### HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG HORN OF AFRICA

**E-PAPER** 

Migration & Displacement Series

# Mapping Displacement Governance in East Africa:

Paradise lost? The past, present, and future of refugee management in Uganda.



MIGRATION & DISPLACEMENT E-PAPER SERIES

## Mapping Displacement Governance in East Africa:

#### Part 1: Towards coherence?

The past, present, and future of refugee management in Kenya

#### Part 2: Paradise lost?

The past, present, and future of refugee management in Uganda

#### Part 3: From open door to revolving door:

The past, present, and future of refugee management in Tanzania

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# Mapping Displacement Governance in East Africa: Paradise lost? The past, present, and future of refugee management in Uganda.

#### **Contents**

Executive Summary	4
Overview	6
Refugee Population Profile	7
Illustrated Map	8
Historical Evolution and Context	11
Legal Frameworks	13
Institutions & Processes	14
Policies: Protection, Rights & Inclusion, Durable Solutions	16
Implementation: Gaps and Challenges	18

Contents 3/<sub>22</sub>

#### **Executive Summary**

Uganda's global reputation as a 'refugee paradise' is rooted in the country's openness toward populations seeking refuge, and its pioneering of 'self-reliance' — an approach to refugee management that grants refugees legally enshrined free movement and the right to work. Like Kenya and Tanzania, it has hosted large numbers of refugees since the 1960s. It has done so without itself being a source country for large numbers of refugees, and despite having limited resources as a low or lower-middle income developing nation.

However, the degree and consistency of its commitment to international standards of refugee protection are distinct from its East African siblings Kenya and Tanzania. It hosts more refugees than any country in Africa; it was arguably the first African country to foster the development of refugee-led organizations, and has led the way in implementing the Global Compact on Refugees [GCR] through the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework [CRRF]. Its policymaking is strengthened by internal coordination across government within a centralized institutional framework, and buttressed by external consultation with stakeholders, civil society and external policy actors in the global and regional arena.

Clichés about Uganda's unique generosity tend to obscure the political, economic, and historical dimensions of its refugee policies. Its leaders have leveraged the country's expanding refugee population as a means of attaining economic development. This has created opportunities for corruption. In 2018, large-scale embezzlement of international donor funds came to light following an internal UN audit. Other problem areas include the persecution of gender and sexual minorities, a serious issue across (outside the scope of this paper) that requires specialized attention.

In addition, the following issues and approaches are recommended for external actors seeking to identify areas for strategic intervention:

- (i) The principal challenge to Uganda's refugee management lies in the question of its financial sustainability. The huge funding gap between what is required for this exemplary system of protection to remain functional for future generations, and what has been received, must be addressed. All conversations with external actors begin here.
- (ii) There are many areas in which funding and support for refugees in Uganda must be made available, as is the case in Tanzania and Kenya. European actors have a special and obvious interest in supporting institutional infrastructure that provides access to justice for asylum seekers who struggle for recognition and sometimes end up undocumented within Uganda. In this case, it is advisable to invest in the REC [Refugee Eligibility Committee], which requires urgent attention so that it can execute proper refugee status determination.
- (iii) Refugee-led organizations are well-established in Uganda but would benefit from more direct funding. In particular, those which offer training and skills development to refugees in search of employment in cities can play a crucial role in boosting economic inclusion.
- (iv) In respect of durable solutions, prospects for local integration would be improved by access to citizenship. Kenya and Uganda could take inspiration from Tanzania and offer

Executive Summary 4/<sub>22</sub>

- naturalization as a way out of protracted displacement. Currently, refugees have few pathways to becoming Ugandan.
- (v) Resettlement has turned into a lottery subject distorted by venal individuals. Here too, access to justice is a concern but the larger issue is declining willingness of Global North countries to absorb their fair share of refugees.
- (vi) Little attention has been paid to holistic, comprehensive approaches to dignified and sustainable voluntary return. If this received the focused, good-faith attention from external actors it merits, a more balanced set of options for durable solutions could attenuate some of the pressures on Uganda's system of refugee management. Lessons should be learned from recent history, which has witnessed important instances of poorly designed and implemented return policies from Uganda to Burundi, and to Uganda from Israel.

