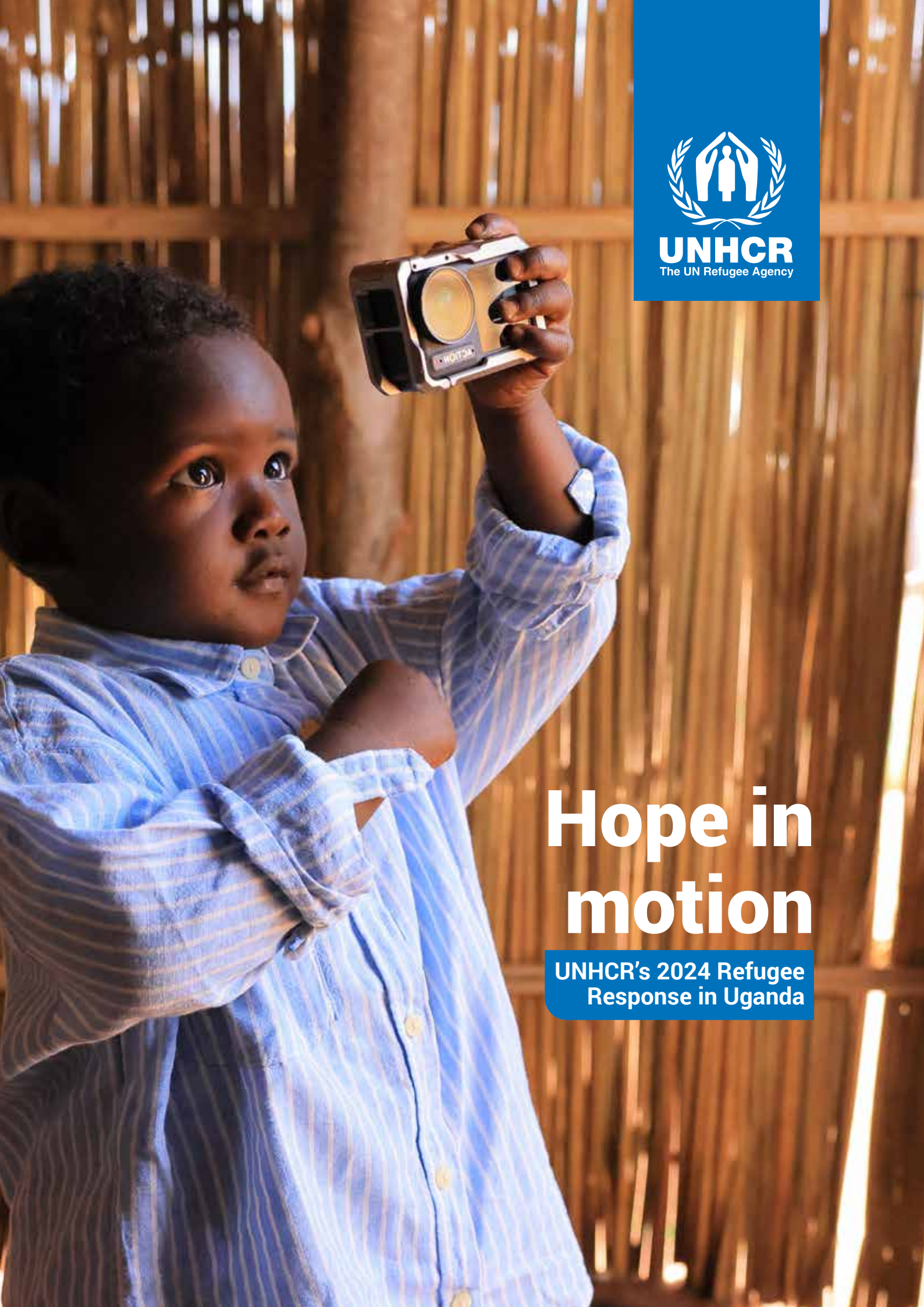

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

# Hope in motion

## UNHCR's 2024 Refugee Response in Uganda

*Refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement line up to receive clothing donated by Inditex*

UNHCR Representation in Uganda
Plots 11/13 Mackenzie Close,
Off Mackenzie Vale, Kololo
P.O.Box 3813, Kampala
Tel: 256-312-231200

**www.unhcr.org**

**Photo Credit:**
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Tanja Kale
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**Cover page (Front)**
Ahmed, a 2-year-old Sudanese refugee, now lives safely with his family in the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement after fleeing conflict.

**Cover Page (Back)**
Sudanese refugee mother Yusra Dafallah Brima with her children—Kuchi, Kaka, and Kodi—at their home in Cluster C, Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement.

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## Foreword: UNHCR Country Representative

# 2024: A year of adaptation and innovation in refugee response

In 2024, Uganda experienced a significant increase in the influx of refugees, with 153,000 new arrivals, primarily from Sudan due to escalating conflict. By the end of the year, Uganda was hosting nearly 1.8 million refugees and asylum seekers, including over 420,000 new arrivals since 2022. Due to the high number of new arrivals, a Level 2 emergency was declared in September.

Besides Sudanese refugees, Uganda also continued to host increasing numbers of refugees from other countries, particularly from the DRC, South Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia. At the current rate of arrivals, the country could be hosting nearly two million refugees by the end of 2025, with children constituting about 50% of the population.

On behalf of all those who serve and support them, I extend my gratitude to the Government of Uganda for their continued empathy and understanding, and their 'open door' policy that provides safety and security within Uganda's borders.

Providing meaningful protection and assistance to refugees in the face of dwindling humanitarian funding coupled with increased displacements around the globe remains challenging. However, I am encouraged by the support from various partners, governments, embassies, and organizations that assist UNHCR in prioritizing refugee needs and ensuring their involvement in decisions affecting their families, communities, and their future.

In a context of increasing needs and constrained resources, it has been imperative for UNHCR in Uganda to establish a work culture that continuously focuses on efficient service delivery through judicious use of resources. This entails deliberate implementation of cost-saving

measures through pragmatic and creative approaches to cover the needs of refugees and their host communities by creating more efficiencies in the refugee response.

Significant strides have been made in integrating services for refugees into national systems, fostering sustainable and diverse partnerships, transitioning to environmentally sustainable solutions, and comprehensively examining internal administrative costs by changing the way we think and intervene in the operation. UNHCR reduced its operational footprint in the field by closing Field Office Nakivale and reduced its entire workforce by 120 personnel (for 2023 and 2024). Among the cost-saving measures were a reduction of fuel allocation to partners by 30% and a reduction of the vehicle fleet and field travels.

These efforts resulted in significant savings that were used to cover critical gaps in the response, including the restoration of soap and sanitary towel provisions for new arrivals, procurement of essential medicines and medical supplies, and provision of additional Core Relief Items (CRIs) for new arrivals. As part of the new ways of doing business and in the spirit of localization, UNHCR engaged and funded 32 refugee-led organizations (RLOs), the highest number for any UNHCR office globally, where refugees lead and collaborate to effect the desired changes.

While some of the efficiency gains can be easily quantified in terms of money saved, others are qualitative and less easy to monetize. However, both quantitative and qualitative changes, including a culture of integrity and a congenial work environment, contributed to ensuring efficiency in our delivery.

Despite the challenges faced in 2024, there were remarkable achievements and progress made. Following the success of the Global Refugee Forum at the end of 2023, where $240.7 million was pledged to Uganda, we saw strong support for the Government's progressive commitments to the refugee situation. In 2024, UNHCR signed 44 Partnership Agreements with relevant Government Institutions, Local and International NGOs, nine Letters of Understanding with sister UN agencies, and engaged 32 Refugee-Led Organizations.

We made substantial strides in protecting children and combating violence against women and girls by initiating the integration of protection services into national systems. Over 35% of schools have transitioned to be government supported, with refugees increasingly included in school planning numbers, which will result in more grant aid benefiting future refugee and host community learners. Strengthening community health teams has led to 30% of childhood illnesses being treated at the community level, reducing pressure on health facilities.

Despite a 14% increase in the population served, water access has improved from 16 liters per person per day to 17 liters, with an additional 17,000 latrines constructed – 69% more than 2023. Enhanced efficiencies and 14 new water systems have reduced the cost of supplying water due to decreased water trucking and increased solarization of water pumping systems.

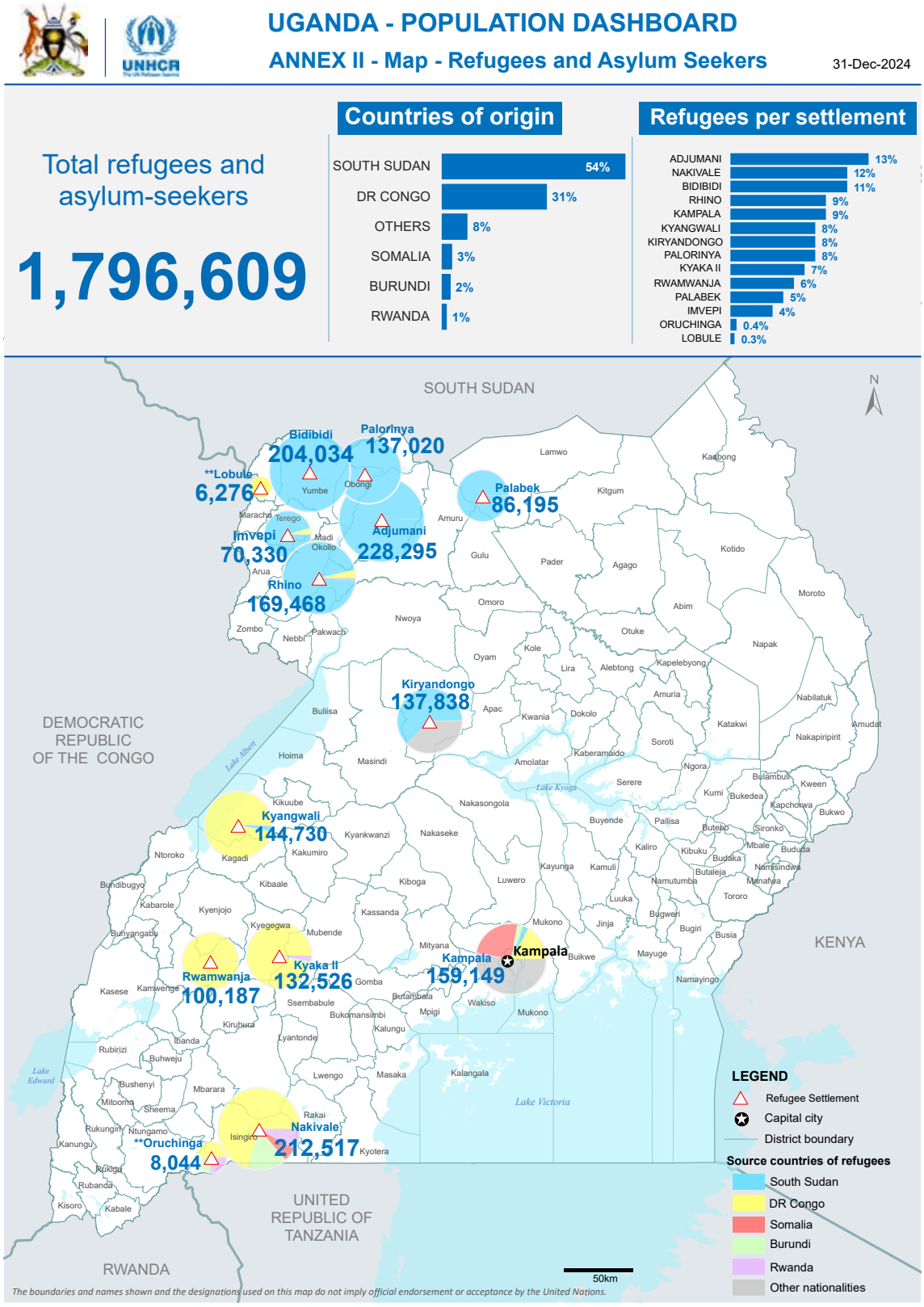
We are also working to reduce the environmental impact of hosting refugees by establishing woodlots, promoting agroforestry, solarizing health centers — 21 more this year—and installing clean cooking and heating systems in schools. These initiatives are part of our long-term sustainable approaches that will guide UNHCR's strategy in the coming years.

