



Uganda: Citizens' Perceptions on Refugees



Voices of Citizens | Sauti za Wananchi

19 June 2018

Uganda

From Harm to Home | [Rescue.org](https://www.rescue.org)



Domitila Kaliya is a Congolese refugee living in Kampala, Uganda. She started her own clothing business after joining an IRC VSLA group. Credit: Andrew Oberstadt for the IRC

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Cover: *Sophie, 16, fled South Sudan in 2016. Today she lives in Bidi Bidi settlement with her Grandma, siblings and her extended family. Jessica Wanless for the IRC*

INTRODUCTION

The much-anticipated Global Refugee Compact (GRC), expected in late 2018, together with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), promise to revitalize refugee response through a multi-stakeholder “whole of society” approach. At a time when the international community is grappling with fundamental questions such as the equitable sharing of responsibility for refugees, the views and opinions of citizens in East Africa are invaluable in charting new directions.

East Africa has a long history of hosting refugee populations. Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda have experienced large influxes of displaced people from numerous conflicts around the region over the past decades. These three countries currently host more than 2.2 million refugees,¹ with Uganda hosting 1.4 million², followed by Kenya (just under 500,000) and Tanzania (over 350,000).

Uganda is unique in that it has departed from the dominant refugee response model in East Africa; instead of housing refugees in large camps, Uganda has championed an integrated settlements approach in which refugees and host communities coexist and share common services—as exemplified by the Settlements Transformative Agenda (STA)² and Refugee and Host Population Empowerment (ReHoPE) approaches that have brought citizens and refugees closer together at the local level.

The majority of Ugandan citizens still have little or no interaction with refugees, yet Ugandans play a critical role, both directly and indirectly, in determining the conditions of refugee asylum. The extent to which citizens influence asylum policies in Uganda is not well documented, and little is known about the impact of citizens’ perceptions on current policy positions.

This report attempts to illuminate key issues concerning the reception and response of the citizens of Uganda to refugees, as well as their attitudes toward the establishment of durable solutions. UNHCR defines three durable solutions for refugees: 1) voluntary repatriation to the country of origin in safety and dignity, 2) local integration in the country of asylum and, 3) resettlement to a third country. The objective is to highlight any connection (or disconnection) that may exist between public perceptions of refugees and public policy established by national and local governments.

The report calls for more deliberate and strategic engagement of the public in the policy decision-making process in Uganda. It identifies opportunities for strategic engagement of citizens and concludes that more needs to be done to improve the quality of information available to the public, as well as opportunities for citizens to engage directly in policy formulation.

1 UNHCR Fact Sheets for Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda February 2018.

2 As of April 18, 2018, according to the Uganda Refugee Response Portal operated by the Government of Uganda and UNHCR. These figures are currently under review. <https://ugandarefugees.org/>

METHODOLOGY

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) in partnership with Twaweza³ undertook the survey using a tool called *Sauti za Wananchi (SzW)*⁴, a mobile phone panel survey developed and managed by Twaweza in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. SzW provides high quality and easily obtained survey data from a nationally representative samples of the population in each of the three target countries. The IRC collaborated with Twaweza, national and international NGOs working on refugee issues to develop the survey consisting of 18 questions administered in all three countries during the first half of May 2018.

Data was collection form 1,672 respondents in Kenya, 1,606 in Tanzania, and 1,925 in Uganda. Based on the response rate, the data sets were then cleaned and weighted by Twaweza before the IRC staff began their analysis.

Twaweza *Sauti za Wananchi* survey description and sampling approach

In brief, *Sauti za Wananchi* is a mobile phone panel survey that first establishes a baseline using randomly selected household and individual data from national censuses in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. In phase one, respondents are interviewed face-to-face in selected enumeration areas. In phase two, respondents are contacted on their mobile phones over a 36-month period and asked questions covering a wide range of topics.

The target population for the survey are citizens 18 years and above. Geographic and gender balances are determined according to national census data. Twaweza used a multistage stratified sampling approach to achieve a representative sample of the total target population: stage one involves random selection of census enumeration areas (EA) based on specific EA strata; stage two involves random selection of households sampled from the EA list; stage three involves selection of individual respondents from household members 18 and older.

