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REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

As of 30 June 2023, Uganda has continued to host the largest refugee population in Africa and the third largest in the world, providing protection to 1,561,634 refugees and asylum seekers from 33 countries (approximately + 136,600 increase since the June 2020 Baseline).

During the reporting period, all sectors were affected by the global COVID-19 pandemic. The national lockdown caused widespread disruptions on economic productivity the effects of which are still being felt. Following the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Uganda's economy rebounded steadily over the period under review. According to the Economic Outlook review by the African Development Bank, Uganda's real GDP grew an estimated 6.3 per cent in 2022, slightly better than the 5.6 per cent in 2021, despite higher commodity prices, tighter financial conditions and continued global supply chain disruptions. Agriculture, notably food crops, performed well, supported by good rains, while growth in industry weakened as output in construction waned. Services also performed well as trade and repairs and the health subsector demonstrated strong growth.

KEY POPULATION DATA (as of 30 June 2023)

1,512,681

Refugees

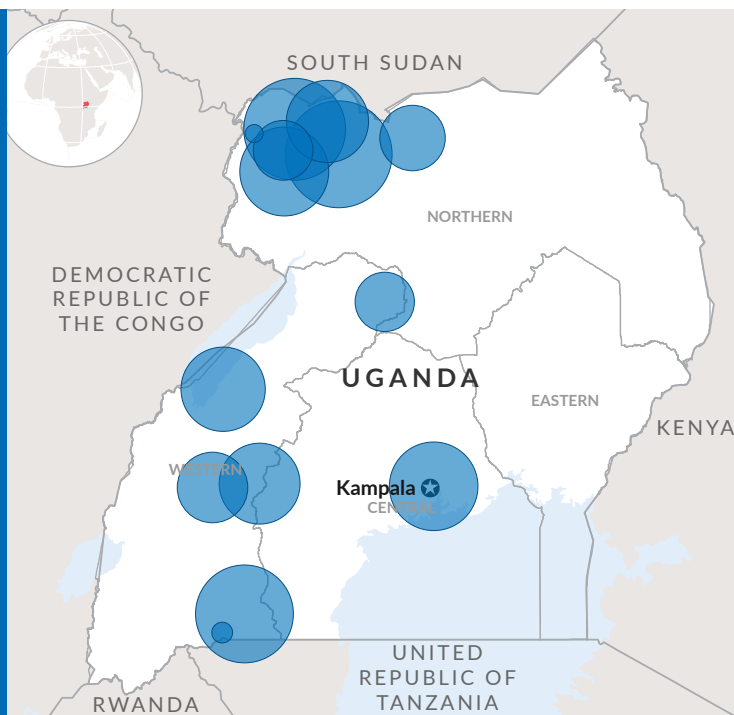
48,953

Asylum-seekers

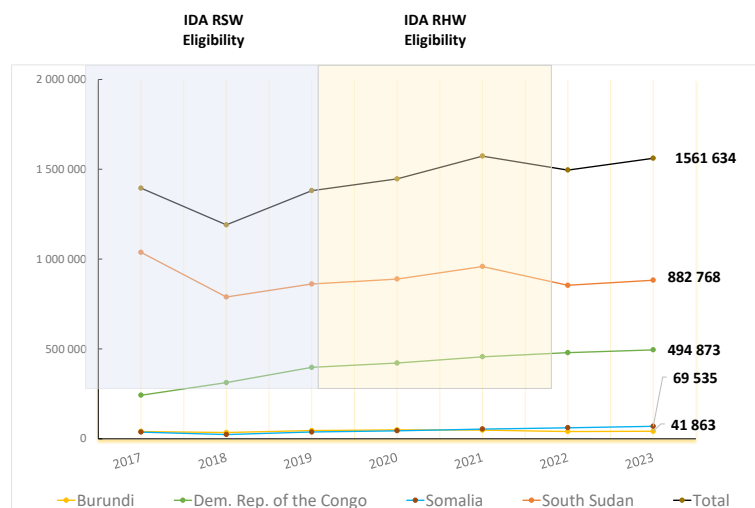
3.43%

of the country's total population
(approx. 48,582,334) are refugees
and asylum seekers.

IDA 18 RSW /IDA 19/IDA 20 WHR
Eligibility: September 2017



Of the total refugee and asylum-seeker population, 9 per cent reside in 31 refugee settlements located within host communities around the country, while 9 per cent reside in urban settings, mainly in Kampala (+3 per cent increase since the June 2020 Baseline). South Sudanese refugees who make up over half of the forcibly displaced population (57 per cent) in the country are settled mostly in the Northeast region; while refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi who make up 32 per cent and 3 per cent of the population respectively are settled in the Southwest and mid-Western regions of the country. As the insecurity situation in Burundi has improved, over 10,800 Burundian refugees returned to Burundi voluntarily since December 2020 to date.



POLICY DIMENSIONS

(as of 30 June 2023)

1. Host Communities

1.1 Support for communities in refugee-hosting areas

During the reporting period, Uganda implemented the third [National Development Plan \(NDP III\) 2020/2021 – 2024/2025](#), aimed at contributing to the realization of Uganda's Vision 2040. NDP III includes a commitment to increase access to social protection and mentions the need to support refugee hosting communities, but refugees are not explicitly mentioned. Additionally, there have been policy changes allowing for incremental improvements in the scope and coverage of social protection legislation. Although there are still limitations in adequacy of benefits, the population coverage for the Senior Citizen Grant for people at the age of 80 years and above has been expanded from a limited number of pilot districts to national coverage.