Our High Commissioner, Mr. Filippo Grandi, visited Uganda in October and heard harrowing personal stories from newly arrived Congolese women and their families. Their words inspire us to continue improving. Despite the challenges, we and our partners will persist in providing lifesaving assistance while laying the foundations for long-term strategies to help forcibly displaced people become self-reliant and forge a prosperous future.

Matthew Crentsil
**UNHCR Representative in Uganda**

## Refugee Population Statistics

# Map showing Uganda Refugee Presence (2024)




** Oruchinga and Lobule symbols not to scale

**Population data:** proGres (OPM) **Author:** UNHCR Representation in Uganda **Feedback:** ugakaimug@unhcr.org **For more info, please visit:** https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/uga

# Refugee Population Statistics (2024)

## UGANDA- POPULATION DASHBOARD

### Overview of Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Uganda

as of 31-Dec-2024

### Key Facts

**Individuals 1,796,609**
- Refugees 1,759,496
- Asy. Seeker 37,113

**Households 466,408**
- Refugees 440,381
- Asy. Seeker 26,027

### Top Countries of Origin

| | |
|---|---|
| S.Sudan | 975,079 |
| DR Congo | 561,880 |
| Sudan | 65,535 |
| Eritrea | 59,478 |
| Somalia | 50,832 |
| Burundi | 42,970 |
| Rwanda | 24,215 |

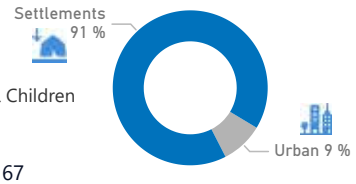
### Top Refugee Population

| | |
|---|---|
| S.Sudan | 975,020 |
| DR Congo | 556,998 |
| Sudan | 65,367 |
| Somalia | 49,122 |
| Burundi | 41,693 |
| Eritrea | 36,759 |
| Rwanda | 22,393 |

### Top Asy. Seeker Population

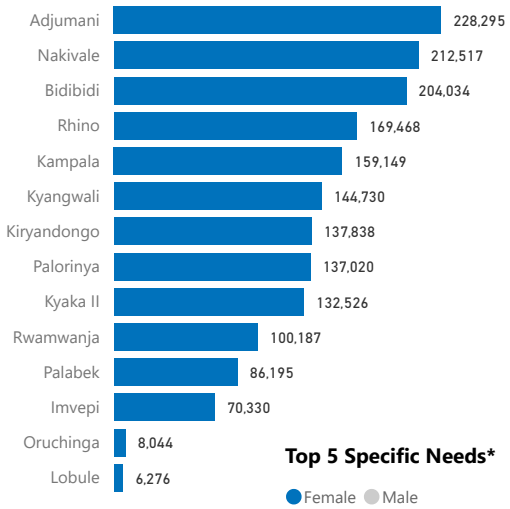
| | |
|---|---|
| Eritrea | 22,719 |
| DR Congo | 4,882 |
| Ethiopia | 4,116 |
| Rwanda | 1,822 |

### Population Distribution

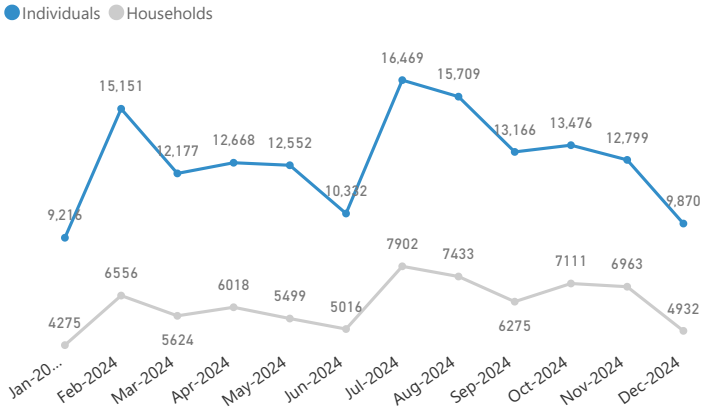


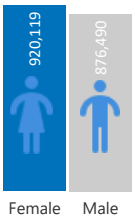

| Elderly | Under 18 | Under 12 | Youth (15-24) | Female | Women & Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 % | 54 % | 37 % | 25 % | 51 % | 79 % |
| 48,880 | 976,435 | 658,312 | 442,611 | 920,119 | 1,417,167 |

### Population by settlement

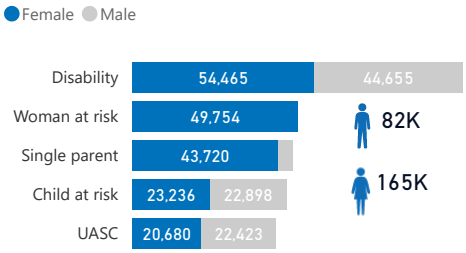



### New arrival registration over the last 12 months

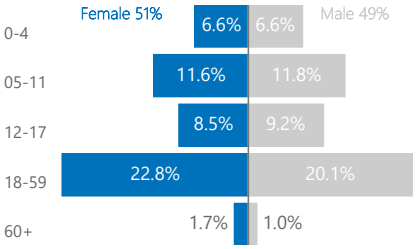



### Top 5 Specific Needs*




### Age & Gender Breakdown




Since the start of 2024, 189,522 individuals (including 35,937 new births) have been registered in Uganda, 26% of whom are new arrivals from Sudan, 22% from the DR Congo, 17% from South Sudan, and 11% from Eritrea. There was an increase of 10,316 individuals (0.6%) in the population from last month, resulting from new arrival and continuous registration activities. The average number of registered Sudanese since the start of the Sudan conflict in April 2023 is 2,600 individuals per month over the last three months.

Source: Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) / proGres

Creation date: 03-Jan-2025

# The High Commissioner's Visit to Uganda

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Filippo Grandi, visited Uganda from 21 to 23 October 2024.

The visit included field visits and meetings with stakeholders, followed by joint activities with the President of the International Olympic Committee, Mr. Thomas Bach, in Kampala. The H.C. was accompanied by the Regional Director for East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Bureau, the Head of Global Communications Service, and his Senior Executive Assistant.

In Uganda, the H.C. visited Rwamwanja refugee settlement, met with government officials, and participated in meetings with members of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) Steering Group. He engaged with the diplomatic community, UN agencies, international organizations, and NGOs. The visit highlighted Uganda's progressive refugee policies and the need for continued support from the international community. The H.C. also met with President Museveni, the First Lady and Minister for Education and Sports, Hon. Janet Museveni, and the Rt. Hon. Robinah Nabbanja. They visited the Game Connect project in Kampala, supported by the Olympic Refuge Foundation, which aims to improve mental health and psychosocial support for refugees and host community members through sports.

The H.C.'s visit emphasized the importance of continued advocacy, development aid, and regional cooperation to support refugee protection and inclusion. The mission also highlighted the transformative power of sports and the importance of partnerships, such as with the International Olympic Committee, in improving the lives of refugees.

**1:** UNHCR staff in Kampala with the High Commissioner at the UNHCR office in Kololo.

**2:** L-R: Minister of Disaster Preparedness, Relief, and Refugees Hon. Hilary Onek, UN High Commissioner Filippo Grandi, then Acting Commissioner of Refugees Douglas Asiimwe, Bureau Director (EHAGL) Mamadou Dian Balde, and UNHCR Representative Matthew Crentsil at Serena Hotel, Kampala.

**3:** President Yoweri Museveni (center, front row) and First Lady Janet Kataha Museveni with High Commissioner Filippo Grandi (left) and International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach at State House, Entebbe.

**4:** H.C. Filippo Grandi meets Congolese refugee and entrepreneur Mahoro Florence at her home in the Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge District, Uganda.

**5:** H.C. Filippo Grandi (light blue long-sleeved shirt), and International Olympic Committee President, Thomas Bach (white long-sleeved shirt), share a fun moment with youths at the Y.E.S. Centre in Kampala on 23 October 2024.

## UNGA President's Visit to the Nsambya Refugee Access Center

The President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), His Excellency Denis Francis, visited the Nsambya Refugee Access Center in Kampala on 20 January 2024. The center is run by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in partnership with UNHCR. President Denis was in Uganda to attend the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit. Over 157,000 refugees live in Kampala, and some of their leaders were present at the center to meet the President. He commended Uganda for its open-door policy towards refugees, allowing them and asylum seekers a safe space in the country. He expressed concern about the underfunding situation for the Uganda refugee response and pledged to lend his voice to addressing the issue.

*"While other, much larger countries with greater resources in many parts of the world are finding ways to export refugees, Uganda, with its limited resources, has opened its doors. This is very impressive; here, I have witnessed the power of the human spirit."* Denis Francis.

***1:*** *A facilitator at the Aspire Digital Hub, a refugee-led language and digital skills training center, showcases products made by refugee youth to the UNGA President.*

***2:*** *UNHCR Country Representative Matthew Crentsil engages with the President of the United Nations General Assembly*

***3:*** *Carol Kibuka-Musoke, a UNHCR staff member, briefs the UNGA President on the innovative self-sustainability initiatives undertaken by urban refugees*

***4:*** *UNGA President with urban refugees, UNHCR staff, and NRC staff.*

Refugee Registration Process

# Settlement Registration Process

## STEP 1 Border Point (Internationally Recognized)

- Refugees arrive in both large and small groups, mainly fleeing conflict and war.
- Security screening is conducted to prevent access by armed individuals or rebels.

## STEP 2 Transit Center

- New arrivals undergo additional screening, including security, health, and immigration checks.
- Symptomic screening for diseases of outbreak potential such as measles, cholera, Mpox, viral hemorrhagic fevers like Ebola.
- Refugees receive either Non-Food Items (NFIs) / Core Relief Items (CRIs) such as soap, blankets, sleeping mats, jerry cans, buckets, basins and sanitary materials for women of reproductive age or cash. This, however, depends on the model used in a particular settlement.
- World Food Programme (WFP) offers a hot meal to refugees
- Refugees stay briefly before relocation to reception centers.

## STEP 3 Reception Center

- Registration and screening is completed
- New arrivals receive food rations from WFP and non-food items such as soap, basins, jerrycans, blankets, clothing, and tarpaulins, either in kind or through cash assistance.
- Refugees receive attestations issued by Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)
- Refugees are later issued sim cards from MTN and the list shared
- Once the available resources are provided by OPM,land is allocated based on availability and number of new arrivals.

## STEP 4 Settlement

- Refugees set up temporary shelters and may stay for as long as needed.
- Refugees receive dry food from WFP for 3 months and thereafter, based on prioritization, they receive food according to their respective category.

# Urban Registration Process

## STEP 1

### Refugee Desk (Plot 302 Sentema Road, Mengo Kampala)

- Submission of Asylum Seeker Registration Information Sheet.
- Security screening by Refugee Desk Officers.

## STEP 2

### Registration at OPM

- Biometric Registration.
- Registration Interview.

## STEP 3

### Refugee Status Determination (RSD) Interview

- Conducted at the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)
- Refugee explains reasons for leaving and fear of return
- On appointment day, the head of household reports with all family members
- Individuals aged 18 and above are registered separately

## STEP 4

### Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC)

- REC approves or rejects the refugee status.
- It may take 3 months or more for one to receive a decision from REC through OPM.
- Upon acceptance of the application from REC, one is responsible for presenting themselves to the Local Council (LC) they choose to live in to make themselves known to the authorities.
- If REC rejects an application and one disagrees with the decision, one has the right to appeal to the Refugee Appeals Board (RAB) within 30 days of receiving REC's notification letter.

## STEP 5

### Refugee Appeals Board (RAB)

- To initiate the appeal process, one fills in Form E. One may contact OPM, UNHCR or NRC for assistance.
- Send the completed form to the Secretary of the Appeals Board via OPM within the 30-day duration.
- The appeal should be resolved within 60 days of filing.