In each country, a population of 2,000 individuals in 200 enumeration areas was obtained, a sample sufficient for a confidence interval of +/- 5 percentage points. In addition to the 2,000, 400 replacement individuals were identified to replace individuals who dropped out over the course of the survey. However, the protocols used to establish trust with Twaweza and to encourage participation ensuring that high response rates are maintained over the life of each survey.

³ <https://www.twaweza.org/go/about-us>

⁴ Voice of Citizens

UGANDA

How do citizens identify refugees and where do they get information?

Given the high number of refugees in Uganda (1.4 million), it is unsurprising that Ugandans demonstrate high levels of awareness about refugees and the issues affecting them. The vast majority of Ugandans (76%) can accurately describe the term *refugee*, based on one criteria, conflict (Figure 1). However, there is a significant proportion of the population whose understanding of the term *refugee* includes migrants (26%), those displaced by natural disasters (36%), and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (40%).

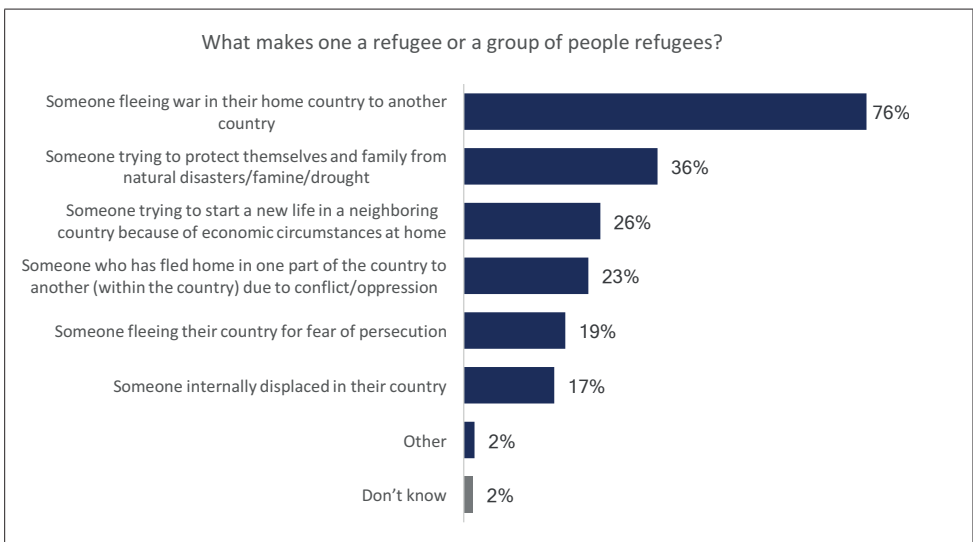


Figure 1: Ugandans' views on what makes one a refugee

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

Respondents appear to be influenced by electronic media, particularly radio (81%) (Figure 2), although fewer (74%) trust information they get radio (Figure 2). Only 33% of Ugandans have had direct contact with a refugee (Figure 3). The experiences of friends and family also account for a significant amount (19%) of information about refugees. Of the issues reported by the media Ugandans cite refugees' need for protection (49%), potential security threats (33%), and the high levels of government spending (21%) as the most prominent themes (Figure 4).

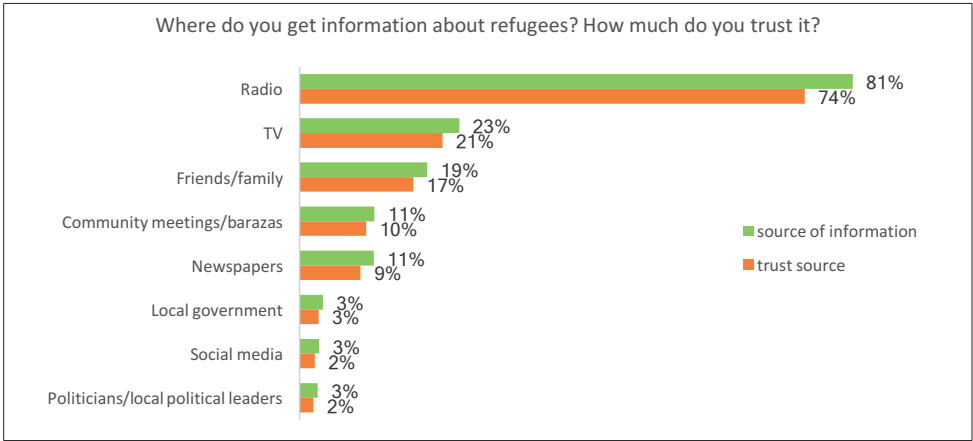


Figure 2: Where do you get information about refugees? How much do you trust it?

