Ethiopian universities alongside their Ethiopian peers. There are always other Ethiopians who can fill the

vacancy and as a result, it is hardly possible for RRS to verify that the job cannot be covered by Ethiopians. However, refugee graduates seem to lack the required level of awareness about the limits on their right to work.

The 2019 refugee proclamation of Ethiopia in Article 26 (3) accords refugees and asylum seekers with academic credentials authenticated by the competent authority the most favourable treatment accorded to foreign nationals to practice liberal professions. Reflecting the *de jure* and *de facto* challenges this study identified, in 2020, UNHCR reported that refugees are generally not formally employed in Ethiopia, there are no known cases of refugees employed in the public sector, and no known cases of refugees engaged in liberal professions (UNHCR, 2020, p. 9). Graham and Miller (2021) indicated a lack of clear procedures on how refugees can obtain a work permit from the MoWSA to be involved in wage-earning employment, and as a result, the option is 'unlikely to be a feasible pathway to employment and has so far not been utilized by refugees' (P. 32).

Refugee graduates in the camps are challenged by limited access to information and a lack of resources for transportation and accommodation to apply for vacancies. Female graduates are particularly affected due to a lack of employment opportunities. Camps are one of the most notable institutional responses to refugee management (Brankamp, 2022). Several studies agree that life in refugee camps is difficult due to various reasons (Dryden-Peterson, 2022; McConnachie, 2016).

McConnachie (2016) summarizes that the prominent characteristics of the camp set-up include its being spatially bounded, temporally limited, and segregated. All refugee camps in Ethiopia are located in spatially bounded sites, geographically remote, and less developed places closer to the countries of origin of refugees. It is specially designed for the refugees in such a way that it can ensure the segregation of refugees from the surrounding local community as much as possible and with

separate bureaucratic arrangements established to enforce the management and segregation. The fundamental characteristic of refugee camps is containment (Dryden-Peterson, 2022) which is enacted in varying degrees in different national contexts. Containment essentially denies refugees exercising such basic rights as the right to movement and the right to work.

The worry of refugees on graduation in Ethiopia relates directly to relocating to a place where containment, spatial non-freedom, and immobility are enforced in several ways (Brankamp, 2022). Their experience echoes the broader disadvantage refugee graduates are exposed to even after their bachelor's degree. While graduation and achieving a bachelor's degree are supposed to present opportunities for upward mobility and independent adult life with income, for refugee graduates, in most cases, this failed.

The contrast research participants draw between the university campus and the refugee camp can also suggest that refugees value higher education scholarships irrespective of their awareness of the lack of employment prospects. Emphasizing the day-to-day life of refugee students in the university, Massa (2022, p. 14) argues that *attending universities plays a crucial role in improving life in Ethiopia by filling the present time…with activities and commitment*.

In the refugee camps, a job immediately available for refugee graduates is 'the incentive worker' position. Morris and Voon (2014) define an incentive as compensation for refugees for jobs undertaken in connection with the provision of assistance and services for the refugee community where the payment is generally lower than a regular wage. Incentive work in contexts where refugees' right to work is not ensured is framed as volunteerism (Morris & Voon, 2014). The incentive work refugee graduates assigned across the camps in Ethiopia are mainly full-time work, are conceptualized as volunteerism, and refugees are paid 'incentives' that are much lower than the remuneration for Ethiopians for similar work.

Notwithstanding the policy and legal limitations on refugees' access to employment in Ethiopia, individual refugees have demonstrated diverse strategies to navigate the obstacles and secure employment. In some cases, refugee graduates have used their ethnic bonds and clan networks to facilitate access to formal employment. These can provide important resources for connection and support that can serve as social capital mobilized as ad hoc strategies (Palmgren, 2013) to overcome challenges posed by the formal policy and legal environment. Zetter and Ruaundel (2016) identified common language and similar cultures as mediating factors that can facilitate refugees' access to employment. Omata (2021) noted that irrespective of restrictive policy and legal requirements on refugees' rights to work, in some cases, ethnic and clan ties lead local authorities to turn a blind eye to certain employment opportunities for refugees involved.