Executive Summary 5/<sub>22</sub>

#### **Overview**

In key respects, Uganda exemplifies the general pattern of refugee management in East Africa. Like Kenya and Tanzania, it has offered high levels of legally enshrined protection since the 1960s, despite having limited resources as a low or lower-middle income developing nation. However, Uganda's unique reputation as a 'refugee paradise' is rooted in the country's distinct openness toward populations seeking refuge, and its pioneering of 'self-reliance' — an approach to refugee management that grants refugees free movement and the right to work. The particularity of Uganda's liberal, progressive model of refugee management is reflected in the consistency of its commitment to international standards of protection at times when many countries have sought to shirk responsibility. Since 2011, Uganda's refugee population has grown more than ten-fold, underlining its unwavering commitment to the Open Door policy.

However, clichés about Uganda's unique generosity tend to obscure the political, economic, and historical dimensions of its refugee policies. More than altruism, successive leaders have leveraged the country's expanding refugee population as a means of attaining economic development, political legitimacy and authority abroad and at home. Self-reliance, according to World Bank cost analysis, is an economically rational concept that has reduced the aid needed by refugees by almost 45%. Cooperation with the UNHCR and World Food Programme (WFP), meanwhile, has brought prestige and funding to promote farming in peripheral regions, where the seeds of 'self-reliance' were sown as early as the 1960s. The same system has also created opportunities for graft. In 2018, large-scale embezzlement of international donor funds came to light following an internal UN audit. The introduction of anti-LGBTQ legislation in 2023 led to augmented rights abuses, creating a climate of fear, curbing internal mobility and making Uganda a source country for refugees abroad. Moreover, asylum seekers from non-neighbouring countries face acute challenges due to the limits of Uganda's Refugee Status Determination (RSD) system and limited access to justice (discussed below).

Notwithstanding these and other problem areas, it is striking that while so many affluent democracies are struggling to preserve basic refugee protections, Uganda remains a laboratory for new forms of progressive displacement governance. Refugees within its borders enjoy free movement and the right to work, along with better access to services than do refugees and asylum seekers in many other countries of the world. Its pursuit of durable solutions via development rather than short-term humanitarianism and its preference for empowering refugees with polices that offer dignity and autonomy rather than dependency on aid have shown leadership within the region, inspiring progressives in Kenya, who are now seeking to emulate important aspects of its model. Uganda's pro-refugee, rights-based approach explains the rise of Africa's earliest and most prominent refugee-led organizations in Kampala.

More generally, Uganda's rights-based approach to refugee governance extends to other areas of displacement policy. For instance, its role in developing the Kampala Convention and pioneering a National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (2004) have established it as a leading proponent of IDPs. It has also made clear its intention to lead on forced migration resulting from global heating. In July 2022, Uganda hosted a regional Inter-Ministerial Conference on climate change-induced mobility, which emphasized the importance of developing integrated approaches ahead of COP27.

Overview 6/<sub>22</sub>

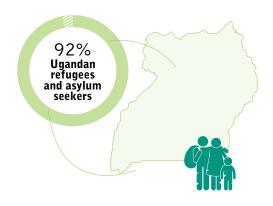
#### Refugee Population Profile



As in Kenya and Tanzania, this represents a longstanding tradition of hospitality dating back to the 1960s. However, with the number of refugees granted asylum at over a million every year since 2017 and crossing two million at various points since the late 1990s, Uganda's contribution is the highest in Africa and impressive even by global standards. (In 2024, it was the fifth highest in the world).