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

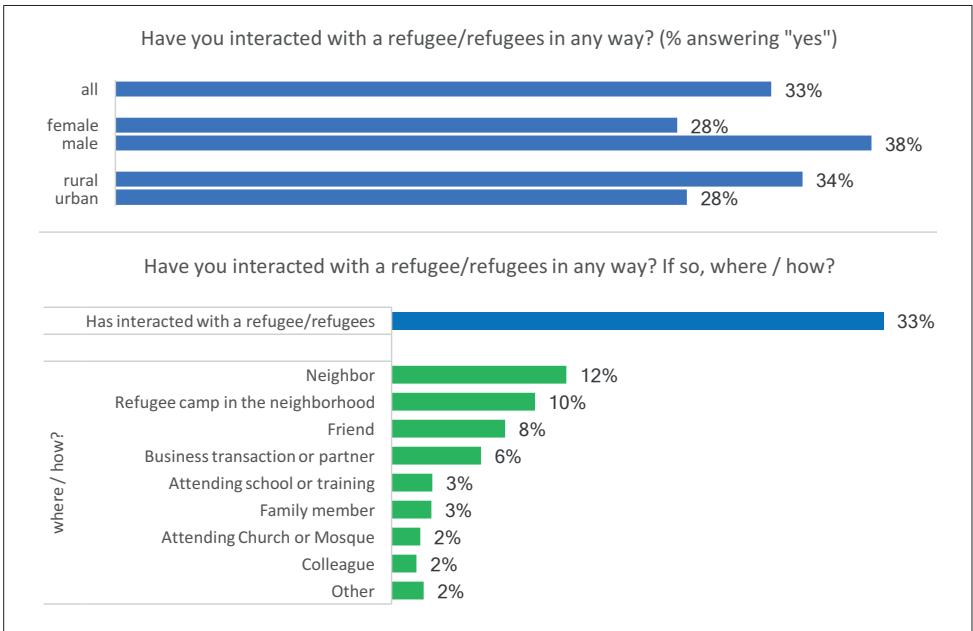


Figure 3: Ugandans who have interacted with a refugee/refugees. And if so where and how.

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

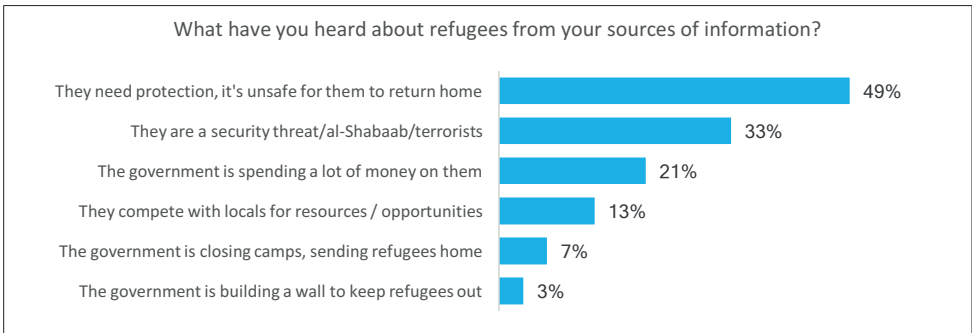


Figure 4: What have you heard about refugees from your sources of information?

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

Uganda is currently hosting the largest population of refugees in Africa—and the third largest globally. The total refugee population stands at 1.4 million, higher than at any time in the country's history. The country continues to be a safe haven for refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (285,398), South Sudan (1,061,892), Burundi (41,296), Somalia (37,274) and other countries (37,026)⁵. With the number of refugees projected to reach 1.8 million by the end of 2018, it is likely that refugees and refugee affairs will remain a major subject of public interest and discussion.

What do citizens think about protection and humanitarian service to refugees?

Uganda is a continental and global pioneer in refugee response and asylum policy, particularly for its approach to integration; placing refugees alongside Ugandan citizens. The policy has enabled nearly 100,000 refugees to live in urban areas. A vast majority of Ugandans (89%) agree that the country serves as a good example to the rest of the world on how to assist refugees (Figure 5). The government's asylum policies enjoy popular support from Ugandan citizens; 81% of the population believe the government has done well or very well in delivering refugee response in Uganda (Figure 6).

