



REFUGEE ENGAGEMENT FORUM (REF) TASKFORCE

ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY -DECEMBER 2021

Introduction.

The Refugee Engagement Forum (REF) is comprised of 37 members from the 13 settlements and Kampala leadership reflecting diverse demography, gender, and age groups. Following the death of one REF member from Kampala, there are currently 36 members

The REF meets quarterly in a year, before every Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) Steering Group (SG) meeting to inform the CRRF Steering Group of all decisions that affect refugees. Two elected members of the REF (one female and one male) participate in the CRRF Steering Group meeting. Through this arrangement, refugees inform the CRRF Steering Group in decisions that affect them, as reflected in the community-based protection approach that puts the capacities, agency, rights, and dignity of persons of concern at the center of the refugee response in Uganda. The REF members further inform the entire refugee community about the discussions and action points from the REF and CRRF SG meetings done through community feedback meetings, sector working groups, and settlement coordination meetings among other platforms.



In 2021, the REF task force conducted its 10th, 11th, and 12th REF meetings in March, October, and December respectively. The second wave of COVID -19 in Uganda and its' restrictions affected the SG meetings and subsequently, one REF meeting that was scheduled for June 2021 was not done. 10th REF meeting was held virtually, where REF members attended from their respective locations. The REF focal point persons and taskforce members played a pivotal role in ensuring that

all REF members attended the virtual meeting. The 11th and 12th REF meetings in October and December 2021 saw a shift from virtual to physical attendance, and REF members travelled from their respective settlements to Kampala. Both meetings had a total attendance of 36 REF members (18 Females and 18 Males), including the Youth representatives (5 in total – 3 Males and 2 Females) who are on a rotational basis.

Key outcomes

1. Three REF sessions were held in March, October, and December 2021, marking the 10th, 11th, and 12th REF sessions. Three consecutive meeting reports were written and shared with REF members for community feedback meetings and are accessible on the REF web page [Working Group: Refugee Engagement Forum \(REF\) - Uganda \(unhcr.org\)](https://www.unhcr.org/working-group-refugee-engagement-forum-ref-uganda)
2. Two REF representatives were able to present key issues during the 14th and 15th SG meetings. During the 11th REF meeting, substantive refugee representatives (1 male & 1 female) were elected to the CRRF SG.
3. A total of 82 Community consultation and feedback sessions were held in 12 settlements and Urban, and reports were shared with the REF TF and members. Community consultation meetings were held regularly before each REF meeting, which helped REF members to have more systematic consultations with their community members and seek their feedback



which REF members bring to the REF meetings. This practice will continue through 2022 with support from REF task force members.

4. Additional funding to the REF was provided by OXFAM. This supported the REF members with airtime for 6 months (July – December 2021)- and tablets (need to be distributed) to ease their communication and attend online meetings. It is important to note that the REF has enjoyed continuous support from task force members (OPM, UNHCR, CRRF Secretariate, U-Learn, IRC, CARE, and OXFAM). These members cost-share the funding of the REF budget and provide additional support in terms of notetaking, facilitating REF meetings, offering training sessions to REF members, etc.
5. UNHCR together with health partners was able to sensitize refugee communities on information about COVID-19 (SOPs) and vaccination. The process is continuing through different channels (Community radios, Mobile radios, FRRM, community meetings, etc) with clear messages on COVID – 19 translated in different languages
6. REF Taskforce regular preparatory and review meetings. The REF Taskforce co-chairs successfully convened 36 preparatory and review meetings prior to and after each REF meeting. Through these meetings, several decisions were taken to ensure continued meaningful and active participation of refugees at the REF meeting and CRRF SG meeting



Key actions /resolutions from REF meetings and CRRF SG meetings

Key actions	Resolution	Recommendation	Responsible partner organisation
Community consultation and feedback sessions should continue in all field locations	The REF members agreed that community consultation meetings should be held earlier to allow adequate preparation and conceptualization of issues for presentation at the REF meetings.		UNHCR, OPM, REF taskforce members.
There is a strong need to strengthen the accountability of legal practitioners like police and courts of law in the settlements to ensure access to justice for the survivors of sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) and other crimes, which has become rampant in the settlements.		There is a need to step up case management and follow up with in the settlements.	OPM, UNHCR, and partners