## STEP 6

### Judicial Review

- If one disagrees with the Appeals Board decision, an application for judicial review in court can be made.
- UNHCR might be asked to present on your behalf during the appeal process.

**Grounds for rejection for both settlement and urban asylum seekers**

- Inconsistencies or lack of credibility during the application process.
- Entry through non-recognized border points.
- Crossing into Uganda for reasons other than persecution.

**Please note:** ALL services delivered by UNHCR and partners including registration, are provided for **FREE**.

# Understanding the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP)

The Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) is a comprehensive framework that coordinates efforts by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), UN agencies, and various international and national partners to support refugees and host communities in Uganda through programs that address both immediate and long-term needs. This plan sets out clear strategies to address immediate and long-term needs in a way that is efficient, inclusive, and sustainable.

The UCRRP operates through an integrated approach that combines humanitarian aid with long-term development goals. It identifies the key needs of refugees and host communities, prioritizes interventions, and allocates resources to address these challenges. The UCRRP ensures a coordinated response that maximizes impact and avoids duplication of efforts. Regular reviews and updates ensure that the plan adapts to changing circumstances and emerging needs.

The Plan's main goal is to strengthen Uganda's asylum space and access to territory, provide lifesaving assistance, and enable refugees into connect with public services. It also aims to promote peaceful coexistence, enhance refugees' self-reliance, and pursue lasting solutions such as local integration, voluntary repatriation, or resettlement to third countries. The UCRRP addresses these challenges by mobilizing resources and providing a clear framework for action.

The UCRRP adapts its approach to address the unique challenges faced by urban refugees while continuing to support those in settlements. The Plan's main goal is to strengthen Uganda's asylum space and access to territory, provide life-saving assistance, and facilitate refugees' access to public services.

In 2024, the UCRRP included 96 partner organisations, appealing for a total of USD 857 million, of which USD 391million was received.

*Refugees arriving from DRC at the Sebagoro point of entry in Kikuube District.*

## Strengthened collaboration with other UN agencies

UNHCR's Representative to Uganda, Matthew Crentsil, and ILO's Director for the Country Office covering the United Republic of Tanzania, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, Caroline Khamati Mugalla, at the signing ceremony of a supplementary agreement to enhance protection and solution prospects for refugees.

In a move aimed at improving refugee support and service delivery in Uganda, UNHCR signed Letters of Understanding (LoU's) with key United Nations (UN) agencies including United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), International Labor Organization (ILO) and Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). These agreements solidify partnerships across sectors such as health, child protection, livelihoods support, food assistance, social protection and nutrition.

The partnerships aim to streamline coordination, resource sharing, and service implementation in refugee-hosting areas in Uganda, Africa's largest refugee hosting country.

### Sectoral Impact Areas

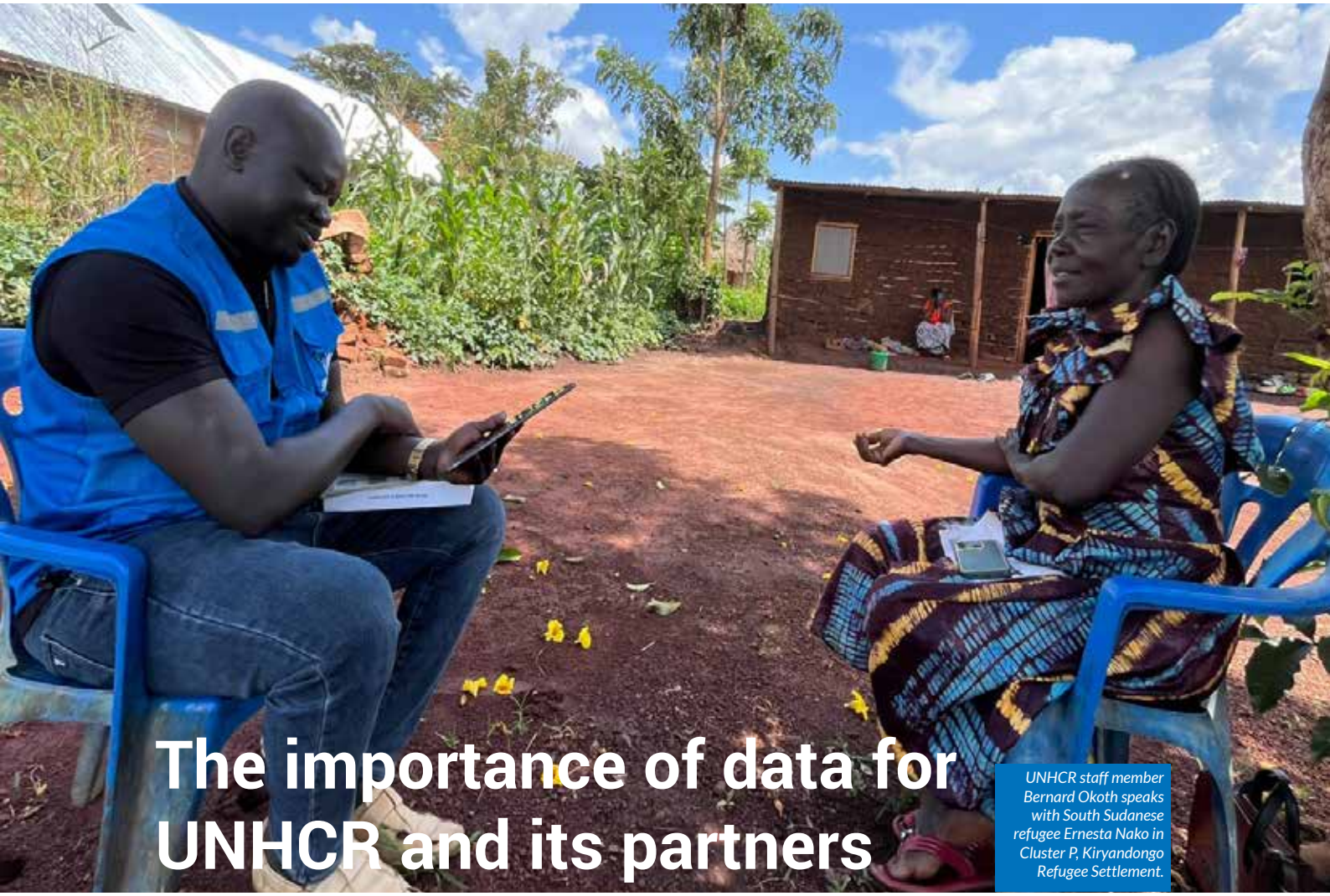
**Health and nutrition**
UNHCR and WHO are enhancing health coordination to include refugees in Uganda's national healthcare programs, policies, and emergency response plans. Together with WFP, they are supporting malnutrition management through improved nutrition assessments, commodity distribution and capacity building for healthcare workers.

**Child protection**
UNHCR and UNICEF are working together to strengthen key child protection interventions, including rolling out birth registration programs and transitioning child-friendly spaces to community-led systems. This aims to improve the welfare of refugee children through stronger legal frameworks and community engagement.

**Livelihoods and economic empowerment**
UNHCR, FAO and ILO are collaborating to improve refugee self-reliance by promoting agricultural value chains (the 'from farm to table' process), skills development and employment opportunities. Joint programs with partners, such as the Self-Reliance Index - a global tool for measuring the progress of refugees towards self-reliance, an initiative led by WFP, are supporting long-term solutions for economic stability.

**Social protection**
UNHCR will work with ILO and WFP to integrate refugees into Uganda's national social protection programs, including access to the National Social Security Fund and cash transfer programs for vulnerable populations.

With strengthened partnerships and a focus on long-term sustainability, the LOUs mark a significant step forward in ensuring better coordination and improved services for refugees and host communities. As refugee numbers continue to grow, UNHCR and its partners remain focused on building resilience and fostering sustainable development across Uganda's refugee settlements.



# The importance of data for UNHCR and its partners

*UNHCR staff member Bernard Okoth speaks with South Sudanese refugee Ernesta Nako in Cluster P, Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement.*

Data and digital technologies are integral to UNHCR's efforts in assisting refugees and asylum seekers. This commitment is reflected in the establishment of specialized teams such as the Data, Identity Management and Analysis and Information Management units. Guided by the UNHCR Data Transformation Strategy (2020–2025) and the data protection policy, these functions safeguard the personal data of 1.8 million refugees and asylum seekers in Uganda.

UNHCR relies on diverse data sources, including refugee arrival monitoring, periodic refugee response monitoring reports from partners, studies, surveys and assessments, to inform planning, coordination, implementation and evidence-based decision-making. Effective data sharing between UNHCR and its nearly one hundred partners amplify the humanitarian response and reduces service duplication, helping to make the process as efficient and effective as possible.

In 2024, UNHCR continued supporting partners, who send reports to the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) every quarter via ActivityInfo, a web-based monitoring and evaluation platform, while collaborating with the Office of the Prime Minister's, Department of Refugees to allow for effective interaction between the information management systems. Additionally, data is collected from the latest assessments, on areas such as food and nutrition, water and sanitation and housing, which helps to shape UNHCR's and UCRRP's multi-year planning.

Innovative technologies, including Artificial Intelligence tools such as the GenAI Programme Assistant, CoPilot (a ChatGPT equivalent) and Geographic Information Systems tools, help to strengthen interactivity between UNHCR and its partners. These advancements will enhance predictive modelling for population movements, enable timely and advanced data analysis and improve the presentation and dissemination of information to governments, the private sector and the general public.

# Forced to flee

## UNHCR Response in 2024

*Refugees arriving from the DRC at Sebagoro Point of Entry, Kikuube District.*

In 2024, 189,522 individuals, including 35,937 newborns, were registered as refugees by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), with support from UNHCR. Among them, 26% were new arrivals from Sudan, 22% from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 17% from South Sudan, and 11% from Eritrea.

Adjumani remained the largest refugee-hosting settlement with 228,295 refugees, while Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement saw the highest influx from Sudan. A total of 49,977 Sudanese refugees from 20,039 households were received and registered in the settlement. By December 31, 2024, Kiryandongo hosted 137,838 forcibly displaced persons, comprising 137,772 refugees and 66 asylum seekers across 34,958 households, 41% of new arrivals were children and 71% were women and children combined.

### The human cost of conflict

In 2024, ongoing conflict and the collapse of basic services in Sudan drove thousands to seek safety in Uganda. The civil war has left communities without access to healthcare, education, or functioning markets. Likewise, continued instability in DRC and South Sudan forced many to leave behind homes, loved ones and livelihoods. For them, the journey to Uganda was one of survival, with uncertainty at every step.

## UNHCR's lifesaving support

With its partners, UNHCR ensured that new arrivals received immediate support, including:

- **Core relief items:** Blankets, sleeping mats, soap, jerry cans, basins, and sanitary materials for women of reproductive age.
- **Hot meals:** Three nutritious, hot meals per day at reception centers to improve food security and health.
- **Emergency healthcare:** Outpatient and inpatient health services, as well as urgent medical evacuations for critically ill arrivals at border entry points.
- **Registration:** Legal identity documentation for refugees that enables access to essential services such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education.
- **Settlement support:** In collaboration with OPM, UNHCR facilitated the relocation of new arrivals to refugee settlements, where they were allocated plots for cultivation and shelter construction, to promote self-reliance and stability.
- **In refugee settlements:** Access to education and healthcare remained a priority. UNHCR and partners ensured that school-aged refugee children were enrolled in primary and secondary schools and supported with learning materials. Health services were strengthened, providing primary healthcare and medical referrals, ensuring refugees received maternal health services, vaccination and mental health support for overall well-being.
- **Refugees in urban Kampala:** Working with partners, UNHCR supported and facilitated access to registration services, medical support and peaceful coexistence sessions through town hall meetings in collaboration with local leaders.