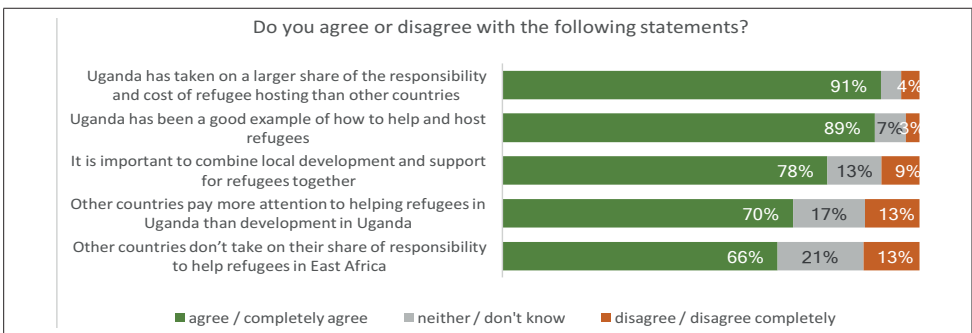


Figure 5: Ugandans views on their government's response to refugee issues.

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

⁵ As of April 18, 2018, according to the Uganda Refugee Response Portal operated by the Government of Uganda and UNHCR. These figures are currently under review. <https://ugandarefugees.org/>

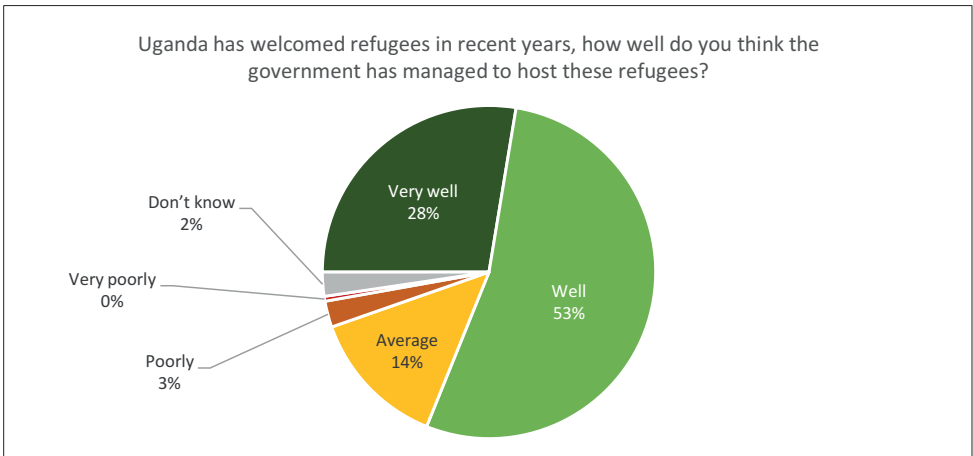


Figure 6: Uganda has welcomed refugees in recent years, how well do you think the government has managed to host these refugees?

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

A majority of Ugandans (60%) cite humanitarian need as the reason to support refugees (Figure 6). However, a significant number (19%) also express the view that hosting refugees places a burden on the country's resources; this opinion does not seem to adversely impact public support for continued provision of services to refugees. A high proportion of the population supports the delivery of public services to refugees, including water services (95%), security (95%), and access to land (71%) and education (86%), as shown in Figure 8. Most of the respondents (77%) also express support for the provision of services to refugees through local government (Figure 10), as well as the joint provision of services to both refugees and host communities by NGOs (84%), as shown in Figure 9.