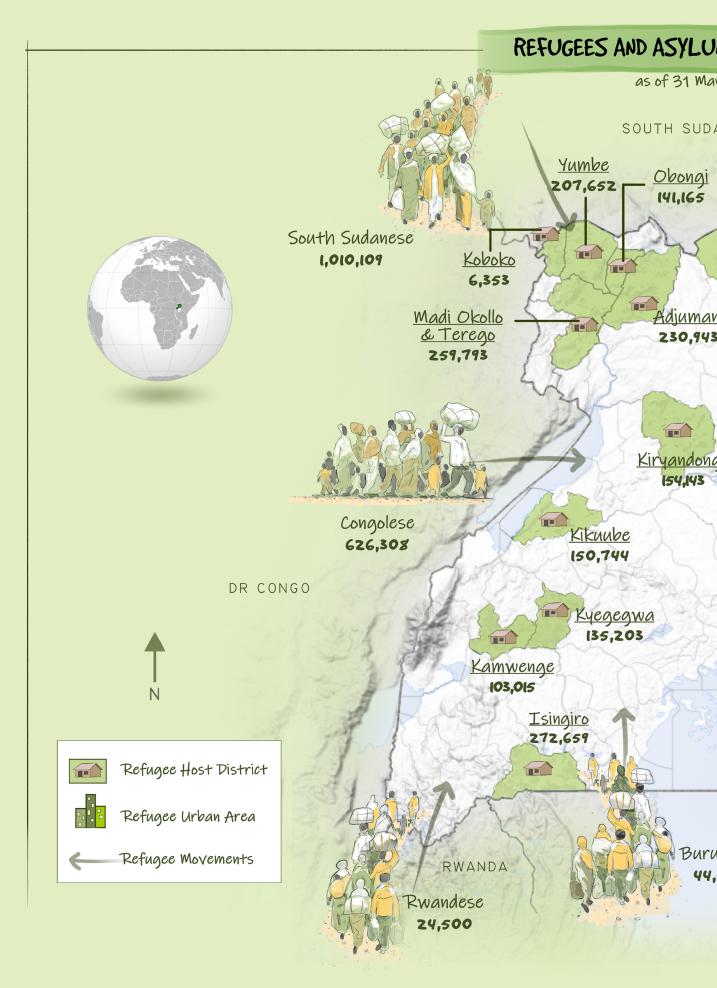
As of 31 May 2025, the vast bulk of Ugandan refugees and asylum seekers (92 per cent) live in a dozen or so settlements across the west and north of the country, but a growing number are moving to urban centres. 8 per cent of Uganda's refugees reside in the capital Kampala, where the population is 159,038.

Though clearly higher in absolute and proportionate terms than figures for Dar es Salaam and other cities

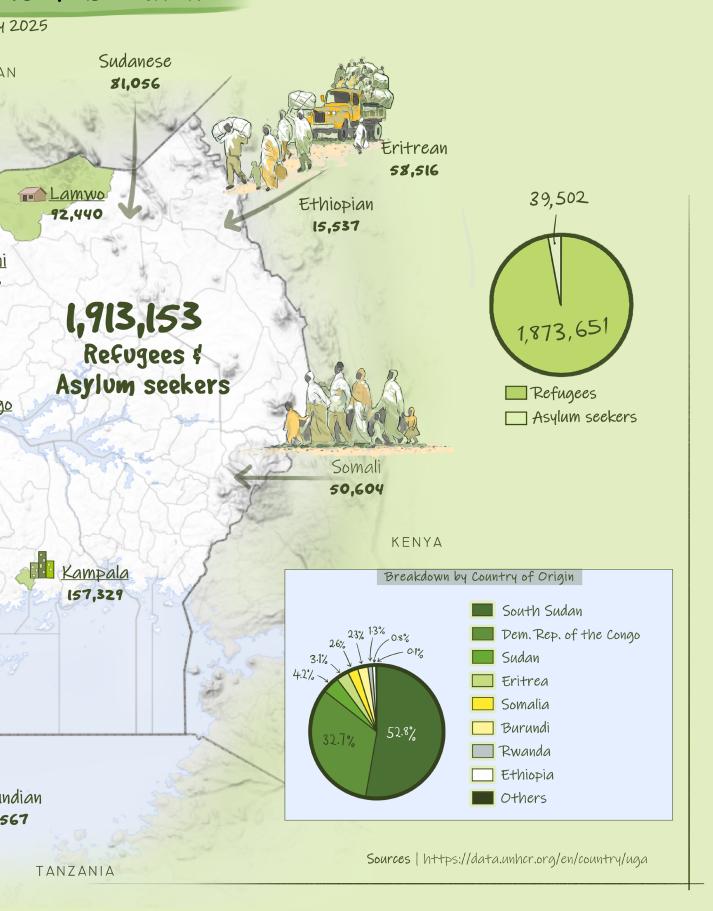


in Tanzania, this figure as a proportion of the overall refugee population is in fact lower than the percentage of Kenya's refugees living in cities. It could therefore be seen to illustrate important structural similarities between the experiences of urban refugees in these last two settings, despite the differing legal regimes.