In January 2022, the [National Social Security Fund \(Amendment\) Act, 2022 - ULII](#) was amended, lifting the previous restriction of membership to people working in the formal sector. While membership remains compulsory for those employed in the formal sector, the amendment provides for any person, including self-employed persons, to register and make voluntary contributions to the fund. The amendment also requires all employers, regardless of the number of employees, to register with the National Social Security Fund (NSSF). In terms of implementation, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD) endorsed the National Social Protection Strategy (2022) and is currently developing a National Strategy for Coverage Extension to the Informal Sector, which is expected to be completed by [end of 2023](#). The Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan for Refugees and Host communities (JLIRP) (2020/2021 – 2024/2025) also provides for the creation of a road map for the development of a national, shock-responsive social [protection systems](#), which will help reduce the impact of economic shocks to households.

Uganda also revised and adopted the [Inter-Governmental Fiscal Transfer Reform Program \(2021\)](#) with the main goal of deepening decentralization and citizen participation in local development and improving the local service delivery. Its implementation is ongoing with support from development projects such as the Uganda Intergovernmental Fiscal Transfer Program (UGIFT) and the [Uganda Support to Municipal Infrastructure Development Program \(USMID\)](#) financed by the World Bank.

During the reporting period, over 18 million seedlings were planted with the National Forestry Authority and UNHCR support to replenish vegetation cover, including woodlots, household tree planting, and Central Forest Reserves restoration near refugee settlements.

1.2 Social cohesion

The applicable national policies that help in identifying, preventing, and mitigating potential social tension and risks of violence in refugee-hosting areas have remain unchanged during the reporting period. There is active presence of local government and law enforcement organs at the settlement level as well as a refugee governance model that supports community-based protection and peaceful coexistence between refugee and hosts. For instance, the Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs) for the former, and the Local Council structures for the latter. The interplay between these two community and local governance systems, coupled with the effective oversight role played by the Office of the Prime Minister-Department of Refugees (OPM-DR) settlement administration structures ensures that conflict between refugees and hosts are relatively uncommon. The security gaps observed during the reporting period are partly situational and partly systemic: the occasional failure of early warning measures intended to identify potential conflict flashpoints are situational, while flawed or inconsistent police investigative approaches at the precinct level is systemic and generally evenly spread among host and refugee communities.

In practice, the social cohesion between refugees and host communities has remained consistent during the reporting period. While refugee and host communities in Uganda typically coexist peacefully, and interact on a regular basis, there are a few cases where subdued tensions have escalated. These tensions can be attributed to various factors, some of which have lingered from the previous reporting period, including competition for natural resources, land disputes, destruction of crops by animals belonging to the host or refugee communities and/or perceived inequities in access to livelihood supports and relief aid.

In June 2019, the Government of Uganda (GOU) approved the Uganda National Transitional Justice Policy, demonstrating a commitment to address the country's legacy of conflict and conflict-related peace, justice, reconciliation, accountability, and social reintegration concerns. The policy raises the profile of transitional justice as a national issue that is critical to not only sustain peace but also to promote sustainable development, requiring the participation of a range of development actors. This policy does not mention refugees and host communities per se but refers to refugees in the climate change section in the context of return and reintegration of former IDPs and refugee communities.

The informal and formal mechanisms in place that promote peaceful coexistence, dialogue, joint activities, and citizen engagement within the host and refugee communities have continued to function in the reporting period. The most relevant mechanisms within the host community are the local councils, which have social cohesion and dispute resolution responsibilities within their area of authority. The refugee welfare committees are the equivalent structures in the refugee community. As a matter of practice, local governments and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) facilitate interventions to promote peaceful coexistence and address any tensions arising between refugees and host communities. OPM facilitates regular engagement between local councils and refugee welfare committees. As part of the National Conflict Early Warning Mechanism, peace committees have been established in some refugee-hosting districts. These have strong potential to address conflict between refugees and host communities more comprehensively but policies to that end, bringing together both refugee and host community representatives, have not yet been established.

The policy frameworks to safeguard the equality of all persons before the law and their entitlement to the protection of the law without any discrimination have remained unchanged in this period. In practice, refugees and asylum-seekers as well as nationals sometimes report incidents of discrimination that are routinely resolved through the existing administrative and judicial systems where the effects of the discrimination are deemed significant.

1.3 Environmental management

The NDP III highlighted that the refugee influx had exacerbated the issues of environmental degradation and that all refugee response interventions should integrate environmental management. To date, all development projects in the refugee response have undergone environmental screening in accordance with the national environmental laws to ascertain their positive or negative impact on the environment.

Uganda's energy conservation strategy is guided by the National Energy Policy (2002) and the Renewable Energy Policy (2007). The latter policy pursues commitments in the National Energy Policy to develop the use of renewable energy resources in Uganda. The GOU overarching policy vision for renewable energy is to establish renewable energy as a substantive component of the national energy consumption profile, where modern renewable energy is understood to mean renewable energy resources that are transformed into modern energy services like electricity.