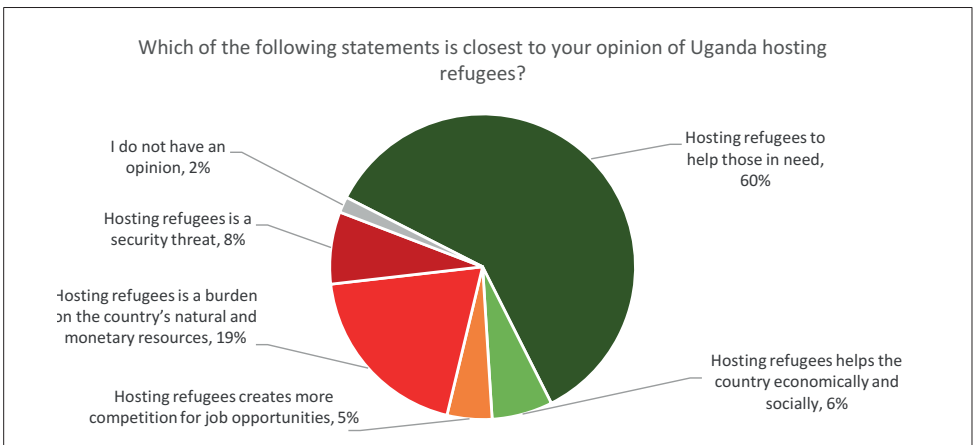


Figure 7: Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion of Uganda hosting refugees?

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

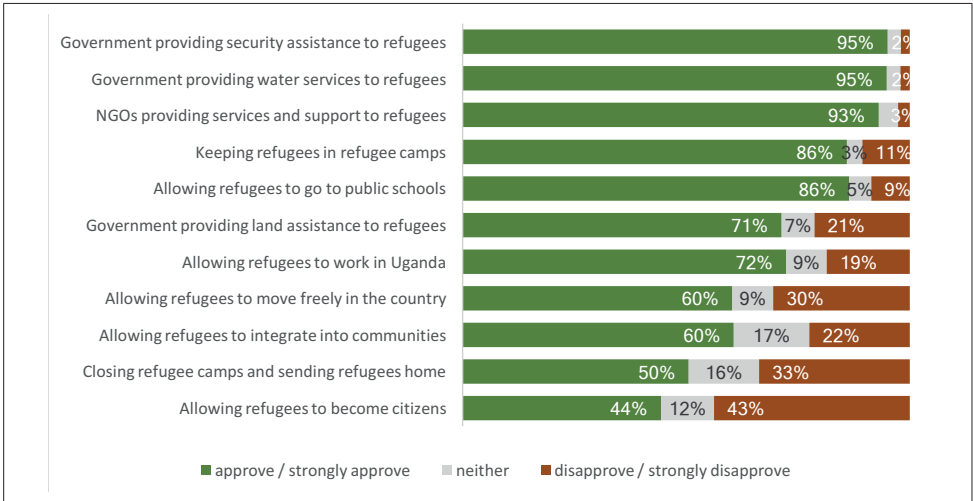


Figure 8: Ugandans' approval or disapproval of various services to refugees in Uganda

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

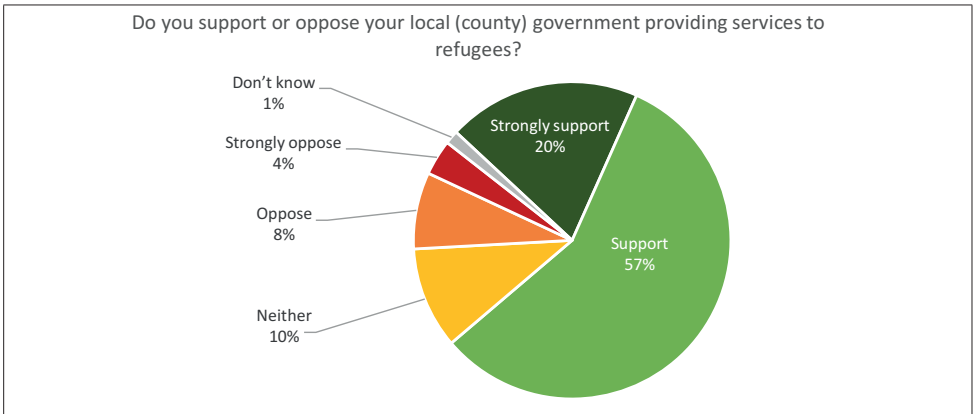


Figure 9: Do you support or oppose your local government providing services to refugees?