As of 31 May 2025, Ugandan refugees and asylum seekers hail mainly from the South Sudan (1,010,109, 52.8 per cent), Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC] (626,308, 32.7 per cent) and Sudanese (81,056, 4.2 per cent). Eritreans (58,516, 3.1 per cent), Somalis (50,604, 2.6 per cent), Burundians, Rwandans, Ethiopians make up most of the rest, underlining the diversity of nationals within the EAHOA region that seek refuge in Uganda. Pakistanis, Afghans, Turks, Yemenis, Syrians, and Nigerians have also begun to appear in recent years, though these populations do not appear as separate figures as they are not yet large enough.



#### M SEEKERS IN UGANDA



Critics of the Museveni regime like Stella Nyanzi continue to flee Uganda, constituting a steady trickle of exiles from an essentially authoritarian system of rule. However, like Kenya and Tanzania, Uganda is not a major source country for refugees, a fact attributable to its relative political and economic stability in recent decades. LGBTQ persecution, outside the scope of this paper, constitutes an important exception to this general picture.

#### **Historical Evolution and Context**

It is well known Uganda provides refugees in rural settlements with plots of land to cultivate, freedom of movement and the right to work — all part of its 'self-reliance' model, officially launched by the Museveni government in 1999 and institutionalized through the Refugee Act of 2006.

The origins of this approach are traceable to movements of people organized and institutionalized by the British colonial authorities in the 1940s and 1950s, when Polish refugees were sheltered in the Ugandan protectorate in remote encampments away from the local population.

The British subsequently presided over the arrival and settlement of Southern Sudanese and Tutsi refugees exiled from Rwanda during the 1950s. They did so not out of kindness, but reluctantly, to preserve regional stability and their own interests in the lead up to independence in 1962, as is clear in the ordinances they enacted, which focus on order and 'Control of Alien Refugees' (1960).

This pragmatism evolved into a shrewd willingness to view refugees as a valuable resource by the post-colonial state, which inherited a legacy and institutional memory of refugee governance, along with embryonic settlements containing plots of arable land. Successive leaders have leveraged the country's expanding refugee population as a means of attaining economic aid for development, political legitimacy and authority abroad and at home. Cooperation with the UNHCR and World Food Programme (WFP) brought prestige and funding to promote farming in peripheral regions, where the seeds of 'self-reliance' were sown as early as the 1960s when reducing the dependency of refugees on aid was first floated for budgetary reasons. (The UNHCR understood development driven by refugee autonomy would be cheaper and more sustainable than humanitarianism).

Within the region, hosting rebel opposition leaders and groups from neighbouring countries has increased Uganda's bargaining power as a geopolitical broker. At the same time, it has strengthened state authority in strategically important regions within its own territory, where displaced foreign populations are viewed as a counterweight to potentially unruly domestic oppositional forces. Idi Amin, who oversaw Uganda's accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention in the mid-1970s, recruited Sudanese, Congolese and Rwandese refugees into the army. A despot who presided over the mass expulsion of Uganda's Asian population in 1972, killing of thousands of Ugandan citizens and butchered political opponents might seem an unlikely pioneer of the most enlightened system of asylum in the world. But pioneering he was, and the paradox endures.

Uganda continues to display authoritarian tendencies, driving sexual minorities and government critics like Stella Nyanzi into exile, whilst retaining its status as a haven for refugees from neighbouring countries. As Alex Betts notes, this curious paradox at the heart of Uganda's exemplary refugee policy is rarely mentioned amidst the plaudits it gets. From its origins in the colonial state to the establishment of a legal framework, the 2006 Refugee Act, that codified the principles of self-reliance under Museveni, "illiberal politics have been essential to achieving ostensibly liberal internationalist goals". Precisely because it is not answerable

to the kind of populist nativism currently pushing European democracies to tighten borders, Ugandan dictatorship has been able to implement hospitable and progressive asylum policies unimpeded.