Following the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) 2019, GOU committed, among other pledges, to promote inclusive and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems through the development of the [Water and Environment Sector Response Plan \(WESRP\) 2019 – 2022](#) and the [Sustainable Energy Response Plan \(SERP\) 2022 – 2025](#) which provide the strategy for interventions in the environment and energy sector. The SERP specifically seeks to ensure universal and sustainable access to affordable, reliable and clean energy for refugees and host communities.

The Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Water and Environment (MWE) also developed the revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) in 2022 that specifies adaptation and mitigation ambitions as a country to address climate change in line with the Paris Agreement and includes consideration for refugees and hosting areas. Development partners have funded multi-year projects within the refugee hosting areas.

1.4 Preparedness for refugee inflows

Over the period under review, the Government did not make policy shifts towards preparedness actions for large population inflows. However, available refugee response arrangements have been applied in situations of mass influx. The [Refugee Act 2006](#) and the [Refugees Regulations, 2010](#) provide an overarching framework for all preparedness actions for the inflow of large populations seeking asylum. In addition, the Settlement Transformation Agenda (STA), Refugee Contingency Plans, the Country Refugee Response Plan, and the accompanying sector plans guide the government preparedness actions to any anticipated refugee inflows. The 2018-2020 GCR/CRRF National Plan of Action expired during the reporting period and is under review.

2. Regulatory Environment and Governance

2.1 Normative framework

Uganda's refugee protection regime continued to be defined by the national refugee laws, international refugee conventions, and confluence of refugee response guidance or approaches. The [Refugee Act 2006](#) and the [Refugees Regulations 2010](#) constitute the national legal framework. However, a draft refugee policy is under review but the timeframe for its finalization remains unclear. Nevertheless, the national legal framework for refugee protection has remained consistent with the international refugee rights dispensations and the state of the asylum system is sufficiently normative for most asylum cases.

The Refugees Act and Regulations, National Development Plans III (NDP-III), and the GCR/CRRF National Action Plan have been disseminated publicly in Uganda. Nevertheless, during the reporting period, UNHCR observed some gaps in the awareness among refugees, authorities, and host communities about applicable refugee right and protections. To address this, OPM and UNHCR enhanced trainings of local authorities, host communities and other stakeholders on refugee protection and domestic laws governing refugees. OPM and UNHCR have also been actively advocating for the inclusion of refugee law into government training programmes, notably through the national police and immigration training academies. Currently, sensitisation on refugee law and policy has been introduced in trainings for the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF). The latest lecture by UNHCR on international protection and legal framework took place on 28 April 2023 at the army's National Senior Command School in Jinja. The training was attended by Senior military officials from Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and other countries from the Region.

The policy framework regarding refugee status determination (RSD) remains unchanged. The RSD framework gives the Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC) responsibility for determining refugee status at first instance. REC adjudicates asylum applications based on RSD interviews conducted by OPM RSD Officers or by its own staff. Asylum-seekers from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have continued to be recognized as refugee through a prima facie approach; while those from other countries of origin and from DRC who enter the country via ungazetted border points have been undergoing individual RSD by REC. However, the Government of Uganda suspended registration for new arrivals from Somalia in March 2023, in response to a sudden influx of Somali asylum-seekers suspected to be Kenyan nationals based on documentation presented at the border. The government plans a meeting with UNHCR in November to discuss the findings and preparations for reopening of the registration.

The Government of Uganda continues to dedicate limited resources to asylum case-processing. State-led RSD procedures in Uganda have continued to be financially dependent upon UNHCR funding. Adjudication of asylum claims should take a maximum of 90 days according to the law; however, delays and RSD backlogs arise due to continued large influxes of asylum-seekers coupled with procedures which are sub-optimal in terms of efficiency: a significant proportion of the funding continued to be spent on seating allowances for the members of the eligibility committee. The quality of the procedures was enhanced with the recruitment by the Government of a senior protection officer in 2022 but significant challenges have remained, including the insufficient number of RSD case workers and interviewing rooms. During the waiting period, asylum-seekers face some restrictions in terms of their enjoyment of rights (e.g., right to work, and access to some services, including loans and SIM cards among others and access to Convention Travel Documents) compared to recognized refugees.

In May 2023, the Parliament of Uganda passed the [Anti Homosexuality Act 2023](#) into a law. This Act criminalizes sexual acts between adults of the same sex, including consensual acts, and prescribes life imprisonment upon conviction. The law is a legislative evolution from the statutory prohibition of same-sex sexual relations under the label “unnatural offences” in Section 145 of the Penal Code Act, which similarly imposes life imprisonment. Notably, the Anti Homosexuality Act does not systematically target asylum-seekers or refugees. So far, no asylum seeker or refugee has reported any threats, harassment or other incidents from law enforcement and other authorities. UNHCR has sensitized asylum-seekers and refugees on the implications of the new law and on the prevailing situation to mitigate potential risks of rights violations against them. UNHCR and partners continue to provide services and protection to LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum-seekers and have so far not experienced any constraints in doing so.