As people continue to be displaced, UNHCR remains committed to supporting refugees and asylum seekers in Uganda, ensuring that those forced to flee find safety, dignity and the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

# Protecting refugee children and youth

## Overview

Forcibly displaced children are at a heightened risk of violence, abuse and exploitation and their protection needs are complex due to the nature of their displacement. The child protection situation in Uganda is shaped by several critical issues, with child labor, child marriage and physical violence being the most prominent. Violence Against Children (VAC) is widespread, along with incidents of sexual violence. Child marriage and teenage pregnancy are major concerns, particularly affecting young girls, while unaccompanied and separated children face heightened risks of exploitation and abuse. Children with disabilities might face limited access to services, leaving them particularly vulnerable. Psychological distress is common among many refugee children due to the challenging circumstances they face.

UNHCR prioritizes child protection, recognizing the vulnerabilities and unique needs of refugee children and responding to their specific needs and risks they face. This includes protecting and advocating against all forms of discrimination, preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation, ensuring immediate access to appropriate services and ensuring durable solutions in the child's best interests.

UNHCR works in partnership with the Government of Uganda, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies, development partners and local communities to ensure the protection of refugee children in Uganda. The Government of Uganda has maintained an inclusive approach toward refugees promoting their integration within the national system and services. UNHCR in coordination with partners focuses on three key objectives: strengthening the national child protection system; providing essential services such as case management and alternative care; and supporting children, families and communities in safeguarding children.

## Child protection case management

Uganda's refugee child protection framework aligns with international standards, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and the 2021 UNHCR Best Interest Procedure guidelines. It ensures that at-risk children receive necessary support through structured case management.

Children at risk include those facing personal, environmental, or relational vulnerabilities, such as those without caregivers, living in unsafe environments, or children with disabilities who face additional barriers to services. Many refugee children are out of school due to documentation issues, school distance, or other challenges, while children with critical health needs require specialized care.

Children in need of protection are identified through community members, teachers, healthcare workers, child protection staff, humanitarian agencies, and government partners. Once identified, trained social workers assess their needs and provide tailored support.

For unaccompanied and separated children, family tracing and reunification efforts are prioritized. Based on individual needs, children may receive foster care, education, health services, mental health support (MHPSS), or specialized disability rehabilitation.

## Youth programming

Youth is a distinct age group (defined by the UN as 15 – 24 years) and makes up a large proportion of persons affected by forced displacement. In Uganda, refugee adolescents and youth make up the 25% of the total registered refugee population. They face various unique socio-economic challenges such as inaccessibility to secondary and tertiary education, all forms of violence and other protection risks, psychosocial distress, limited livelihoods opportunities among others that limit their full potential.

UNHCR Uganda in close partnership and collaboration with key stakeholders such as the Government of Uganda, other UN agencies and development partners have jointly advocated for adolescents and youth participation and empowerment targeted programs such as sports, positive behavioral change initiatives, life and vocational skilling, sexual and reproductive health services, MHPSS with focus on psychosocial first aid, peace building and climate action.

In 2023, 13 UN agencies and the Government of Uganda created a multi-year strategy to address the complex needs of youth, including refugees. This integrated approach leverages the strengths and expertise of each agency, ensuring a comprehensive and impactful response to address youth related cross-cutting issues.

## Mental health and psychosocial support

In Uganda, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programs help refugee children cope with displacement and hardship. These programs promote mental well-being and resilience across different age groups.

Key initiatives include child-friendly spaces, where children engage in play, art therapy, and emotional healing activities. Counseling and psychosocial support services are also provided, with a focus on training child protection workers, teachers, and caregivers to identify and assist children in need.

*UNHCR staff Jimmy Ogwang assists mothers and their children as they board a truck at the Bunagana border point.*

## General information about protection

UNHCR plays an essential role in protecting refugees, with its mandate rooted in international law. UNHCR safeguards the safety and well-being of refugees upholding their rights and seeking practical long-term solutions when they are forced to flee their countries of origin. Central to UNHCR's mission is its international protection mandate, advocating for the rights of recognized refugees and asylum-seekers. Through collaboration with governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and international agencies, UNHCR ensures a unified response to refugee needs, striving to uphold long-term solutions for displaced populations.

Sudanese, Congolese from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudanese refugees are recognized prima facie in Uganda, meaning they are automatically recognized as refugees upon arrival at the Uganda border. Of the 153,585 new arrivals in 2024, 121,297 (79%) were recognized as prima facie refugees.

One significant aspect of UNHCR's efforts in Uganda is the provision of legal services to refugees and asylum seekers including detention monitoring, access to mobile court services in settlements, sensitization on Ugandan and refugee law, counseling, and legal representation.

# Unaccompanied refugee children find safety and hope in foster care

*Sikitu Elener, a foster parent, meets with a protection worker along with her three foster children in Nakivale Refugee Settlement.*

In the lively village of Kabazana A, Basecamp Zone, Nakivale Refugee Settlement — a thriving center of refugee-run businesses such as boda-boda transport, kiosks selling snacks and drinks, and green grocers — three unaccompanied Congolese siblings are slowly rebuilding their lives. Tumaine Musafri, 17, Alliance Zawadi, 12, and Muhoza Nzituriki, 9, have found safety and hope under the care of Sikitu Elener, a compassionate foster parent who has been supporting vulnerable children since 2019.

Musafri recalls life in Gatuguru village, Rutshuru, North Kivu province, where he and his siblings lived with their parents, Uwimana Nyiramugisha and Munezero Ngezekumunsi. Their parents were subsistence farmers, barely able to meet the family's needs. School was a distant dream as the children spent their days helping in the fields.

In 2023, their lives were shattered when armed men attacked their village. Fleeing for their lives, the family temporarily settled in Kishore, but conflict erupted again in August 2024, tearing the siblings away from their parents. Alone and frightened, they fled through unfamiliar villages, often unable to communicate with those around them due to language barriers. Hunger, fear, and the uncertainty of their parents' fate weighed heavily on them.

Their arduous journey finally led them to the Bunagana border, where AIRD and UNHCR transported them to Nyakabande Transit Centre in Kisoro District. Here, they received vital services such as food, shelter, and healthcare. Yet overcrowding and limited resources meant were some of the main challenges they faced. For Musafri, who lives with a physical disability, caring for his younger siblings was overwhelming.

In October 2024, the siblings were relocated to Kabazana Reception Centre in Nakivale. UNHCR's partner, Alight, provided clothing, bedding, and meals, while Medical Teams International (MTI) treated Alliance when she fell ill with malaria. Soon after, the children were placed in the care of Elener.

Under Elener's guidance, life has begun to stabilize. The children now attend Kabazana Primary School and access health services at Ruhoko Health Centre. They receive regular support from child protection caseworkers and community committees. Despite these improvements, Musafri worries about their future, particularly access to secondary education, which remains a challenge for many refugee children due to financial constraints.

The siblings have found a sense of belonging, forming close bonds with their foster family and local peers. They participate in traditional games and help with household chores, with Elener providing the emotional support they need to heal from their trauma.

> *"Caring for these children feels like a divine call for me," Elener shared. "Seeing them grow and thrive is incredibly rewarding. It's not easy, but fostering has taught me patience, empathy, and the importance of meeting each child's unique needs."*

The siblings dream of reuniting with their parents. Until then, they find solace in the care and kindness of those around them, slowly piecing their lives back together.

# Owning a birth certificate

## A document for life

In 2022, UNHCR joined the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) and UNICEF in a pilot scheme covering six refugee settlements to distribute birth certificates to thousands of children who had lost their original documentation. In 2024, this was expanded with European Union funding to cover seven settlements, mainly in northern and central Uganda, including Kampala.

For many refugees, losing documents is a significant issue. During their flight from conflicts, documents can be left behind, lost, or damaged. The Government of Uganda and UNHCR often face the challenge of receiving refugees with few or no documents, including birth certificates. These important documents grant access to government support like health, education and protective legislation. Without this certificate, a child may be considered 'stateless' and miss out on essential services.

The aim of the project was to reach 90,000 refugee children under five years old for birth registration and certification. By the end of the project, over 151,000 refugees were processed and there is still high demand for more in 2025, especially among those at secondary school who need a birth certificate to sit for national exams.

One challenge is to ensure there are no duplications. To combat this, the Department of Refugees worked with NIRA to certify that information was valid and cross-referenced with other documents, such as individual records within the Government's registration system, vaccination cards and other information used to track and identify children. Once the birth certificates are printed, they are sent to the officials in the settlement to distribute through various national and local partners.

Raising awareness about the importance of birth certificates is crucial, especially in areas with low uptake. Fortunately, most children born to refugee families in Uganda are now registered at health centers where they were born. Trained staff ensure mothers leave with a birth notification certificate, which is later submitted to NIRA district offices and exchanged for a birth certificate. This process helps spread the word about the benefits of birth certificates. Ensuring everyone has a birth certificate is a significant step towards helping refugees integrate into their new communities.

"I came here very young, in 2004. If I had a birth certificate, things would be easier. A birth certificate tells the world who you are and gives you a real identity," said Gutama Darartu Assefa, a 22-year-old refugee from Ethiopia. She arrived in Uganda at the age of four and currently lives in Base Camp 4 of Nakivale Refugee Settlement.

# Cash-Based Transfers revitalizing refugee livelihoods and boosting local economies

*Mary Kahindo displaying her registration form*

In Kyaka II refugee settlement, Kyegegwa district, Southwest Uganda, the Sweswe community is home to thousands of refugees, including Maria Kahindo, a 67-year-old woman who fled from Congo to Uganda in 2015.

When asked if she was heading to the Food Distribution Point (FDP), where refugees receive food rations, Maria laughed and said, "Kumupokero Haahaa!" (meaning "I am going to receive assistance from the FDP").

She recalled the long lines, shoving, and chaos, which made the process exhausting for elderly refugees like her.

To improve food assistance, a Cash-Based Transfers (CBT) system was introduced by World Food Program (WFP), allowing refugees to receive mobile payments or withdraw cash from local agents. This system gives refugees the freedom to choose their essential needs while supporting local businesses.

In 2024, Maria received a Post Bank card, enabling her to withdraw money from nearby agents without waiting in long queues. She now shops for food and essentials whenever needed, gaining independence and saving time for other tasks.

Initially uncertain, Maria tried the new system during a 2024 February assistance cycle and was surprised at how quick and smooth the process was. "It was easy," she said.

In less than 20 minutes, she withdrew UGX 60,000.

More refugees are adopting this banking system. In 2024, over 1.6 million refugees across 13 settlements received lifesaving food assistance from WFP —75% through Cash-Based Transfers (CBT) and 24% through in-kind food aid. With reduced donor funding, CBT remains a cost-effective way to ensure refugees like Maria receive dignified assistance while supporting local economies.

*Refugees at Ocea Reception Centre in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement receive a hot meal.*

# Jimmy Ogwang
# Head of UNHCR Kisoro Field Unit

*Jimmy Ogwang receives new arrivals at the Kibaya border with the DRC, including a mother with a three-day-old baby, in November.*

Jimmy Ogwang, a dedicated UNHCR staff member and Head of Kisoro Field Unit (FU) in southeastern Uganda, has been serving in this role for eight years. As the only national staff member in his position, Jimmy brings over 20 years of humanitarian experience.

Beginning his humanitarian work with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in 2004 in north Uganda, Jimmy joined the UNHCR Uganda operation in 2006 as a field clerk supporting the return of Internally Displaced People (IDPs).

*"My turning point came when I joined UNHCR Mbarara Sub Office in 2012 as a UN Volunteer - Community Services Officer. In September 2013, I moved to Kisoro Field Unit. I continued as a Field Associate and Team Leader until 2017. Due to my significant contributions and achievements especially in emergency response, I was promoted to National Officer Grade A in 2018."*

The Kisoro Field Unit, established in 2012 to receive refugees from the DRC, requires Jimmy to stay prepared for emergencies as situations shift rapidly. In 2024, he advocated to OPM for more registration staff and additional coaches to speed up relocations. Kisoro received 28,656 new arrivals, mainly from DRC, relocating 23,694 (83%) to Nakivale Refugee Settlement.