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

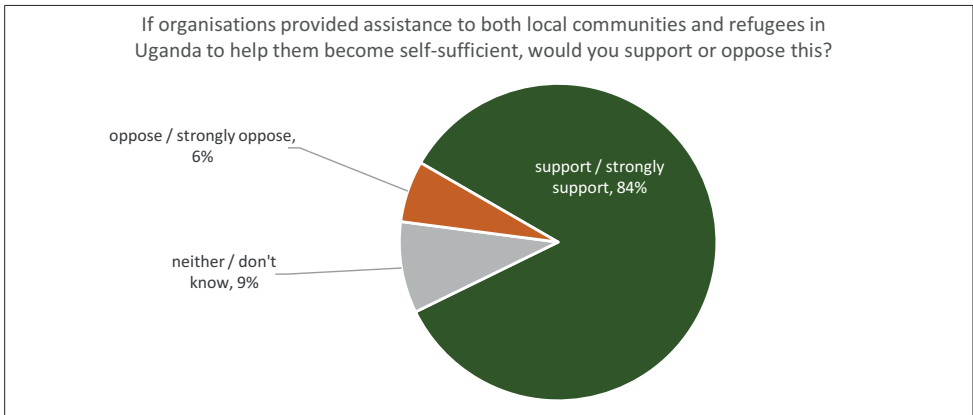


Figure 10: Ugandans' support for integrated support for self-sufficiency for local and refugee communities

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

In Uganda, refugees and host communities share access to public services including health care and education. Infrastructure improvements are carried out in a way that not only meet the needs of refugees, but continue to benefit host communities long after the refugees return home.⁶ The data indicates that the integrated model is popular not only in host communities, but nationwide.

What do citizens think about refugee integration?

The refugee response in Uganda is designed to transition refugees from humanitarian aid to self-reliance and resilience as elaborated in the ReHoPE strategy and the Settlement Transformation Agenda (STA). The ReHoPE framework, adopted in June 2017, is a multiyear strategy with a focus on sustainable livelihoods and integration of social services. The STA integrates refugees into national development plans.⁴ Key to the settlements approach is avoiding segregation and isolation of refugees in camps, fostering coexistence, and allowing refugees freedom of movement and the right to work.

The majority of Ugandans (61%) support the integration of refugees into society. Most Ugandans (60%) approve of refugees having freedom of movement, although a significant proportion (31%) disapprove. Moreover, nearly three quarters of Ugandans (72%) are in favor of allowing refugees the right to work (Figure 12). While Uganda does not host refugees in camps, a significant proportion of the population responded when question on the topic, suggesting that the difference between camps and settlements is not obvious to a significant proportion of the population.

⁶ UNHCR Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework - Uganda: The Way Forward. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/63266>

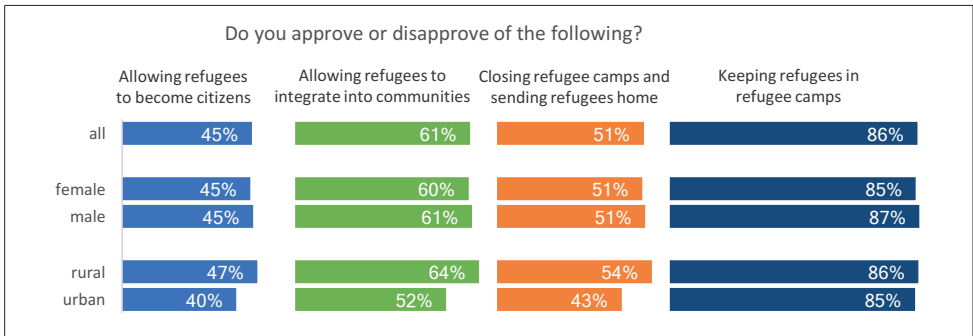


Figure 11: Ugandans’ approval on citizenship, integration, closing camps, and refugee camps

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

Uganda has a long history of granting asylum in a region prone to population displacement. Thousands of refugees, mostly Sudanese, Congolese, have lived in Uganda for 20 to 40 years. Despite the country’s pioneering policies, Uganda citizenship remains unattainable for refugees, even those who have been in the country for decades. Under its constitution and applicable statutes, Uganda precludes refugees from becoming naturalized; time spent in Uganda under refugee status does not count toward the residence required for citizenship.

Despite this policy the precludes refugees from obtaining citizenship, a majority of respondents (53%) think that citizenship should be granted to refugees, with slightly less than half (47%) opposing the idea (Figure 12). A strong majority (62%) think that citizenship should be granted to refugees after 20 years (Figure 13). Only 17% think that refugees should never be granted citizenship regardless of duration of residence in Uganda.