<p>Alleviating the effects of COVID – 19 on social economic and cultural aspects of refugee households. This is in light with COVID – 19 restrictions that impacted on many households and saw schools closed for over 2 years.</p>	<p>All REF members agreed to continue sensitizing their respective refugee communities about the dangers of early marriages, child abuse, teenage pregnancies, and SGBV within their communities.</p> <p>REF members pledged to continue encouraging parents to take their children back to school once they are re-opened.</p>		<p>REF members</p>
<p>Escalation of issues identified during REF meeting to relevant sector working groups.</p>	<p>Issues raised during the REF meeting need to be categorized by sector. The issues can then be raised/ shared with relevant sector working group leads for their attention and action.</p>	<p>Issues raised by REF that fall under Livelihoods, need to be escalated to the national/settlement livelihood sector working group meeting.</p>	<p>UNHCR and OPM</p>
<p>There is a need for increased, consistent, and regularised interactions between refugee leaders and district officials (RHDs).</p>	<p>Establishment of the District Engagement Forum (DEF), REF members will ensure more interaction with district leaders.</p>		<p>CRRF – Secretariat UNHCR</p>



Considering the ongoing food ration reduction, there is a strong need to support the transition from humanitarian assistance to a more sustainable solution.

The focus should be to revise the design of livelihood projects, diversify livelihood opportunities through livestock keeping and improved veterinary services, increase access to soft loans and credit facilities.

As both short-term and long-term solutions, REF members requested more livelihood interventions especially income-generating activities to respond to reduced food rations.

It is already noted that the ongoing livelihood interventions by UNHCR and partners do not have a “deeper reach” in terms of scale yet there is an increasing need for household food production for food security. Efforts should be made to upscale innovative approaches such as the Optimal Land Use Model (OLUM), block farming, commercial farming, and other cash-based interventions already piloted in some settlements to respond to the effects of reduced food rations. UNHCR and OPM need to meaningfully engage local governments and landlords for access to land for agriculture

OPM

UNHCR

Partners



<p>Universal vaccination against COVID-19 and the need for adherence to the SOPs by the community.</p>		<p>It is crucial to provide additional/ detailed information on the plan for the vaccination of refugees and the general population and, the safety of vaccines to avoid misinformation among the refugee community.</p>	<p>G.O.U (OPM)</p>
<p>Inclusion of people with disabilities and other minority groups to be represented in REF</p>		<p>REF needs to be more representative, in terms of diversity within their communities including persons with disabilities and minority groups.</p>	<p>REF Taskforce</p>
<p>Spontaneous returns of refugees in most of the settlements without following the right procedures.</p>		<p>Continued sensitization of community members on the risks and consequences associated with spontaneous return to areas in their countries of origin that are still volatile is encouraged.</p>	<p>OPM UNHCR</p>
<p>Limited participation of REF Focal point persons in community consultation and feedback sessions.</p>		<p>UNHCR REF focal point persons at the sub-offices are advised to consistently attend the community consultation meetings and capture or respond to some of the issues raised and participate in Zonal coordination meetings actively at the settlement level.</p>	<p>UNHCR</p>
<p>There is a need for government to encourage more private sector investment in the refugee response.</p>		<p>Government and partners should scale up programs that lead to the acquisition of more skills, application of best agricultural practices, and capacity building for sustainable jobs and livelihood</p>	<p>OPM – DOR UNHCR</p>



Challenges faced by the REF in 2021

- Covid-19 restrictions resulting from the 2nd Lockdown in Uganda made it impossible for the REF Taskforce to hold a meeting in the second quarter of 2021. Additionally, the impact of Covid-19 on consultative and feedback sessions was evident as it limited the number of community members invited for sessions to just 20 participants as per Ministry of Health guidelines.
- Limited commitment from some stakeholders at the settlement level to address key issues raised by REF and community members poses a challenge to the relevance of the Refugee Engagement Forum.
- Sustainability of the REF funding. The REF Taskforce depends on funds from its task force members which is unsustainable in the long run.
- Absenteeism of humanitarian actors to attend the community feedback and consultation meetings organized by REF members and the task force has affected receipt of instant feedback to community issues raised.
- The election of the Refugee Welfare Council (RWC) left most of the REF members voted out. This affected the REF engagement with the community and partners. It further delayed REF feedback sessions, especially election periods.



The way forward/ Next steps

- ✓ Moving forward, The REF Taskforce plans to support members with tablets to ensure members are well equipped and can engage despite the COVID - 19 situation in the country. The task force plans to distribute these tablets in the 13th REF meeting.
- ✓ The REF Taskforce will continue to prioritize capacity-building sessions for REF members to effectively advocate at the settlement and at the national level. CARE will continue training REF members on advocacy and conflict resolution this year.
- ✓ The REF task force is prioritizing developing joint proposals to be submitted to potential funders to supplement available support from individual organizations. This is more sustainable in the long run.
- ✓ The Refugee Engagement Forum is making a lot of progress since its inception, but there is a need to begin tracking progress on issues raised. An M&E system needs to be developed to track progress, capture lessons learned, and share good practices/successes with a wider audience.