Despite Nyakabande Transit Centre having a capacity of 850, it sheltered over 3,000 individuals at peak times without disease outbreaks, demonstrating UNHCR's strong management and coordination.

In 2021, Jimmy joined UNHCR's Emergency Response Team (ERT) in Thailand for four months, responding to the Myanmar crisis, and later served in Renk, South Sudan, supporting displaced communities fleeing conflict in Sudan. These experiences have sharpened his skills.

*"The most interesting aspect is the strong teamwork and flexibility among the staff, they are willing to take on additional responsibilities at short notice, which is crucial for an office that primarily handles emergencies. Our goal is to provide protection and assistance to refugees using our diversity to achieve this goal rather than divide us. I encourage open communication, both bottom-up and top-down and lead by example to ensure we walk the talk."*

In 2024, Kisoro FU received **28,656** new arrivals mainly from the DRC and relocated **23,694** to Nakivale Refugee Settlement (**83%** of arrivals). Despite Nyakabande TC's official capacity of **850**, it accommodated over **3,000** individuals during peak times without any disease outbreaks.

# Lee serving refugees in Lamwo Field Unit

Jatuporn Lee Cheewasrirungruang known to most as 'Lee' is an international staff member, a team leader and Head of Lamwo Field Office (FO). From the southern part of Thailand, Lee started her career with the UNHCR as a Refugee Status Determination intern in 2007. In 2010, a three-month assignment with UNHCR Bangkok turned into a 15-year career spanning work in Thailand, Bangladesh, South Sudan, Iraq and now Uganda.

*Jatuporn Lee at a young pine woodlot in Palabek Refugee Settlement.*

As team leader, Lee currently leads the UNHCR team which oversees Palabek Refugee Settlement with approximately 88,000 refugees spread across 68 square kilometers. This is the first time Lee has been Head of Office and after over a year in the post, she has overseen among other things, protection and humanitarian activities, administration work, supply and procurement, programmatic planning and staff welfare. In 2024, Lee focused on strengthening the Refugee Led Organizations (RLOs) in Palabek.

*"Three RLOs received funding from the EU-INTPA Refugee Youth Peacebuilding Programme, enabling them to implement community-led initiatives that promote peace"*, said Lee.

In collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister, Lee and her team secured development funding of Euro 45,000 (approx. UGX172 million) on health resilience to be implemented in 2025 over three years.

*"We facilitated a partnership with Anna Rosa Skincare (skin care company) from Iceland and an Icelandic NGO (Helping Herbs), working together we were offered Sustainable Development funding from Iceland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support a health resilience program in Palabek."*

Towards the end of the year, under Lee's leadership, the UNHCR team were able to manage a refugee influx of South Sudanese at Lokung Collection Point and a cholera outbreak.

*"Managing both situations required rapid and refined coordination across multiple sectors including logistics, core relief item distribution, cash-based interventions and settlement management. Thanks to the dedication and teamwork, we successfully navigated the crisis and ensured the well-being of those affected."*

Lee and the team's commitment is proof that UNHCR's work goes beyond humanitarian intervention, but spreads to fostering peaceful coexistence and ensuring that both refugees and host communities benefit from our interventions.

**The Palabek Refugee Settlement was established in 2017 with approximately 88,000 refugees across 68 square kilometers.**

# The rise of Neima Khemis: First female chairperson of Bidibidi's Refugee Welfare Council

Neima Grace Khemis is the first female Refugee Welfare Council (RWC) III Chairperson of Zone 2, Bidibidi Settlement in the northwest corner of Uganda. It is a historic moment as the position has been led by men for the last eight years. The RWC is a refugee-led leadership structure which mirrors the Ugandan Government's lower local government structure, comprising of three levels starting at the Village Level, Cluster Level and Level III.

The RWC works at Zone level and aims to support refugees, ensuring they are part of community activities and decision making. RWC refers refugees to respective partners and service points, shares information and resolves community level issues. The Council also acts as a bridge between the refugee community, UNHCR, OPM (the Office of the Prime Minister) and the partners that support peaceful co-existence activities.

In 2016, Neima fled South Sudan due to ongoing conflict with her family of 14 individuals, which included her husband, five biological children and other dependent relatives. After settling in Uganda, she volunteered to be part of the village hygiene promoters' team, where she promoted the use of good hygiene practices among her community. This role and the responsibility that came with it, was the start of Neima's desire to have more leadership roles.

In 2017, Neima stood as an executive committee member of the RWC I. She became the General Secretary and part of the RWC I cabinet. She was then voted to the position of Vice Chairperson of RWC II and then to Vice Chairperson of RWC III, before rising to become the Chairperson of RWC III in April 2024.

Neima learnt from losing an election in 2019, which she attributed to the strong customary and cultural practices of the South Sudanese. She began to work towards dispelling the cultural beliefs concerning leadership roles for women, by setting up discussions with opinion leaders, leaders, youth and the general community.

With a very supportive family, Neima has taken up her roles with aplomb and she has no plans to stop. One day, she hopes that peace will return to South Sudan and she will return home to take up other leadership roles.

> Neima has beaten all the odds, showing courage and perseverance to reach the highest level of refugee leadership. She is a role model for all refugees, but especially the women and girls that see her, follow her and want to be like her.

# Ocan's mission to empower refugees in Palabek

Robert Ocan, a 39-year-old South Sudanese refugee, is reshaping his community in Palabek Refugee Settlement, northern Uganda, with his financial acumen and innovative spirit.

In 2019, he founded Paludar Savings and Credit Cooperative Society (SACCO), rallying fellow refugees toward financial inclusion. Through Paludar SACCO, members gain access to financial support, enabling them to invest in small businesses and build economic resilience.

Ocan's vision extends far beyond financial aid. He has pioneered initiatives that address both economic and environmental challenges. His tree-planting program not only combats climate change but also generates income through carbon credits. Recognizing the potential of sustainable agriculture, he introduced free-range chicken farming for organic egg production and worm farming to produce organic fertilizers and chicken feed, boosting food security and livelihoods.

Recognizing the importance of access to land for agriculture, Robert has worked closely with partners, including legal experts, to secure farmland for refugees through leasing arrangements. This allows refugee communities to cultivate crops sustainably each year, instead of depending on humanitarian assistance. His efforts have improved food security, helped refugees in his community build self-reliance, and encouraged investment in livelihoods.

Under Robert's leadership, UNHCR entrusted Paludar SACCO to co-manage an agricultural tractor to increase productivity and manage a solar mini-grid to promote the use of renewable energy in farming. The cooperative was also awarded the Refugee-Led Organization (RLO) fund to expand the group's initiatives, including programs that promote mental health, peaceful coexistence, and economic inclusion.

***"I feel so proud to see the community standing on their own after joining the SACCO. They can pay school fees for their children, access health care, and live a better life. I am grateful to the Government of Uganda for its open-door policy, which recognizes us not only as beneficiaries but as stakeholders."* said Ocan.**

In 2024, as part of the Regional Youth Peacebuilding Programme (RYPP) under the South Sudan-Sudan Solutions Initiative, funded by European Union International Partnerships (EU INTPA), UNHCR established grant agreements with 32 community-based organizations (CBOs) to implement initiatives promoting peaceful coexistence between host and refugee communities.

These organizations operate in Adjumani, Moyo-Obongi, Arua, and Yumbe, receiving annual grants ranging from US$4,000 to US$12,000 to support their peacebuilding efforts.

# Sina Loketa

## A Refugee-led Organization changing Bidibidi with inventive solutions

In 2024, UNHCR funded seven Refugee Led Organizations (RLOs) in Yumbe district, of which Sina Loketa was one of them. Sina Loketa is a youth RLO which helps young people channel their creative skills. Their activities include entrepreneurship training, mentorship, life coaching, trauma healing for personal and professional development, digital literacy training, agriculture, music studio management, recycling plastic and handcrafts.

In 2022, Sina Loketa was supported by UNHCR's Innovation Fund to set up several small-scale projects. In 2024, Sina Loketa was selected for further investment and the RLO's initiative was launched as pilot in September 2024.

Sina Loketa established several independent enterprises run by refugees including Generous Designs Africa (GDA) which recycles plastic to make products such as cloth buttons, rulers, plastic cups, beads and eco-shoes produced and distributed for children.

GDA is a refugee-led Community Based Organization registered with Yumbe District Local Government and the brainchild of Sina Loketa. Lomoro Emmanuel, a GDA team leader says,

*"Generous Designs Africa was deliberately chosen in appreciation of the generosity of the Government of Uganda and the local community in Yumbe for accepting to host and live together with refugees."*

*Sina Loketa auditorium in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement in Yumbe*

Responding to the environmental impact of refugees GDA established a plastic recycling plant, as a result of seeing so much plastic waste being disposed of by refugees. By December 2024 GDA had collected over 850kgs of plastic waste and are employing people to clean, sort and shred the plastics, creating a source of income for 105 young women and men.

Emmanuel says their initiative is a winner in two ways,

*"I am happy about this project because GDA is not only contributing to preventing environmental pollution but also providing employment opportunities to the youth and young mothers in my community, who would otherwise have nothing to do."*

# New refugee policies for peaceful coexistence and self-reliance

*DEF and REF during a side meeting at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF)*

Uganda remains a global leader in its progressive refugee policies. The establishment of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) Steering Group (SG) positioned Uganda at the forefront of refugee governance. As the highest decision-making body, CRRF SG created the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF) and District Engagement Forum (DEF) to amplify refugee voices and foster district-level dialogue on shared challenges and opportunities.

In 2024, the first-ever REF and DEF meetings took place, led by the CRRF secretariat in collaboration with UNHCR and key partners. The September session brought together refugee-hosting districts from West Nile and Northern Uganda, while the December session focused on South and Midwest regions. Each meeting featured field visits showcasing local innovation and entrepreneurship, allowing participants to witness refugee experiences and explore scalable solutions for other settlements.

A key achievement of the meetings was the discussion on turning the 2023 Global Refugee Forum pledges into action, with a focus on climate action, integration into government services, and durable solutions—long-term strategies that restore refugees' rights and access to essential services.

The 2024 meetings' resolutions were ambitious, but realistic and actionable. They emphasized the importance of refugee representation in district and local government planning processes to ensure refugees are active participants in decisions that affect them. There was also a strong call for capacity building of refugee groups and refugee-led organizations (RLOs), as part of Uganda's broader localization agenda, something which UNHCR plays a leading role with, in partnership with the Ugandan Government.

Uganda's inclusive refugee policy, which prioritizes integration, self-reliance and community empowerment and emphasizes solutions that are locally driven and sustainable, is widely regarded as one of the best in the world. As their slogan says, 'Nothing for Us, Without Us'.

## Overview of the District Engagement Forum

The District Engagement Forum (DEF) is a joint district coordination platform that brings together, political and technical personnel from refugee-hosting districts across Uganda. DEF is composed of 26 members including the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO's) and District Chairpersons from the 13 refugee hosting districts.

The districts elect five members (three District Chairpersons and two CAOs) from amongst themselves to represent the District Local Governments in the Steering Group (SG). DEF is co-chaired by the Commissioner for District Inspection from the Ministry of Local Government and the Commissioner for Refugees from OPM.

## Overview of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) was formally launched in Uganda, in March 2017. The CRRF was largely influenced by Uganda's Refugee Model and Uganda was implementing many of the elements of a comprehensive refugee response long before the adoption of the CRRF.

Through the CRRF, Uganda created a more predictable and sustainable approach to refugee management and accelerated the implementation of a refugee response plan. In Uganda, the implementation of the CRRF is guided by a high-level, multi-stakeholder CRRF Steering Group, which is co-chaired at the ministerial level by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the Ministry of Local Government (MoLG) and supported by a technical CRRF Secretariat in OPM.

# Transforming support into opportunity

*Macca Altam attending to her shop in Kiryandongo Settlement*

Macca Altam, a 68-year-old widow and mother of three sons and one daughter, fled Khartoum, Sudan, in 2024 following political unrest and violence. Seeking safety for her family, Macca arrived in the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement in Uganda with little more than the clothes on her back. Life was difficult, as it is with refugees from Sudan and other countries, but Macca was determined to rebuild and provide for her family.