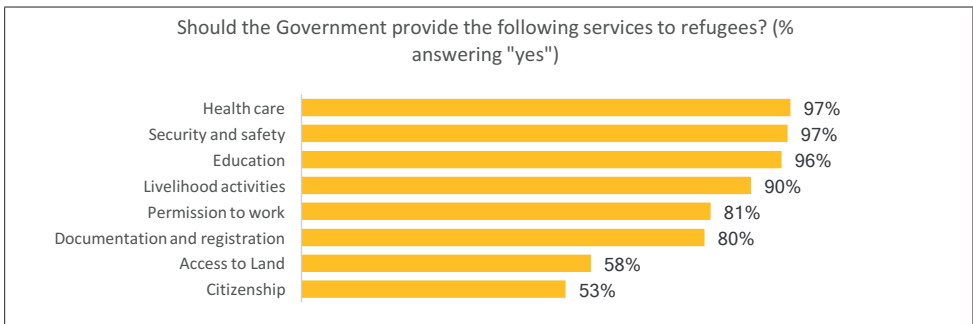


Figure 12: Should the Government provide the following services to refugees? (% answering “yes”)

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

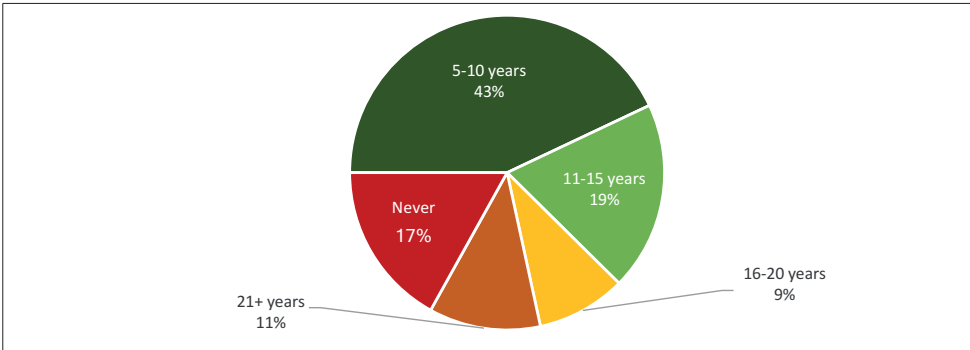


Figure 13: After how long in the country would you support refugee in Uganda having the ability to become citizens following registration with the government?

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

What do citizens think about sharing responsibility for refugee hosting among the international community?

The international community has been urged to match the generosity shown by Uganda and to address the root causes of displacement. In line with the 2016 New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants, a pledge by the international community to ease the pressure on host countries and communities, Uganda established its Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in 2017. The framework is intended to enable international support for five mutually reinforcing themes: admission and rights; emergency response and ongoing needs; resilience and self-reliance of refugees; expansion of solutions through resettlement; and complementary pathways.

In the recent past, the refugee response in Uganda has come close to the breaking point as refugee numbers increase and chronic underfunding debilitates the capabilities of the government and humanitarian organizations to deliver services.⁵ A strong majority of Ugandans (91%) think that the country has taken on a larger share of the responsibility and cost of hosting refugees compared to other countries (Figure 5); 66% agree that other countries have not accepted their share of responsibility to help refugees in East Africa (Figure 5).

Since December 2017, the international community has responded to the situation in Uganda in part through the World Bank, which has extended loans to the country. Uganda has received USD 50 million in credit from the World Bank in support of the ReHoPE framework. Additionally, the World Bank has included Uganda in its financing sub-window, International Development Association IDA 18⁷, to help it cope with its refugee influx, partly in response to the appeal made during the Uganda Solidarity Conference in 2017.

7 <http://ida.worldbank.org/financing/replenishments/ida18-overview/ida18-regional-sub-window-for-refugees-host-communities>

About half of Ugandans (47%) agree with the country borrowing money to support refugees the same number of people agree with borrowing money to support refugee hosting areas (47%) (Figure 14). These figures indicate a need for greater public awareness and engagement regarding World Bank loans for support of refugees and host communities. In addition, the fact that 70% of the population believe other countries pay more attention to helping refugees than helping Ugandans (Figure 5) suggests that citizens of the country should be brought into the national discussion on financing for refugee support and broader national development plans.