2.2 Security of legal status

The policy frameworks regarding security of legal status of refugees in Uganda have remained unchanged during the period. No refugees experienced unlawful termination of refugee status during the reporting period. In the first half of 2023, the Government reopened the registration of asylum-seekers from Pakistan which had been put on hold since 2017. Asylum-seekers with claims relating to their sexual orientation have experienced difficulties in accessing the national asylum procedures but have not been subjected to refoulement. Additionally, since March 2023, new asylum-seekers from Somalia have also been unable to register their asylum applications. However, UNHCR is not aware of any cases of refoulement during the period under review. In 2020, borders were temporarily closed to refugees and asylum seekers as one of the COVID-19 preventive measures but was reopened officially in December 2021.

2.3 Institutional framework for refugee management and coordination

In the prescribed period, Uganda has continued to be a model for the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) through the government-led Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). This structure is spearheaded by the Office of the Prime Minister – Department of Refugees (OPM-DR) and the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), supported by UNHCR, and guided by the participation of a wide range of stakeholders (including donors, humanitarian and development partners, private sector, and refugee leadership). Pledges made by Uganda at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) in 2019 emphasize a multi-stakeholder approach to refugee management and there has been significant progress against these pledges.

There is a need for a significant increase in international responsibility-sharing to supplement existing government and partner commitments to safeguard the success of the model. The existing commitments, together with the pledges made by the GOU at the GRF, are intended to achieve the goals of the GCR and its CRRF. These goals are included within the framework of the National Development Plan III (2020/21 – 2024/25), which provides for inclusion of refugees in the statistics that guides development planning, budgeting, and implementation of public service programs.

The [Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan \(UCRRP\)](#) provides a framework covering the period 2022-2025 and detailed planning for 2022-2023. It is a joint plan between the Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR and UN organizations, international and national partners.

During the reporting period, the GOU and the CRRF Secretariat developed the five-sector specific refugee and host community response plans that were considered to be consultative processes involving different stakeholders to be brought together around a common direction. The processes demonstrated government engagement and ownership, further building on the progressive policy environment that was already in place. Having line ministries, whose involvement in the refugee response prior to the CRRF was limited, taking the lead on the development of the Sector Response Plans (SRPs), was considered a success. The five SRPs need to systemically cascade to the districts and form part of the district development plans.

Notably, the Uganda operation being a blend of protracted refugee caseloads and emergencies calls for building capacity and enhancement of local responders which is critical and ideal for sustainable preparedness. Therefore, the SRPs created entry points for development donors to invest in the refugee response. Support of development partners is also coordinated within a dedicated CRRF DPG. Many of these partners pledged support to CRRF implementation in Uganda at the GRF (2019).

With a view on CRRF coordination at district level, there have been significant advancements: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between OPM, MoLG, and UNHCR in June 2020, laying out the principles for strengthened coordination of the refugee response in Refugee Hosting District (RHDs) through convening regular inclusive coordination meetings with all relevant partners both at the central and sub-national levels as per guidance issued by the CRRF Steering Group. In 2022, the District Engagement Forum (DEF) was created to mirror the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF) to ensure district participation in national CRRF decision-making and enhance implementation at district level.

While there is some government engagement in SRPs, there is variable engagement from the relevant line ministries. In particular, there is concern about low capacity and a lack of financial and human resources provided by the relevant line ministries for the coordination and implementation of the SRPs. The level of attendance at the CRRF Steering Group that is meant to support this higher-level coordination has diminished making strategic decisions more challenging to move forward.

Prior to the adoption of the CRRF, the refugee response was led by OPM-DR and UNHCR, with little to no significant engagement by Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and development partners. While the inclusion of those actors in the refugee response can be seen as a key achievement, there has also been a lack of clarity of mandates of different line ministries and the mandate of OPM-DR, with regard to the refugee response. There have also been discussions around the roles and responsibilities of the CRRF Secretariat and OPM-DR. For these ministries to further contribute to the CRRF, their roles will need to be more clearly defined, as well as the resources needed for their involvement.

2.4 Access to civil registration and documentation

The Refugee Act and Regulations provide for asylum-seeker and refugee entitlement to identity documents. Refugees are also entitled to travel documents referred to as a Convention Travel Documents (CTD). During registration, refugee households are issued a “Refugee Family Attestation” that is valid for three years, while each member of the household, 16 years and over, is issued a “Refugee Identity Card” by OPM/DRS which is valid for five years. Asylum-seeker households, on the other hand, are issued “Asylum-seeker Certificates” that are valid for three months.

As of June 2023, 85 per cent of refugees of 16 years and above had refugee IDs (+41 per cent from the June 2020 baseline period) issued by OPM/DRS. Law enforcement authorities at national/sub-national level recognize refugee ID cards and Refugee Family Attestation. Recognition of refugee ID cards by national/sub-national authorities or private sector institutions responsible for socioeconomic services depends in practice on the sector. Issuance of national ID cards for refugees by the competent authority for identity management, the National Identification Registration Agency on par with nationals could in the future

reduce this gap. During the reporting period, the Immigration Department has continued to issue Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) to recognized refugees, upon recommendations of OPM, that are in line with the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Additionally, the CTDs are also issued to refugees for the purpose of obtaining work permits issued by the Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control (DCIC). All CTDs are issued at a cost similar to the fee payable by nationals for the issuance of their national passports.