The imperfections, limits, and dysfunctions of its asylum system have been laid bare in recent years, most infamously the embezzlement of international donor funds which came to light in 2018 after allegations of corruption triggered an internal UN audit. Official figures putting the number of refugees at 1.4 million the previous year were revealed to have been inflated by 300,000, with locals listed as refugees to obtain relief supplies fraudulently. Also unearthed were payments to 'ghost' civil servants, overpayment of VAT costs by US\$10 million, and dubious arrangements between UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) which awarded contracts to questionable entities. Amidst this extensive malpractice, in which top ranking officials from the OPM and UNHCR itself were both implicated, it emerged that companies or local NGOs hired by the Ministry in charge of refugee management to build infrastructure, camps and roads were owned by relatives of decision-makers.

Within a relatively short space of time, the Ugandan government and UNHCR have managed to shake off this corruption controversy, explaining it away as the work of a few bad apples. Mismanagement was put down to the influx of refugees from South Sudan in 2016 in remote regions, where new staff and partners were not vetted. Efforts have subsequently been made to give the impression corruption is being stamped out. (Early in 2020, two senior Ugandan government officials were indicted for corruption and abuse of office over the awarding of contracts at refugee settlements). By the time Uganda hosted a plane-load of Afghan exiles following the US withdrawal of 2021, the disgrace of three years prior had receded sufficiently in public memory for the international media to rediscover the narrative about its status as a refugee 'paradise'.

#### **Legal Frameworks**

The Ugandan 'self-reliance' model, officially launched by the Museveni government in 1999, was institutionalized through the Refugees Act of 2006 and buttressed by the accompanying regulations of 2010, which together replaced British era ordinances framing refugees as a problematic population to be controlled. The resulting legal framework for refugee management enshrined international (i.e. UN) and continental (OAU) standards of protection. (See figure 1, below).

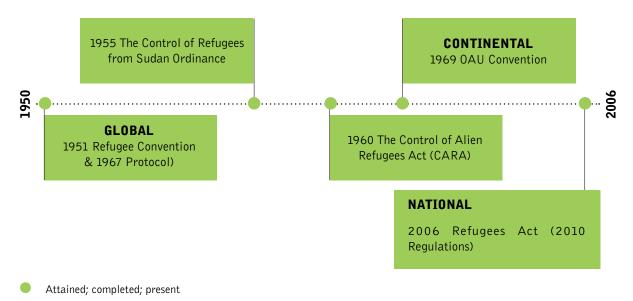


Figure 1: Layers of Law Matrix

The 2006 Act effectively codified the principles of self-reliance, some of which were already operational at the policy level, underlining the fact that law itself has not necessarily been the driver of policy. (Whereas in Kenya, legal reform will have preceded important changes in policy). Uganda also ratified the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless People in 1965. However, it is yet to ratify the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness despite having made a formal pledge towards this objective during the 60th Anniversary of UNHCR.

As in Kenya, legislation, policies, arrangements and even debates on deportation/return and reintegration of migrants to Uganda seem less developed than they are in North and West African countries, which have been forced to engage with Europe's externalization policies in recent years. (In Uganda, debates on the local integration of refugees and migrants are better developed). Uganda's acceptance of deported migrants from Israel appears to have been extra-legal, a point picked up below.

Legal Frameworks

#### **Institutions & Processes**

Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) co-ordinates a whole-of-government approach to refugee management, centralized through the Department of Refugees, which has privileged access to government ministries, from water to land, to health and security, allowing it to address the manifold intersections between refugee governance via coordinated policy design and enactment. It works closely with the UNHCR in operationalizing all facets of refugee management. Like Kenya and Tanzania, however, it retains a decisive role in sensitive areas such as refugee status determination.

Refugees themselves are represented directly through elected representatives from settlements and Kampala via Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs). These bodies mirror host community local councils, with which they work closely to ensure coordination at the local level, ensuring refugees can access information about their rights and services to which they are entitled.