### Cash support for Core Relief Items

Upon arrival, UNHCR provided Macca with UGX 200,000 (about USD 55) to purchase essential items like bedding, cooking utensils, and construction materials. However, Macca chose to invest UGX 150,000 in a grocery shop instead, seeing a chance to create a sustainable income.

### Building a grocery shop

Macca had an entrepreneurial spirit back in Khartoum, in Sudan. In Kiryandongo Refugee settlement, she figured that starting a grocery shop near her home could provide both an income and the flexibility to care for her children and grandchildren. With the support of her children, they built a stall from simple materials like wood. She stocked high-demand essentials such as soft drinks, sugar, salt, soap, and flour.

Her shop quickly gained popularity in Cluster B, due to her warm customer service and fair prices. As profits grew, Macca reinvested in her business, expanding her stock and eventually constructing a more permanent structure. Her children have since adapted to life in Uganda with renewed hope for the future.

### Overcoming challenges

Starting a business in a refugee settlement was not easy because Macca had to forego a lot just to set up a shop with the hope that all would be recovered in the shortest period but with the support of her sons, she was able to navigate through the fluctuating demand and limited capital. Her determination and ability to adapt is helping her build self-reliance. She built relationships with local suppliers to secure better prices and increase her profit margins.

Recently, she added to the stock in the shop, yet she was also able to buy food for her children and grandchildren.

> *"I had to forego most of the basic items needed at home so that I secure a source of living for my family" narrates Macca.*

Macca's determination and adaptability are helping her build self-reliance, turning a small opportunity into a pathway to a better future.

> *"My sons are abled men, they supported in putting up a more temporal structure as we strive for a better living,"* Macca recalls.

# Crafting a new life

## Habib's leather business in Uganda

Habib Abdelrahim, a 39-year-old Sudanese refugee now living in Uganda with his wife and five-year-old daughter, has turned his passion for creating into a livelihood. Habib worked as a civil engineer in North Darfur, Sudan, and has turned his love of leather crafting into a vital source of income.

*Habib Abdelrahim showcasing his leather products at the Christmas Market in Kitante, Kampala.*

With another child on the way, Habib was determined to find a way to support his family, transforming his part-time hobby into a full-time job. Today, he runs a thriving leather workshop in Bweyale Town, a business hub near the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, located in the central part of the country. "While in Sudan and working as a civil engineer there, I used to do leather crafting in my free time, but now it is my main source of income here," Habib explains.

Fleeing violence in the North Darfur region in 2023, Habib sought a safer life for himself, his wife, a pharmacist also from North Darfur, and their daughter. When they arrived in Uganda via Nyumazi Reception Center on the northern border near Adjumani, they were first registered and then relocated to Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement on the outskirts of Bweyale Town.

With support from UNHCR, Habib was among several refugee craftspeople from Kiryandongo who participated in the Refugee Christmas market in the capital city, Kampala. At his stall, he proudly displayed his range of leather products, including men's wallets, men's shoes, women's purses, and handbags, all handmade from cow leather sourced from Kampala and transported to Bweyale.

Habib's commitment to his new enterprise is a testament to his determination. He dreams of continuing to expand his leather goods business and wants to buy his own leather stitching machine and start a craft skills school.

Despite facing the challenges of limited investment, needing to rely on a rented stitching machine, and the need to market his products more widely, Habib has created a business and a vital source of income.

Throughout his journey from fleeing the conflict in Sudan, crossing South Sudan, and arriving in Uganda to find safety, Habib has always been driven by a vision of a brighter future for himself and his family.

## General information on livelihoods

While the Refugees Act 2006 and the Refugee Regulations 2010 granted refugees the right to work, freedom of movement, and access to land and financial services, about 70% still live in poverty, compared to 38% of Ugandans. To address this, the Government of Uganda developed the Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan (JLIRP) to implement sustainable livelihood programs for refugees and host communities. The JLIRP strengthens the capacities of refugee-hosting districts to meet the needs of both refugees and hosts.

UNHCR aims, through advocacy and coordination with partners, to support refugees in Uganda to achieve self-reliance, participate in local economies, expand employment access, and improve social cohesion. This strategy focuses on coordinating with partners to deliver effective programs and advocating for a supportive legal and policy environment. UNHCR also partners with development-focused organizations, such as UN agencies (UNICEF, IOM) and other international and local entities, to attract expertise, funding, and resources for sustainable, long-term programming.

# From humble beginnings to fruitful success

***Mary Edward, 46-year-old South Sudanese refugee, has turned hardship into opportunity in Kampala city.***

In 2016, conflict forced Mary, her husband, three children, and three other relatives to flee South Sudan, seeking safety in Uganda. Upon arrival, a friend helped her register as a refugee, and her uncle later assisted in securing a rental home in the city.

Determined to build a better life for her family, Mary pursued every opportunity to become self-reliant. She started by making and selling handicrafts and baked goods using a portable oven. As her ambition grew, Mary ventured into drying and selling dried cassava leaves - a good source of protein, minerals, and vitamins. With time, she expanded her product range to include dried okra, jackfruit, mangoes, and pineapples.

In 2023, she established Muhaba Pastries Store, a small-scale fruit drying business in Namungoona, a surburb of Kampala.

Her dedication paid off in 2024 when she secured a Quality Mark from the Uganda National Bureau of Standards (UNBS), allowing her to reach a broader market.

Despite the hardships and sorrow, she endured in South Sudan, Mary remains deeply connected to her homeland. This connection inspired her to name her business *'Muhaba'*, which means love in her native language, Juba Arabic.

From sourcing in local markets to expertly grading, washing, peeling, slicing, dehydrating, and marketing, Mary has shown her tireless work ethic and aspirational spirit. She acknowledges that UNHCR has helped her increase her earnings by offering opportunities to market and sell her products.

*"UNHCR normally assists in helping us market our products, for example, during the Refugee Christmas Market. That was not the first time. I also marketed my products when I was still doing bakery at Munyonyo. There was a conference at Speke Resort, and through UNHCR, I was able to showcase my products at the conference."* Mary said.

With support from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), a UNHCR partner in Kampala, Mary was able to register her business and acquire a Tax Identification Number (TIN) – which every official business needs to have – and obtained a trading license from Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), enabling her to operate as a registered business and expand to employ three staff, two refugees, and a Ugandan.

Mary's business now generates a monthly turnover of two million Uganda shillings.

*"My hope is that I can be able to export my products to other countries."*
Mary shared.

*Mary showcasing some of her processed products*

*Mary packing cassava dried leaves with one of her employees.*

# Albert's path to self sufficiency

Albert Elise is a 32-year-old man, husband and the proud father of two daughters and a son. Originally a refugee from Yei Yei in South Sudan, he settled in Uganda in 2016 in Jomorogo, a settlement village directly west of Adjumani town.

His journey took a positive turn when he became a part of a livelihood project, led by UNHCR through its partner Caritas, which was funded by the Muslim World League. Through the project, Albert and was allocated an one-acre plot on the Jomorogo block farm. To help him set up, he received six bags of cassava (an edible root vegetable and one of the most popular foods in Uganda) cuttings and two kilograms of simsim or sesame, which he planted on his allocated land.

Due to his dedication and hard work, Albert successfully harvested 400Kg of simsim (sesame) and 700Kg of cassava, which allowed him and his family to have a consistent source of food and income from the sale of the crops.

*"I can now support my school-going children with school fees and the other requirements for school. Above all, my household is food secure."* Albert proudly shares.

The additional income that came from selling the crops allowed him to purchase two goats and six chickens.

*"I worked hard, nurturing the crops, and when the harvest approached, I was excited to see the results,"* Albert said.

*Maawia Alhassan digging in his backyard garden in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement.*

## Resilience taught Maawia farming

Many refugees in Uganda are utilizing the land allocated to them by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) to grow food crops and vegetables, supplementing WFP rations and improving their nutrition.

Maawia Alhassan had never held a hoe before. In Khartoum, Sudan, he ran two thriving boutiques, owned a decent home, and built a good life. Then, in April 2023, conflict shattered everything.

During his flight to Uganda, he was separated from his wife and three children in Al Gadarif state — their fate remains unknown.

Now, living in a temporary shelter, Maawia farms to supplement his rations. The pain of loss is immense, but like many resilient refugees, he hasn't given up. His hope remains strong, even far from home.

# Prepare for the future

## Let's up skill our young people

*Graduates receiving start-up kits*

In a significant milestone for refugee youth empowerment, 25 young adults graduated in various vocational fields at the Nakivale Vocational Training Institute established by UNHCR. The trainings offered were building and construction, woodwork, carpentry and joinery, IT & Computer skills, welding and metal construction, tailoring and garment cutting and salon management and hairdressing.

With support from UNHCR and partner organization Alight, all the graduates were presented with vocational start-up kits and certificates from the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), a Government body that approves quality assurance of occupational standards for vocational training and qualifications. With DIT certification, refugees are eligible to use their skills professionally, allowing them to earn more money for themselves and their families, which in turn offers them opportunities for self-reliance and economic independence.

In a ceremony attended by the Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR, members of local Refugee Welfare Committees, families and friends, the trainees were given kits to help them launch their careers with their newly learned skills. Faida Winne, a 22-year-old, South Sudanese refugee from Nakivale Refugee Settlement, Base Camp Zone says

> *"I was idle, and I felt envious of my peers who were already in this printing business. However, with determination and start up kits, now I have transformed my life and am self-employed."*

Such initiatives by UNHCR are part of a broader strategy to equip refugees with the skills, resources and the initial capital in the form of equipment, to enable them to thrive amidst the challenges of displacement. Practical skills can create a pathway to a sustainable livelihood for young people and a way of positively contributing to their communities.

## Refugees accessing skilling through Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Refugees hosted in Uganda are offered access to education at all levels including Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). To enable refugees to acquire and develop skills, UNHCR has supported the establishment of training centres in settlements and vocational courses within selected secondary schools, that have been registered by National Authorities, such as Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) and Uganda Business and Technical Examination Board (UBTEB).

At the end of their training course, the trainees are presented with a certificate recognized by employees. Students can acquire various skills including tailoring, hair dressing, carpentry, welding, plumbing, baking, catering, motor mechanics, web development and network administration. With these skills they can create employment for themselves especially during school holidays and can help to improve their families' incomes. Offering TVET is part of the Government of Uganda's Inclusion Agenda and offers refugees a way to become self-reliant and take up a role as part of the wider community.

# Agro-farming for a greener future

**Shukuru Pedeya, a mother of three and a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo living in Uganda, has, over the past four years, been planting crops in the Kigali woodlot as part of the Nakivale Green Environment (NGE) group. Through her hard work, Shukuru earns income from what she harvests, which she uses to buy school supplies for her children.**

*Shukuru Pedeya attends to her garden in the Kigali Woodlot, Nakivale Refugee Settlement*

NGE, a refugee-led initiative founded in 2012, is transforming lives and the landscapes of the settlement. With funding support from France, which donated €1 million to UNHCR Uganda for environmental activities, the group of over 300 refugees has made remarkable progress. Initially focused on vegetable farming, the group, guided by UNHCR's partner Nsamizi and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), has shifted to agroforestry practices which help to protect the environment.

UNHCR offered NGE tree seedlings, irrigation tanks, and hoses, and they followed an agroforestry method called 'Taungya', which combines the planting of trees with the planting of other crops, such as beans, between the trees. This is an efficient use of land, while also helping to capture more moisture from the air and offer additional protection for the rotational crops planted, preserving the land while providing an income for the farmers.

In the first season of 2024, NEG harvested and sold 8 tonnes of beans at 2,000 UGX per kilo, which gave the group a gross profit of UGX 16M, while some of the harvest was eaten by the families or used as seed for replanting for the second season. Unfortunately, in the second season of 2024, inconsistent rainfall meant they harvested less. They sold 3.5 tonnes at 2,500 UGX, which gave them a gross profit of UGX 8.75M. Again, some of the beans were eaten and others kept for seed.