According to article 18 of the Constitution of Uganda, the State has the obligation to register every birth, marriage and death occurring in Uganda. However, in stark contrast to the Constitution, [the Registration of Persons \(Births and Deaths\) Act, 2015 \(RPA\)](#), the primary law that governs the registration of births and deaths in Uganda, under article 1(2) (b), states that the Act applies to the registration of all persons except to a refugee recognized by the Government and the UNHCR. Nevertheless, [the Registration of Persons \(Birth and Deaths\) Regulation, 2015](#), under article 5(2) and 16 (3), provides that the registration of every birth and death is free and compulsory. Furthermore, article 3(8) of the Regulation seems to permit the registration of vital events of refugees. In practice, refugees' vital events are recognized and recorded in the same manner as nationals. The National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA), that is mandated to register birth and deaths in Uganda, also registers the vital event of refugees. The Registration of marriages is addressed under other laws and policies, notably under [the Marriage Act](#).

While the government recognized the need to provide additional services and logistical support to remote locations, including in refugee-hosting areas, the limited resources and capacity of NIRA have led to significant delays in the issuance of birth certificates for refugees and hosts. To improve the timeliness of future birth registration services, the Government is working to establish links between the medical databases of hospitals registering births and the national NIRA database system. Uganda is also developing a Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) strategy with a view to providing guidelines for the delivery of civil registration services and the production of vital statistics, including for refugees. It is noted that limited birth registration and certification for refugees, including adults born in Uganda, places them at risk of statelessness.

2.5 Justice and security

Refugees are entitled to the same rights as nationals regarding access to justice, including access to legal assistance under applicable laws in Uganda, in line with the Refugees Act and its Regulations. The level of security enjoyed by refugees has been comparable to that enjoyed by nationals in the same areas in the reporting period.

In practice access to law enforcement and justice, including state-provided legal aid, has remained limited for both refugees and host communities. Challenges are, inter alia, related to costs, physical distance, and limited legal representation. Consequently, most refugees and host communities, resort to informal justice mechanisms and local council courts to settle disputes. The judiciary has also adopted a Case Backlog Reduction Strategy to address delays in the dispensation of justice and deployed judicial staffing and mobile courts to refugee-hosting areas with support from UNHCR, but challenges remain.

Various policies continue to be in place to prevent and deter gender-based violence (GBV), which apply across the country and are inclusive of refugees. These include the Penal Code Act, the [Domestic Violence Act \(2010\)](#), the [Female Genital Mutilation Act \(2010\)](#) and the [Elimination of Gender Based Violence Policy \(2016\)](#). Despite the strong normative and policy framework, which is non-discriminatory and takes deliberate steps to include refugees in government GBV responses, including regulations, guidelines, protocols and even district-level laws and orders, actual implementation of the laws and policies has been challenging owing to financial and institutional gaps in the national judicial and social services. Although refugee-hosting communities face similar challenges in Uganda, GBV disproportionately affects refugees. GBV is also significantly underreported owing to a combination of a culture of silence within the communities and inadequate services to respond to reported cases. Due to a lack of livelihood opportunities, some women

and girls engage in survival sex as a coping mechanism, exposing them to sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking. It is worth noting that there was a significant increase in GBV cases during the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown; women and children were affected disproportionately.

3. Economic Opportunities

3.1 Freedom of movement

Section 30(1) of the Refugee Act continues to establish the legal foundation for recognized refugees to enjoy freedom of movement in Uganda. Nonetheless, Section 30(2) of the same law outlines that this freedom is subject to reasonable restrictions as specified in Ugandan laws or directions issued by the Commissioner, applicable to aliens generally in similar circumstances. However, the refugee legal framework does not provide refugees with an explicit right to choose their place of residence

In practice, refugees and asylum-seekers continue to effectively enjoy freedom of movement and choose their place of residence in Uganda. They can opt to reside in a refugee settlement or elsewhere, but refugees who choose to reside outside of the refugee settlements forfeit access to regular humanitarian assistance programmes. Formally, only 9 per cent (+3 per cent of the 30 June 2020) of the refugee population is registered in Kampala rather than in refugee settlements.

3.2 Right to work and rights at work

The legal framework regarding the recognized refugee's right to work remains unchanged. According to Section 29(1) e) of the Refugee Act and Article 64 of the Refugees Regulations, recognized refugees holding identity cards remain entitled to the most favourable treatment accorded to foreign residents in similar circumstances; except that they are exempt from any requirement to pay fee to obtain a work permit prior to taking up any offer of work or continuing their employment. Specifically, this includes (i) the right to engage in agriculture, industry, handicrafts, and commerce, and establish commercial and industrial companies in compliance with Uganda's laws and regulations, (ii) to have access to employment opportunities and engage in gainful employment, and (iii) to practice a profession if they hold qualifications recognized by competent authorities in Uganda. This latter implies that refugees are required to equate their professional documents and diploma to Ugandan standards before obtaining authorization to practice their profession. However, the Refugee Act and Regulations do not explicitly entitle asylum-seekers to work. In practice, asylum-seekers have continued to engage informally in gainful employment in the reporting period.