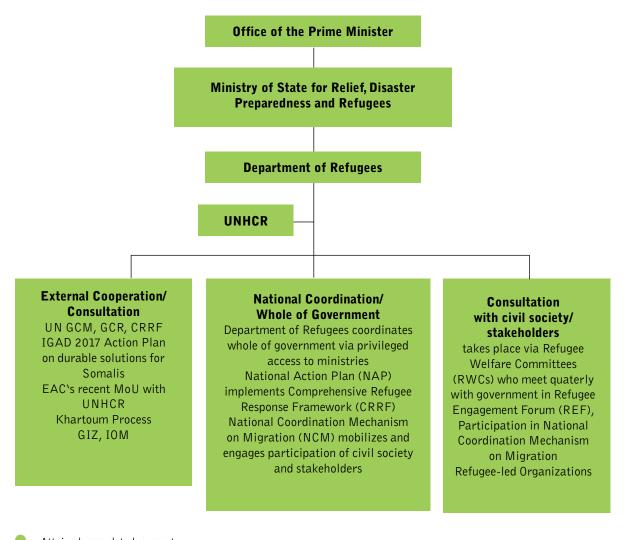
All of which is to say, policy coordination across government and multi-stakeholder consultation (see next section) are integral to the design and implementation of Uganda's lauded model of refugee governance. In 2019, a task-force co-chaired by the OPM and UNHCR designed and established a centralized participatory mechanism to ensure meaningful refugee participation: the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF), which comprises of individuals from RWCs who meet quarterly with government to advocate on behalf of their communities, conveying concerns and feedback on the functioning of policies at the highest level.

At the international level, Uganda engages as a leader in UN processes and its policies have helped define the 'New Way of Working' that has emerged since 2015. In refugee governance, it is an enthusiastic roll out participant country of the CRRF [Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework]. Where Tanzania has withdrawn and Kenya has shown ambivalence toward implementation, Uganda has set up a comprehensive roadmap to drive it into existence through an energetic whole-of-government approach focused on mobilization, delivery and policy coherence across government departments. This is called the NAP (National Action Plan). In 2023, Uganda co-convened the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva, underlining its extensive engagement and leadership in global migration and displacement governance.

Like Kenya, Uganda engages Europe and the EU in the Khartoum Process and other forums driven by EU and European state diplomacy. Both have diversified their access to Global North actors and institutions. Leading refugee INGOs like Cohere have offices and/or projects in Kampala.

At the transnational African level, regional cooperation is more relevant when it comes to refugees and asylum seekers than continental African (AU) processes. Uganda is a signatory of IGAD's 2017 Action Plan, which saw the region convene to advance durable solutions for the 900,000 Somali refugees within the region (and for IDPs within Somalia itself). The EAC [East African Community]'s recent MoU with UNHCR provides a framework for collaborating on freedom of movement as enshrined in the EAC Common Market Protocol. The Ugandan government also engages a range of external actors through its participation in the IGAD-framed National Coordination Mechanism on Migration (NCM). (See figure 2 below).

Institutions & Processes 14/<sub>22</sub>



Attained; completed; present

Figure 2: Institutions and Processes

Institutions & Processes 15/<sub>22</sub>

# Policies: Protection, Rights & Inclusion, Durable Solutions

As noted, Uganda is a leading refugee-hosting country when it comes to international protection in Africa and the world. Its border has remained largely open to refugees from across the region and beyond. Large-scale refoulement is rare. (See figure 3, below).

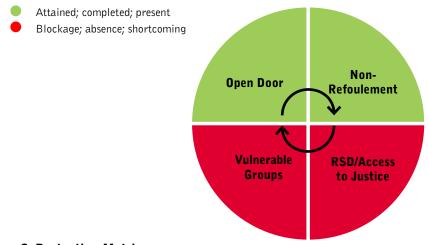


Figure 3: Protection Matrix

However, in January 2024, the Ugandan government reportedly announced Sudanese arrivals would no longer be able to register as refugees while living in the capital and other urban towns around the country, leading to clashes between refugees and UNHCR staff. Arrivals were told they had to live in refugee settlements until such documents would be issued, and to stay in the settlements thereafter. As noted by observers, such actions are clearly an indication that the extant system is under pressure. Whether it signals a fundamental shift in policy remains to be seen. What seems to be beyond doubt is that groups and individuals that do not receive prima facie recognition as refugees — asylum seekers, and some who become undocumented — experience serious forms of vulnerability in settlements and cities, a point picked up below (See figure 3, above).

Refugees also benefit from rights to move, work, and associate in refugee-led organizations that are distinct within East Africa and beyond (See figure 4, below). As a consequence of this favourable legal and policy context, the level of refugee inclusion is arguably higher than both Kenya and Tanzania, with important caveats. Above all, economic opportunities for refugees in Uganda, irrespective of rights, should not be overstated. The condition of refugees in settlements and cities is generally impoverished and sometimes desperate. Many rely on refugee-led organizations for training and support to find employment; even then, they struggle. Moreover, some refugees and asylum seekers in cities face harassment from police, discrimination, and extortion, especially those who struggle for recognition and legal status.