Lack of opportunities and policy and legal limitations to exercise the right to work have a significant impact on the self-esteem, social standing, and sense of belonging of the refugee graduates in Ethiopia. Reportedly, many refugee graduates are hopeless, careless towards themselves, and exposed to alcohol and drug addiction. Female refugee graduates are exposed to negative coping strategies. As Abur and Spaaji (2016) noted unemployment has an impact on the health and well-being of refugee graduates.

The combined impact of long years of stay without jobs or involvement in incentive work that does not align with the knowledge and skills set refugees acquired from their university education can potentially lead to skills decay (Arthur et al, 1998). Refugee graduates with whatever bachelor’s degree background can be assigned as incentive teachers in refugee camp primary schools. Opportunities to practice the profession refugees are trained in the universities are rarely possible in the refugee camps. As a result, refugee graduates are prone to loss of the knowledge and skills gained from a university education (Zetter & Ruaundel, 2016). Continued dependence on aid and/or financial support in the form of remittance from family and friends abroad has pushed

many refugee graduates to try risky and illegal migration options (Zetter & Ruaundel, 2016).

In communities where higher education is expected to lead to better employment and income, having refugee graduates without a job for an extended period sharing the meagre family resources has significantly affected families and community attitudes towards education in general. Reportedly the commitment of children and refugee families to pursue education at higher levels is declining. UNHCR (2019) in its 2019 progress report on the pledges made by Ethiopia during the New York Summit in 2016 indicated that Shire area camps in the Tigray region hosting refugees have shown one of the lowest gross enrollment ratios (GER) in the upper secondary education from grade 11-12. Drawing on data from the 2018/2019 academic year educational statistics annual abstract (ESAA) from the Ethiopian MoE, UNHCR (2019) indicated that the GER for grades 11-12 in Shire camps was only 0.3 per cent. These data may supplement the observations of research participants about refugee children's lack of motivation to stay in schools and refugee parents' lack of incentives to invest in the education of their children. However, the relationship between data reported by ESAA and the observation of study participants must be taken carefully.

Conclusion and Implications

Studies confirm that vulnerability mainly involves a status of susceptibility and an evaluation of future exposure to harming circumstances and their consequences (Brown et. al., 2017; Mendola & Pera, 2021). This study has shown that the vulnerability of refugee graduates cannot be generalized by gender and is diverse depending on the location they reside (camp or city), the strategy they adopt to navigate the policy and legal environment related to the right to work, and the social capital they can mobilize to mediate the legal and policy hurdles. For some refugee graduates, higher education opportunities in Ethiopia are empowering by providing an important resource to follow a legal pathway to move out of Ethiopia. In addition, opportunities for

higher education for refugees and the formation of associations like ERUGSA have contributed to creating a critical pool of human resources that can collectively mobilize their knowledge and skills to avert what is called by Mendola and Pera (2021) potential vulnerabilities.

Situational vulnerability, as defined by Sozer (2019), and Mendola and Pera (2021) is very evident in the day-to-day life of refugee graduates. Refugee graduates in this study, as Adger (2006) defines vulnerability, are prone to harm, powerlessness, and marginality in the camps and the cities, and have limited influence on the social system they inhabit due to their legal status. The situational vulnerability most graduate refugees are exposed to is actual in several ways. Due to a lack of employment opportunities, experiences of underemployment as incentive workers, and the big gap they encountered between their expectations from pursuing higher education and the reality they faced, refugee graduates in this study are exposed to vulnerability in terms of 'harming circumstances and their consequences.' Exposure to psychological distress, and alcohol and drug addiction are some of the harms refugee graduates are susceptible to. Unemployment after graduation has exposed refugees to vulnerability in terms of exposure to high risks and illegal secondary migration options to achieve self-reliance, and negative coping strategies to augment continued dependence on food aid and family support (Zetter & Ruaundel, 2016).

Focusing mainly on the situational factors that can promote vulnerability, this study highlights the diversity among the refugees who are graduates of Ethiopian higher education institutions in terms of their proneness to vulnerability. By providing a context-specific, situational, and fine-grained analysis of vulnerability using data from the experiences and narratives of refugee graduates in Ethiopia, this study, as Flager (2002) highlighted, can modestly contribute to the literature that criticizes the generalized notion of vulnerability considering certain fixed categories of refugees as vulnerable. Hence, this study implies that policymakers and researchers need to understand the meaning and manifestation of

vulnerability from the specific experiences of refugees who dwell in varying contexts.

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