It is noted that the [Citizenship and Immigration Control Act](#) and related statutory instruments require foreigners to obtain work permits, which are issued as passport endorsements by the Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control (DCIC). This also applies to refugees with the difference as per Article 64 of the Regulations that they are exempt from paying a fee under Uganda Statutory Instruments Supplement No. 5 dated 5 February 2016. The work permit issued is not linked to a specific employment and does not appear to have an expiration validity. There are different interpretations as to the validity of the work permits (between 1 to 3 years as per Immigration and indefinite according to refugee lawyers). The DCIC has not accepted the refugee ID cards in lieu of a passport. In general, work permits of recognized refugees continue to be stamped on refugee Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) despite advocacy made by OPM against such a practice. This limits access to employment for refugees who do not hold CTDs, which are themselves not easily acquired by refugees due to the application fees for a CTD (220,000 UGX equivalent to USD 62) and relatively long process. No data is available on the number of refugees formally engaged in gainfully employment and no data is available on the number of work permit issued to refugees by DCIC for the reporting period.

Refugees with a valid labor contract are in principle eligible for enrollment in the National Social Security Fund (NSSF). However, in 2021, there was a temporary suspension of NSSF number issuance to refugees due to data synchronization challenges. Since then, the issue has since been resolved, and refugees can now

register for NSSF using their refugee registration number and contact information. The effective inclusion of refugees into the national (digital) identity management system under the NIRA and their issuance of national (single) identifier numbers as well as the ID credentials issued by NIRA could be a way to facilitate access to gainful employment and enhance the right to work and conditions at work in Uganda. Similarly, it would make it much easier for refugees to access the different public contributory social protection programmes in an effective way.

[The Employment Act](#) has continued to provide refugees with the same worker protections as nationals. The Act outlines specific workplace protections, including equal remuneration for work of equal value, a prohibition on the dismissal of pregnant women and a prohibition on discrimination on many grounds, among others.

Even if refugees in practice could operate businesses in their own names, some refugees continue to face multiple challenges including lack of access to official information about businesses registration, accessibility to local government offices and costs for formalizing a business and limited funding opportunities for business in the settlements.

3.3 Land, housing, and property rights

The legal framework governing property rights of refugees has remained unchanged during the reporting period. In practice, OPM has continued to freely provide refugees living in settlements with plots of land for agricultural use, without discrimination and for the full period of their asylum in Uganda. The Settlement Transformation Agenda (STA) specifically calls for investments to increase productivity and diversify economic opportunities in refugee settlements, and to address environmental pressures. As the refugee population continues to grow, there are general concerns of the sustainability of this land allocation policy in the longer-term. The Government of Uganda, through the office of the Prime Minister, launched STA II in April 2023. While it is costed, it is not yet funded.

The host community is just as much in need of land, most particularly in the West Nile region. Also, many refugees are still unaware of their rights and the rules concerning land ownership, with some purchasing land in informal and often illegal ways.

The Refugee Act 2006 and Regulations have continued to entitle refugees the same treatment as foreign nationals regarding movable and immovable property in the reporting period. Refugees are able to possess land on leasehold for a duration of not more than 99 years in the same manner as foreigners. Refugees can also access the Tax Identification Number ([TIN](#)) which is part of the requirements to access property. In practice, however, very few refugees have formal agreements or documentation to secure their access to housing.

Regarding access to social/public housing programs, the policy framework has remained unchanged. In practice, there are no reports of refugees accessing public/social housing programs during the period.

3.4 Financial and administrative services

Refugees have continued to be entitled to open bank accounts using the refugee ID card, in line the [2004 Financial Institutions Act](#) and the [2015 Anti-Money Laundering Regulations](#). However, asylum seekers have challenges opening bank accounts and accessing loans due to the validity of their documents and the nature of their status.

In practice the challenges observed in the Baseline period have persisted in the period under review. Some banks do not lend to refugees even when they meet the requirements, citing reasons of refugee mobility. Refugees can take out loans from formal financial institutions, but they often are not able to provide the required guarantees. Furthermore, many financial service providers have required contact addresses or a letter of introduction from a local leader, which can often be difficult for refugees to provide. As such,

the proportion of refugees with a bank account and/or access to other financial services such as loans and insurance remains below 30 per cent. Refugees have also continued to access mobile phones and banking systems. Most refugees are in possession of a mobile phone in the update period.

National laws and policies allow refugees to obtain key administrative documents, notably Section 29 1(e) III of the Refugee Act. Based on the Refugee Act and Regulations, refugees can be supported to equate their professional documents to Ugandan standards. However, for French-speaking refugees, mainly from Congo and Burundi, language barriers and accreditation requirements for academic qualifications affect their ability to practice their profession given the different education systems in their countries of origin. Refugees with a similar education scheme to Uganda are expected to submit their foreign certificates and diplomas to the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) so that equivalence may be established at a fee. Skills development opportunities for refugees are regulated in the Education Response Plan for refugees and host communities.

Like other citizens, refugees have continued to access driving licenses without hindrance if they show a refugee ID or asylum certificate. Driving licenses issued from countries that have similar licence systems as Uganda (especially East African countries: Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda etc.) are expressly recognised but all others must apply for the licence under the Traffic and Road Safety Act and the accompanying Regulations as amended.

4. Access to National Public Services

4.1 Education

The Refugee Act 2006 and Regulations have continued to provide the legal framework regarding refugees' access to education in the prescribed period. The [second Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities \(ERP II\)](#) covering the period 2021/22–2024/25, which replaced the ERP (2018-2021), is a comprehensive Plan that aims at mobilizing resources and coordinating efforts that cater for the education of refugees and host communities in Uganda. ERP II is anchored in a firm policy framework, annexed to the Education and Sports Strategic Plan (ESSP) FY 2020/21–2024/25, tethered to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the [African Union Agenda 2063](#), and the National Development Plan III (2020/21 - 2024/25) among other frameworks. It was developed based on the challenges and lessons learned from ERP I.