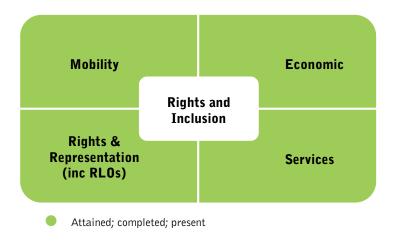


Figure 4: Rights and Inclusion Matrix

Notwithstanding these problems, Uganda deserves praise and support from donors for its leadership on rights and inclusion and its emphasis on local integration as a durable solution. (See figure 5, below).

In respect of other durable solutions: with resettlement having dried up, the limited pathways to citizenship for refugees and their offspring needs addressing. Uganda has not pushed for return with the single-mindedness of Kenya (in respect of Somalis) or Tanzania (in respect of Burundians). Its policies in this field are an area of relative weakness, and its willingness to receive refugees returned from elsewhere are a matter of concern. Israel's secret deportation policy to Uganda, whereby unwanted African asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from Eritrea and Sudan were forcibly and illegally dumped in Uganda without papers, without protection, and without means to sustain themselves between 2015-18 ended ignominiously for all involved. This sordid episode, together with Uganda's long term policy of pressuring Burundians to return, is important evidence Uganda is not necessarily the 'paradise' it is imagined to be for all refugees in all aspects of their journeys.

In future, Ugandan law and policymakers should be supported to develop transparent, comprehensive approaches to voluntary return both to and from Uganda, in which the rights and dignity of refugees are upheld.

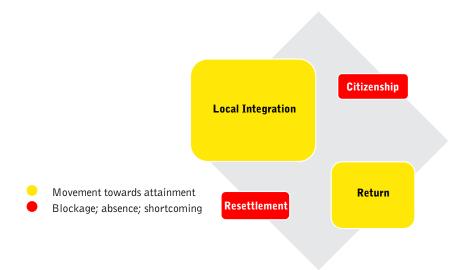


Figure 5: Durable Solutions Matrix

#### Implementation: Gaps and Challenges

Funding levels for refugee assistance have been declining for years. In December 2020, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) reduced monthly relief cash and food rations for 1.26 million refugees in Uganda due to a funding shortfall caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The war in Ukraine led to a further dwindling of donor funds. In May 2022, following a fresh influx of asylum seekers from DRC, the amount of support those already settled in camps were receiving for basic needs (food) in monetary terms decreased from 90 per cent of the ideal amount to about 40 per cent.

By the end of August 2022, the UNHCR had received just 38 per cent of its 2022 funding requirement of US\$343.4 million, straining its capacity to provide basic humanitarian assistance and livelihood opportunities. As of 31st December 2024, the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) had received just 46 per cent (\$391, 800, 000 USD) of its target (\$857,900,000): a funding gap of 54 per cent. These dramatic trends are likely to be exacerbated as a result of global funding cuts and in particular the termination of USAID early in 2025. All of which raises the question of how the system will function at all for future generations. Calls from Ugandan Ministers such as Esther Anyakun Davina for a regional solution to the funding shortfall, whereby countries whose citizens are living in Uganda as refugees mobilise financial resources to support them, have been rejected. The onus must surely be on support from wealthy countries.

Equally concerning is the mounting pressure on Uganda's own environmental resources, above all, land, which is famously provided to households in settlements for housing and subsistence agriculture. By all accounts, the quality and quantity of land allocated to new arrivals has been deteriorating in recent years. The influx of arrivals from South Sudan since 2016 has led to a considerable reduction in the size of such plots from 100x100m to around 20x20m in some settlements. Moreover, host communities whose land is allotted to refugees for farming are increasingly demanding direct payment rather than service delivery for the wider community, as they feel benefits promised have not materialized.