For Shukuru, this initiative has been life changing. It has provided her with a stable income and allows her to plan a better future.

## Environment and energy overview

UNHCR, in collaboration with the government, development partners, and humanitarian agencies, is actively working to mitigate the impact of climate change and environmental degradation in refugee-hosting areas. This is achieved through co-chairing the Technical Working Group on Environment and Energy alongside the Office of the Prime Minister, mobilizing long-term funding for the sector, and supporting the implementation of key environmental initiatives.

In 2024, with funding from EU INTPA, DG ECHO, France, Ireland, and an in-kind donation from the Signify Foundation, UNHCR:

- Installed 359 solar streetlights in Palabek and Kyangwali.
- Installed seven solar systems (10kW or 15kW) at health centers in southwestern Uganda.
- Solarized 50 schools and two water systems to improve access to education and clean water.
- Produced and distributed 8.9 million tree seedlings for reforestation and agroforestry.
- Replanted 200 hectares of degraded forest reserves and planted 40 hectares of wetland buffer zones.
- Established 810 hectares of new woodlots and maintained over 1,080 hectares of existing ones.
- Provided 24,800 households with energy-saving cookstoves to reduce firewood consumption and environmental impact.

The integration of agroforestry in woodlot establishment has provided refugees with additional land for crop cultivation, ensuring food security while promoting environmental conservation. This approach fosters peaceful coexistence by bringing refugees and host community members together to cultivate crops within the woodlots, promoting shared resources and collaboration.

# UNHCR Uganda operation Mpox preparedness and response

**Raising awareness about Mpox remains a priority. Health workers in settlements, hosting communities, and health centers have continued to educate refugees and host community residents about the disease, which the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in August 2024.**

**UNHCR is a member of the national task force leading the response and aligned its activities with the national Mpox response strategy initiated by the Ministry of Health. A UNHCR dedicated Mpox response and preparedness plan was developed and adapted for use in refugee-hosting districts.**

**Due to their high mobility across borders, particularly with the DRC, which reported significant numbers of cases, all 13 refugee-hosting districts across the country were categorized as high-risk areas.**

**UNHCR received $1.7 million from the U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) to support Mpox response activities, with $1.2 million allocated to the health sector and $0.5 million to water, sanitation and hygiene. Response activities were aligned with the national and UNHCR Mpox response pillars.**

**By 31st December 2024, UNHCR had reported 6 Mpox cases amongst refugees in Adjumani (1), Nakivale (1), Bidibidi (1) and Kampala (04) who had all successfully been treated and had recovered. At the national level, 1,415 Mpox cases and six deaths were reported.**

## The Mpox Response Pillars

**Coordination**

- Supports district-level task force meetings led by District Health Officers (DHOs) and settlement task force meetings.

### Risk Communication and Community Engagement

- Distributes Information, Education and Communication materials.
- Conducts community awareness campaigns to educate residents about Mpox signs, symptoms, and modes of transmission.

### Surveillance

- Builds the capacity of Village Health Teams to identify Mpox signs, symptoms, and spread, and to promote access to treatment and community-based surveillance.
- Screens new arrivals at transit and reception centers.

### Infection Prevention and Control (IPC)

- Procures and distributes personal protective equipment (PPE), including gloves, protective gowns, sanitizers, and soap.
- Installed handwashing stations and improved water access in settlements with less than 13 liters per person per day.
- Promotes handwashing campaigns and hygiene practices.

### Laboratory

- Trained healthcare workers on sample collection and transportation.
- Procured supplies for effective sample collection and transportation.

### Case Management

- Refurbished and equipped isolation wards.
- Supports the transportation of suspected cases to isolation wards and confirmed cases to treatment facilities.

## General information about health

UNHCR provides health and nutrition services to refugees through around 100 primary health care facilities. These are mainly government facilities supported by UNHCR and partners, for which 80% of staffing is provided by UNHCR and the government provides 20%.

More than 445 SGBV survivors were provided with a combination of HIV drugs (PEP) for Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV) prevention while 410 female survivors were provided with emergency contraceptive pills to prevent them from unwanted pregnancy.

Throughout all the health facilities, 72,945 mothers attended their first antenatal care and 228,151 repeat antenatal care visits were made. There were 52,852 live births assisted by skilled health workers which is 97% of the total number of live births recorded in 2024.

A total of 236,706 (135,084 refugees & 101,622 nationals) were tested for HIV of which 2,340 (869 refugees & 1,471 nationals) tested positive and were enrolled into care and treatment. Currently there are 15,534 (4,915 refugees & 10,619 nationals) enrolled into HIV care, treatment and antiretroviral therapy across Uganda's health facilities. There were also 3,100 individuals given tuberculosis (TB) care and treatment, of which 2,521 made a full recovery.

17,158 (12,166 refugees & 4,992 nationals) children under 5 years were offered care for acute malnutrition.

# Harnessing nature

## A community's way of tackling malaria

*Refugee women from Palabek Refugee Settlement that participated in pain relief oil workshop .*

In 2024, UNHCR staff in Lamwo, northern Uganda, embarked on an innovative project to address health resilience and preserve cultural heritage with refugees living in Palabek Refugee Settlement. Through a partnership with Helping Herbs, an Icelandic NGO founded by Anna Rosa, a clinical herbalist, the initiative recognized the community's deep-rooted knowledge of herbal medicine and is working to integrate this knowledge within activities to enhance healthcare and wellbeing.

Palabek, home to over **85,000 South Sudanese refugees**, faces significant **health challenges**, including a **high prevalence of malaria**. Leveraging the community's traditional knowledge, the project seeks to systematically document and promote the safe use of herbal remedies. One promising area of exploration is the development of natural mosquito repellents from local plants, an effort aimed at reducing malaria transmission. By combining community insights with scientific approaches, the project aspires to create effective, sustainable solutions for disease prevention.

The initiative **equips refugees with the skills to produce herbal-based treatments** for common ailments. Workshops conducted with women-led community groups introduce the process of creating pain relief oil using locally available plants, such as mango leaves. These workshops provide practical health benefits and empower participants to take an active role in their healthcare.

**Community participation has been central to the success of this initiative.** Refugees have shared their knowledge, contributed to the identification of potential herbs to use, and actively participated in workshops and discussions. The collaboration between the local community and a businesswoman with over twenty years of experience in this field ensures that the project can be income-generating, culturally relevant, and tailored to the needs of the people it serves. It also underscores the potential of innovative, community-driven approaches to address pressing health challenges facing refugee and local hosting communities. This project has mixed innovation with partnership and community engagement, and although still in its first year, the aim is to learn, adapt, and roll out similar projects in other areas of Uganda.

# Water boosting agricultural productivity for refugees

*Solar-powered irrigation system*

*Women farmers irrigate their gardens using a solar-powered irrigation system*

Mushabina Jackline a 34-year-old, Congolese refugee now living in Rwamwanja and a member of 'Together We Can' farmers group said

***"After the installation of the solar powered irrigation system, we have access to sufficient water for production, seasonless production without depending on rain to meet the market demands and get higher prices."***

In response to the growing challenges of climate change, UNHCR and its partner Alight made significant strides to improve access to water for farming in Nakivale, Oruchinga, Rwamwanja, Kyaka II and Kyangwali refugee settlements.

To enhance agricultural productivity and create intensified crop production, 11 solar-powered, low cost, drag hose irrigation systems were installed across the five refugee settlements each capable of irrigating more than 2 acres of land per kit. With the installation of solar powered irrigation kits, which includes; water pumps, solar panels, water tank stands, hydrants, lengths of garden hose and water roses with multiple spray patterns. The kits have helped to mitigate the impact of unpredictable weather patterns, enabling farmers to have a consistent production even in times of drought or irregular rains.

The solar-powered irrigation systems are a game-changer for smallholder farmers particularly in areas with an unreliable water supply. The system allows the farmers to have seasonless growing cycles – which means crops can be grown even in dry spells. With consistent yields, the farmers have been able to meet demand even in off-seasons and has resulted in farmers earning more at local markets throughout the year, boosting their economic security and reducing their dependency on aid as their ability to provide food for their families throughout the year has increased.

Benefiting over 330 refugee farmers organized into eleven farming groups of men and women, the farmers have found economic empowerment, by gaining control of their agricultural production.

This project is a key part of the broader effort to empower refugees, enhance their livelihoods and contribute to the long-term development of the regions where they live.

Atong Rhoda Akur demonstrates proper handwashing to children.

# Meet a dedicated hygiene teacher

In Rhino Camp, northern Uganda, over 153,000 refugees, predominantly from South Sudan, now have access to clean, potable water. Every year the water system and the management of the system are evaluated, to ensure that any changes that can improve the health and hygiene of the refugees and local community residents are put into place, ensuring the water and sanitation facilities are the best they can be.

*"The acquired knowledge is instrumental in our efforts to promote hygiene. In our village, we encountered various challenges, like open defecation, which lead to diseases," says Rhoda.*

Atong Rhoda Akur, a 34-year-old refugee from South Sudan, serves as a Village Health Team (VHT) member. Her primary responsibility is to share her knowledge on hygiene practices with families living in Odobu Zone, Rhino Camp. Rhoda, along with 239 other VHTs have participated in intensive training provided by UNHCR and local partner, Water Mission.

Wearing a distinctive branded blue jacket, Rhoda is a familiar sight every morning as she walks along the dusty avenues and narrow paths of Odobu village. She visits families in their homes explaining water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) safe practices, such as the importance of hand washing, using latrines, the safe disposal of garbage and explaining the safe water chain – ensuring that water is not contaminated through each stage between water source and consumption.

In her quest to reach even more people with WASH-tailored, best practice messaging, Rhoda conducts daily talks to refugees waiting for medical attention at the Outpatient Department of Odobu Health Center III and visits community water points to ensure that the jerrycans used to transport water are clean.

After working as a VHT for over ten years, Rhoda is well-known among local leaders and has established a strong and trusted relationship with them. They frequently suggest areas to focus her awareness talks on. Rhoda explains:

> *"The people we teach become our ambassadors. We inform the leaders what we are going to do in the community. They too help us spread the message about hygiene. They understand better the challenges in their communities better."*

As part of a wider plan with local, national and international partners to promote WASH, Rhoda supports the Water User Committees to ensure that water sources are effectively protected with fencing and that every community member knows about WASH.

# Clean water

## A route to livelihoods and dreams in Kyangwali Refugee Settlement

*Kasereka Bahamulwa transports jerrycans filled with water for sale on his bicycle.*

In Kyangwali Refugee Settlement, the Kavule II water system is essential for thousands of refugees and the local community in Kikuube district. Powered by solar energy and a generator, this hybrid system ensures access to clean water, even on cloudy days.

The water pump was constructed with funding from the Government of the United States of America, with the Government of South Korea funding an upgrade that reduced frequent breakages and improved water flow to collection points across the settlement.

For Kasereka Bahamulwa Valantin, a Congolese refugee in Uganda, the water points provide more than just water—they offer a livelihood. He hand pumps the water in to jerricans and then sells the water he fetches to his neighbours and friends in the local community. He began with filling and selling a single jerrican and has gradually increased to rotating ten jerricans. With the income he raised from selling one jerrican of water at a time, he was able to repair his bicycle, which allowed him to carry more jerricans.

He describes how he built his business,

*"When someone sees me with two jerricans of water, they call me, and I sell to them". "Later, I carried eight, then ten, up until now."* he adds proudly.

The improvements to the water system, have transformed lives. Dedan Tugaine, working with the community for UNHCR explains,

> *"Kyangwali is receiving newly arrived refugees all the time and the challenges include expanding and upgrading water systems, to cope with the hundreds of new arrivals. We aim to upgrade the smaller water systems to match what the amount of water Kavule needs to provide."*

Kavule II system has become a reliable water source. The upgrade undertaken in 2024 ensures a steady water supply for all the storage tanks and collection points around the Settlement. For the families that live in Kasereka, access to water means more than being able to fulfill daily water needs— it is an opportunity to earn a living and become self-reliant.