The ERP II theory of change articulates how improvement of learning outcomes and skills for crisis affected and host community children and adolescents will be achieved through improving equitable access and retention: delivery of the quality of education and training and strengthening systems for effective and resilient service delivery. The ERP II also provides for refugee access to specialized services including accelerated education programmes, vocational and life skills training, psychosocial support, and referrals. The ERP II aims to reach an average of 674,895 beneficiaries per year over the period of 3.5 years at a cost of \$450 million. The Plan will be implemented in the 37 sub counties in the 12 refugee-hosting districts, and in Kampala. The implementation of the ERP is overseen by a multi-stakeholder steering committee led by Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and supported by a Secretariat within MoES that receives financial and technical support from UNHCR.

Another important step toward inclusion of refugees into the national system is their integration into the “new” Education Management Information System (EMIS) at the end of 2022. However, the EMIS is not fully operational yet. The system will be used by the MoES as the basis for the computation of capitation grants and national indicator tracking.

Finally, in terms of sustainability and the transition of “community” schools from the humanitarian sector to the government system, 36 per cent of the schools were “coded” grant aided by the government. With multi-year and development funding, the goal is to increase this percentage up to 50 per cent by 2025.

Once non-public community schools in refugee hosting districts are “coded” by the MoES they can benefit from capitation grant and teacher deployment (6 teachers + 1 principal for each coded school). Although this is not enough to cater to all education needs (some schools, given the number of learners, need 20+ teachers), it is an important step toward the transition to full inclusion in the national education system.

In 2023, UNHCR remains the key donor covering salaries for 4,775 out of 7,212 teachers deployed (1,902 are paid by the MoES, 468 by WB-UgFIT, and the remaining by ECHO and BPRM). In addition, it is important to note that following the latest education assessment an additional 1,988 teachers are needed to cover the current gaps.

4.2 Health care

In line with the Constitution and the Refugees Act, refugees have continued to access health services under the same terms as nationals. During the period under review, there have been infrastructure improvement efforts by the Ministry of Health and development partners to prepare health facilities for accreditation and registration/coding of more health facilities. Refugees have been included in the various Ministry of Health Programs and projects. During the review period, refugees were included in the national surveys Uganda HIV/AIDS Population-based impact assessment and Uganda Demographic and Health Surveys. In terms of services, there was a forty-six percent (46%) increase in access to life-saving health services at the refugee serving health facilities. During the same period, 15 health facilities were transitioned to the Government through registration and coding, although the challenges of inadequate health workers in the transitioned health facilities remain – with UNHCR and other actors supplementing the majority of staff.

Currently, 85% of the qualifying refugee serving health facilities are coded by the Ministry of Health (MoH) financed by the World Bank support UGIFT project. Despite the coding of the health facilities, the government resource inputs into the transitioned health facilities are not commensurate to the resource requirements of these health facilities because of increased catchment populations. To date, the National health insurance scheme is not yet approved although there is high momentum to make it ready by cabinet and parliament.

Upon the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act (2023), the UN and many other members of the international community in Uganda have formally expressed concern about the new law to the Government as it violates international human rights obligations. Nevertheless, the Minister of Health issued a statement indicating that the authorities will continue to provide health services to LGBTIQ+ individuals without discrimination and will maintain confidentiality pursuant to the Professional Code of Conduct and Ethics governing medical practitioners.

4.3 Social protection

The overall social protection sector in Uganda remains relatively nascent, with extremely low levels of national coverage and few programmes with the potential for refugee inclusion. Uganda’s current spending on social assistance is low by both international and regional standards.

From a policy and legislative perspective, refugees have continued to be entitled to the right to social security at the same level as nationals, subject to regulatory limitations under national laws, as per the Refugee Act. However, the 2015 National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) is intended to support vulnerable and excluded “citizens”. While the [2016–2020 Social Development Sector Plan \(SDSP\)](#) does not make this explicit reference, the policy basis for refugees’ access to social protection programmes is not entirely clear. The CRRF Action plan includes milestones for the inclusion of refugees in the next National Social Protection Policy, its Programme Plan of Interventions, and the next Social Development Sector Plan. [The Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities \(2020/2021 – 2024/2025\)](#) that was developed by the Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development (MoGLSD) and stakeholders, including UNHCR, also provides access to social protection interventions for refugees.

In practice, there are only a few Government-led social protection programmes and interventions, and even fewer that formally include refugees. One example of refugee inclusion is within the Uganda Development Response to Displacement Project (DRDIP) which has included refugees in activities that create employment opportunities under the second Sustainable Environmental Management Component, managed by MoGLSD. While not a nationally led programme, refugees are also included in the Child Sensitive Social Protection Programme (CSSP) in West Nile, which is currently implemented by WFP and UNICEF with the support of SIDA.

The Social Protection Development Partners Working Group (SPDG) continues to be the main platform through which development partners interact with government to support the development of the national social protection system. Discussions on the gradual alignment of humanitarian aid and social protection systems are taking place as part of this component, including implementation of the milestones for refugee inclusion in national social protection systems, as set out in the CRRF Action plan.