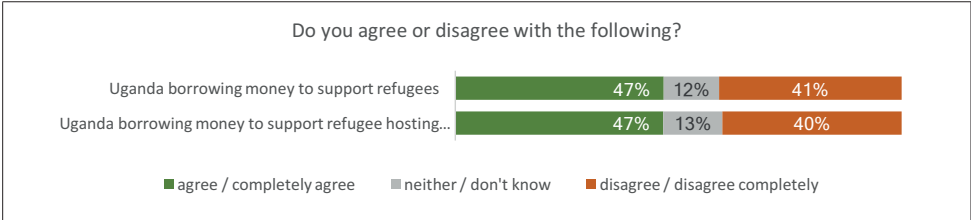


Figure 14: Support for borrowing

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

Uganda plays a major role in regional peace processes at both the bilateral and multilateral levels, especially in South Sudan and Somalia. The majority of Ugandans think that the government is doing enough to resolve conflicts in the region (Figure 15). However, more than 40% of Ugandans do not think that the government has done enough in this area. It should be remembered that Uganda is located at the confluence of several ongoing conflicts, including Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan.

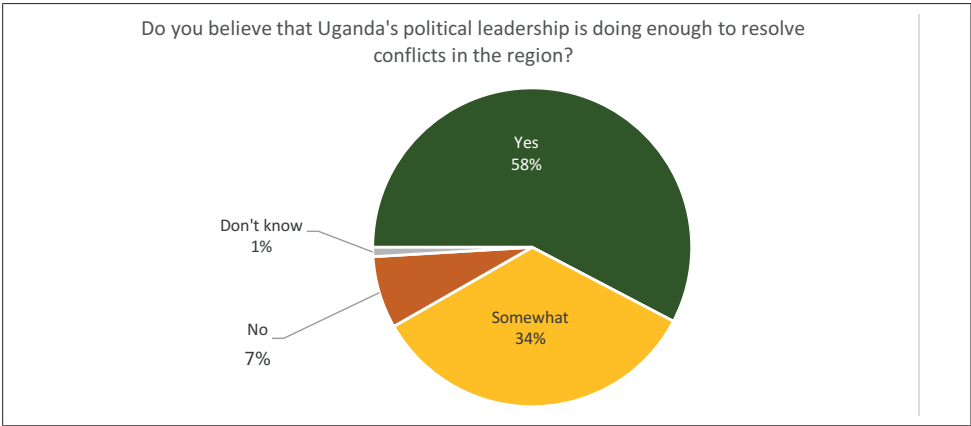


Figure 15: Do you believe that Uganda’s political leadership is doing enough to resolve conflicts in the region?

Source: *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone survey (Round 4, May 2018 n= 1,925)

OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

Information to citizens about refugees needs to be more strategic.

A vast majority of Ugandans are informed about refugees and present high levels of awareness of the issues affecting them although more awareness is needed on the distinction between refugees and other displaced populations. Public concerns (protection, security, government spending) reflect current policy priorities, a finding that indicates public awareness and engagement on the most pressing issues. There is an opportunity to build on this engagement by enhancing the quality of information available to Ugandans. Journalists and media professionals are important partners in this effort.

Citizens support public service provision to refugees but are concerned about other countries' contributions.

Both citizens and government express concern about inadequate resources for refugee response, but there is divided opinion on how the resources should be obtained, particularly with respect to their government borrowing to support refugees. Ugandans generally feel that their country has taken on a greater share of the responsibility for hosting refugees than other countries. More work is needed to make information on current investments by the international community available to the public, but also to make sure Ugandans' opinions about inadequate response are transmitted to the international community. Moreover, support for integrated service provision to refugee and host communities is viewed favorably. With the collaboration of both local governments and NGOs and backed by long-term predictable funding, could catalyze further development that benefits Ugandans as well as refugees.

Citizens are open to integration, but more work is required to determine the appropriate extent.

There is popular support for integration of refugees in Uganda; citizens generally are in favor of refugees having freedom of movement, the right to work, and access to public services. It appears that Ugandans are amenable to an even higher degree of integration, particularly for refugees who have been in the country for protracted periods, or who were born in the country. There is need to engage with citizens to better understand and define parameters for refugee integration, particularly in cases where citizenship could contribute to a durable solution.



*Refugee boys collecting water in Bidibidi settlement area Uganda.
Credit: Kellie Ryan for the IRC*

The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises, helping to restore health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power to people devastated by conflict and disaster. Founded in 1993 at the call of Albert Einstein, the IRC is at work in over 30 countries and 26 U.S. cities helping people to survive, reclaim control of their future and strengthen their communities.

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