Similar patterns are observable with respect to firewood obtained from forests and clean water for drinking, resulting in reports of conflict between refugees and host communities in contexts such as Bidibidi settlement in Yumbe, where locals have become frustrated by having to travel further afield for firewood and by competing with new arrivals for access to water from boreholes. Could such instances of waning hospitality reflect of a growing perception that autochthonous populations are not benefiting from the presence of refugees?

A growing number of pessimistic analysts argue the Ugandan system of refugee management cannot be sustained in its current form. The NRC, for instance, has warned that 'its impact on refugees and Ugandans hosting them is worsening socioeconomic outcomes and lives stuck in a cycle of aid dependency'. It has called for 'decisive action... to pivot the response to one of long-term funding and planning, towards durable solutions and greater prosperity for all.'



The crisis in funding is surely the most important issue and must be addressed. However, senior Ugandan officials interviewed for the present study point out that there are serious risks in allowing the conversation to be steered towards radical overhaul of the current refugee management system in Uganda. Pessimistic discourses of scarcity could be used by cynics within the country to undermine and even destroy Uganda's Open Door model without replacing it with anything resembling the current system in terms of scale of support and protection for refugees.

The pathway advocated by such proponents of Uganda's current system is continued 'progressive realization' of the country's legal and policy ideals. Optimists point to the OPM's ability to adapt and address shortcomings, for instance, in the way it has succeeded in keeping host community resentment under control by incorporating locals into schemes and projects that target refugees. Beginning in 2015 with ReHope (Refugee and Host Population Empowerment), a strategy rolled out with the support of the UNHCR, the OPM has consistently advised donors that host community stakeholders should constitute 30 per cent of the beneficiaries of any given project. Some of those interviewed said this figure will soon be increased to 50 per cent.

Refugee-led organizations can play a greater role in progressive realization towards greater economic inclusion of refugees in Uganda. Their importance increased substantially during the pandemic, particularly in cities where they were relied upon to interface with refugee populations otherwise cut off from the global system of humanitarian aid distribution. RLOs also play a key role in providing urban refugees with skills and training necessary to take advantage of their right to work. However, many do not receive enough direct donor funding to fulfil their potential. In line with pledges made by many countries at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023, this can and should change so that RLOs can support refugees' pathways to socio-economic uplift. Without the means to attain decent jobs, the right to work on paper has limited value.

Another key challenge that can be addressed with European support is access to justice for asylum seekers, particularly Refugee Status Determination (RSD) for those who do not receive prima facie recognition as refugees. Uganda's impressive ability to absorb and manage large groups of refugees tends to obscure its limited capacity to process asylum claims. Individuals from smaller groups, often from non-neighbouring countries such as Eritrea, are often left to the mercy of an underfunded asylum system. Many eventually leave Uganda for countries such as Sweden, the UK, and Germany if they do not receive recognition as refugees.

Problems with the RSD process, which have been identified before, presented themselves as a major concern for civil society during the research completed for this study. Access to justice is challenging in cities and indeed remote areas, where asylum seekers who lack legal representation, translation facilities, and any hope of a hearing by the REC (Refugee Eligibility Committee) can end up languishing in detention for months and even years. The REC is not a standing committee; it has no premises, few translation facilities, and is often administered by staff that lack the training to assess complex claims. These problems of legal and institutional infrastructure must be addressed if Uganda is to develop a viable system of assessing asylum claims.

For a growing number of urban self-settled refugees and asylum seekers in cities — West Africans, Cameroonians, Eritreans, Pakistanis and others who struggle for an audience with the REC — the consequences of Uganda's lack of capacity to assess individual claims can be devastating. Those who are or become undocumented face harassment, extortion and abuse from the police and others who take advantage of their predicament.

Finally, the issue of resettlement is in need of urgent attention. Journalistic investigations and analyses dating back to 2019 have revealed systematic patterns of bribery. As recently as 2022, insider accounts have identified the way in which international humanitarian aid for refugees in Uganda is subject to distortive manipulation within an industry that sometimes serves managers more than beneficiaries. It should perhaps come as little surprise, then, that the problem of bribery continues to distort the process of resettlement and remains a deep source of anxiety for refugees and asylum seekers seeking access to justice in Uganda. The issue remains systemic and must be addressed at a structural level through determined action and cooperation between the relevant agencies. This is a particularly sensitive problem and outsiders are hesitant to intervene, not least for fear of reprisals that might affect the most vulnerable.

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