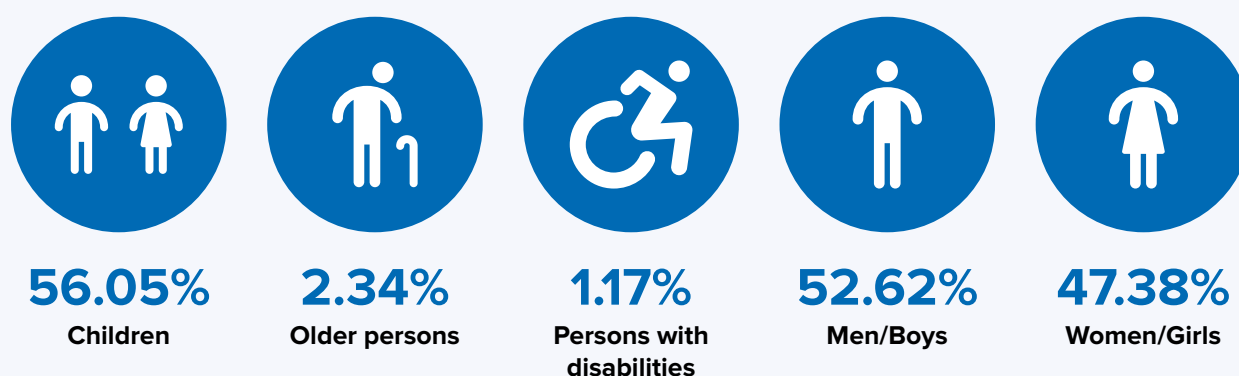
4.4 Protection for vulnerable groups

The Refugee Act 2006 and its 2010 Regulations, in conjunction with non-discrimination clauses in the [1995 Constitution](#) and relevant international instruments, have continued to provide the legal framework for the protection of vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers.

Access to relevant services is limited for both nationals and refugees because of shortcomings in policies as well as their implementation. The [Uganda National Child Policy \(2020\)](#) specifically notes that refugee children will be included in all aspects of the policy and details the additional dangers to safety and wellbeing that refugee children may face, as well as the challenges in accessing Ugandan childcare and protection services. Uganda has finalized the National Framework for Alternative Care, which explicitly mentions refugee children and highlights their specific protection and care needs, but implementation remains a challenge. The pilot phase of the NACF commenced in 2022 and the Framework has been rolled out in Nakivale, Kampala, Yumbe, Adjumani, Kyangwali and partially in Arua, led by the Ministry of Gender. On the other hand, community-based alternative care is more accessible to refugee children than to national children generally hosted by fellow refugees through existing community-based arrangements in the settlements. Similarly, there are laws and policies to protect victims of trafficking in persons, but implementation is weak.

5. Cross Sectors

Characteristics of registered refugees and asylum-seekers in total refugee population
as of 30 June 2023



5.1 Gender

There are differences or restrictions in policies and/or their implementation related to gender in most policy sub-dimensions in the reporting period. The most consequential ones in terms of socioeconomic development (which equally impact both Ugandan women and girls as well as refugee women and girls) have remained unchanged as follows.

- a. The right to work and rights at work:** The lack of formal regulations on sexual harassment applying to employers employing less than 25 staff has continued to create significant risks of sexual harassment. The poor working conditions many women and girls face in informal employment has remained a challenge in the period.
- b. Housing, land, and property rights:** In line with the law, women, men, girls and boys are treated equally with respect to housing, land and property rights. However, in practice, women and girls have continued to face challenges in inheriting properties of deceased relatives as some communities apply traditional cultural norms which recognise men and boys as the only legatee/heir of a deceased estate.
- c. Education:** The lower school enrolment of refugee girls due to practical barriers as well as traditional gender norms that result in families prioritizing boys' education over girls has continued to be a challenge in the period.
- d. Health care:** The more limited access to health services for women and girls, who face barriers such as long distances to health facilities, long waiting times and time poverty due to domestic responsibilities that are overwhelmingly assigned to them. While men and boys also face similar challenges, they disproportionately affect women and girls due to the burden of domestic responsibilities placed on them, as well as certain groups such as those who are pregnant or have young children.

5.2 Social inclusion

The sub-dimensions where differences and/or restrictions in refugee characteristics – age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, country of origin, statelessness, political opinions, indigenous status, disability, sexual orientation, membership of a particular social group – are most consequential in terms of socioeconomic development remained the same during the period. Legal integration has been added as a sub-dimension due to the challenges in accessing naturalization.

The consequential ones in terms of socio-economic development that remained a challenge in the report period are as follows:

- a. Security of legal status:** The challenges faced by asylum-seekers and refugees in relation to diverse sexual orientation and gender identity compound by the new law (Anti Homosexuality Act).
- b. Access to civil registration and documentation:** The limited birth registration and certification for refugee children and adults born in Uganda due to significant delays in issuing such documents in remote locations, a challenge similarly faced by nationals.
- c. Access to justice and security:** The challenges in the actual implementation of the laws and policies related to GBV.
- d. Protection for vulnerable groups:** The challenges for non-accompanied and separated refugee children to effectively access protection mechanisms in the national systems.