### Overview: Water, sanitation and hygiene

The Household Knowledge Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey for 2024 revealed that 86% of refugees and the hosting population accessed basic drinking water, which reflects a slight increase from 2023. The average water availability per person per day remained at 17 liters, falling below the UNHCR standard of 20 liters per person per day. With over 98% functionality of water systems in the settlements, UNHCR implementing partners maintained 223 motorized water systems and 1,168 hand pumps, 77% of the water supplied was powered by renewable energy, mainly solar and hydro power. The construction of additional boreholes, motorized solar systems, extended pipe networks and new reservoirs contributed to an improved water supply. UNHCR coordinates the implementation of the Water and Environment Refugee Response Plan in collaboration with the Ministry of Water and Environment (MoWE), UNICEF, and partners. UNHCR continues to advocate for water and sanitation services in settlements to be integrated into with the national government systems as part of UNHCR's wider integration strategy.

## Second chances, new dreams

In August 2024, 16-year-old Poni Cecily arrived at Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement with her mother and two siblings, fleeing insecurity in Kiri village, in South Sudan. Their desperate search for safety forced them to abandon their home and put their education on hold, leaving them uncertain about their future.

At Rwamwanja's Reception Centre, UNHCR staff assessed the family's needs and identified education as a priority. Within a month, UNHCR had liaised with the Kamwenge District Education Office and the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) to secure special permission for the siblings to register, even though the official deadline had passed. They were subsequently enrolled at Mahani Primary School and allowed to sit for the PLE in 2024.

The results were remarkable - Poni and her siblings passed Grade 2 and 3, opening the door for them to continue their education. Their success also rekindled hope and optimism within the family.

## "My worst fear is dropping out of school"

When Florence Butumwa (21) enrolled at Rwamwanja Primary School in 2012, she had to start in primary one due to a language barrier—education in Congo is in French, while Uganda uses English. With her teachers' support, she worked hard and passed her Primary Leaving Examinations in 2019 with a first grade.

She joined Rwamwanja Secondary School in 2020. In 2022, a UNHCR scholarship enabled her to enroll at Ntenungi Secondary School, where she excelled academically and also became head girl in 2023.

Due to the long commute, Florence returned to Rwamwanja Secondary School in 2024. In her final Ordinary Level exams, she scored an A in Biology and Bs in Geography, Kiswahili, and Physics. She now hopes to study Physics, Economics, and Mathematics—and pursue her dream of becoming an electrical engineer.

## Abdinasir, one of 2024 UACE's top performers, aspires to become a civil engineer

In 2013, Abdinasir Salad Muse and his family fled Somalia, passing through Kenya before finding safety in Nakivale Refugee Settlement. Raised in a household of six by a single mother, life as a refugee has never been easy.

With a partial scholarship, Abdinasir completed his Ordinary Level examinations at Nakivale Secondary School in 2022, earning a first grade. Driven by a passion for science and technology, he pursued Physics, Economics, Mathematics, and Information and Communications Technology at Advanced Level. He later secured a full scholarship to study at Mbarara High School, where he qualified for university admission.

*Abdinasir Salad Muse and his mother in Nakivale Refugee Settlement*

Now, Abdinasir dreams of becoming a civil engineer — determined to use his education to build a better future for himself and his community.

# A scholarship beyond education

I am Akita Magret, a 25-year-old student of Social Work and Social Administration at Uganda Christian University. Pursuing a university education had always been my dream, but as a refugee, financial barriers and the long distance to higher institutions seemed like impossible obstacles. My hope came in the form of a scholarship program supported by private philanthropists from Australia, Sweden, and the UK. The opportunity changed my life.

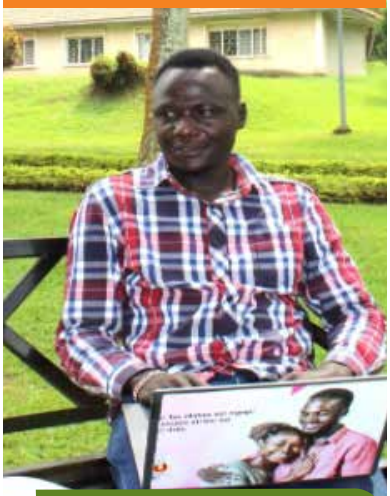
I arrived in Uganda in 2016, fleeing the conflict in South Sudan with my cousins. We settled in Bidibidi refugee settlement, in the far northwest of the country.

I completed my secondary education with a good grade, but affording university seemed out of reach. When I heard about the scholarship opportunity, I applied immediately, hoping for a chance to further my studies. My promptness paid off, and I was selected. The scholarship now covers my tuition, accommodation, and living expenses—costs my family could never afford. Studying in Kampala has been a huge adjustment but also an exciting journey. One of the most useful resources I received to make my studying easy was a laptop.

Once I graduate, I hope to make a difference in my community, improving social well-being and advocating for girls' right to education. Through career talks and mentorship,

I want to inspire younger girls to have the courage and hope to pursue their dreams. Beyond academics, this journey has given me a new perspective on life. I have met and made friends from different backgrounds and cultures, which has deepened my understanding of the world.

# Learning today, aiming higher tomorrow



*"My profound gratitude extends to everyone involved for their unwavering support of my journey. I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for their support, and for that, I am eternally grateful."*

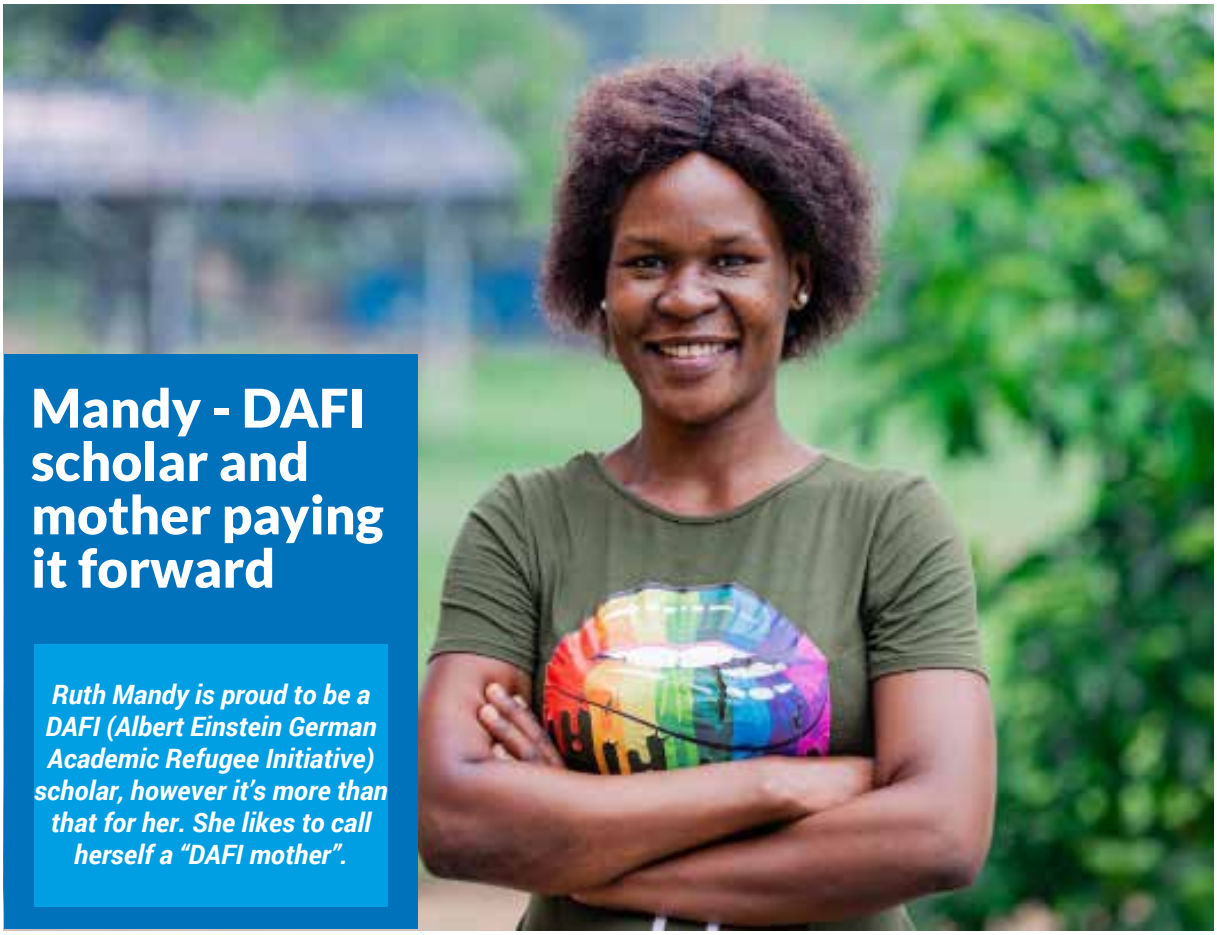
Fleeing war in South Sudan, Bidali Stephen and his uncle found refuge in Bidibidi refugee settlement, northern Uganda. Given a small plot of land, they built a shelter, grew vegetables, and started over.

Life in the settlement presented challenges, and Bidali took on various small jobs to survive. However, he soon realized that without qualifications, his earning potential was limited. When he found out about the possibility of a DAFI scholarship—launched by the German government many years ago and now funded in part by private individuals from around the world via UNHCR's network of National Partners—a dream came true for Bidali. The scholarship has provided him with the chance to pursue higher education and break free from a cycle of limited opportunities.

*"After seeing the advertisement, I applied, went through multiple interviews, and eventually emerged successful. The moment I received the news, I was overwhelmed with excitement," Bidali shares enthusiastically.*

Bidali graduated in July 2024, after studying Social Work and Social Administration at Uganda Christian University. The scholarship funds covered all the essentials, including his tuition fees, accommodation, living expenses, laptop, and internet access. The laptop especially has become an invaluable tool for Bidali, enabling him to conduct research, prepare presentations, and stay connected with online learning platforms.

Despite the challenges posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic throughout his first year of university, the scholarship program has provided Bidali with the necessary resources to adapt and succeed in his studies. He aims to bring about change and transformation in his community, focused on addressing the issue of addiction amongst adolescents and young adults.



# Mandy - DAFI scholar and mother paying it forward

***Ruth Mandy is proud to be a DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholar, however it's more than that for her. She likes to call herself a "DAFI mother".***

Ruth Mandy is proud to be a DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholar, however it's more than that for her. She likes to call herself a "DAFI mother".

In 2015, the fighting forced her to leave everything behind in South Sudan. There was no time to plan or pack belongings - she fled to northwest Uganda and ended up in Bidibidi refugee settlement, in Yumbe district.

In the settlement Mandy found herself drawn to community work. She started volunteering as the Refugee Welfare Council's Secretary for Education, helping other refugees access educational opportunities.

Through this role, she learned about the DAFI scholarship programme which offers qualified refugee and returnee students the possibility to earn an undergraduate degree in their country of asylum or home country.

*"I saved money to sit for the entry exams," says Mandy. "I was the first person to be shortlisted as the winner. I was so excited, so happy. I even cried."*

In 2022, Mandy enrolled at Uganda Christian University, where she is now studying Social Work and Social Administration.

As a DAFI mother, she can focus on her studies, knowing her children's health is taken care of because the scholarship covers childcare costs. Before DAFI, if she or her child were sick, she would panic about the price of treatment. Now, she feels secure.

*"I don't feel stressed because DAFI supports me, supports the child that is there."*

Mandy is currently doing her internship at Office of the Prime Minister at the Regional Desk in Arua. When she is not in class or working, she returns to Bidibidi to talk to young girls at the Women's Center. Mandy knows the pressure these girls face, early marriage, feeling forced to prioritize other things and doubting their dreams. But she tells them otherwise.

*"As they are young girls, you need to talk to them in motivational words," she says "I share from my experience that I'm a mother who has been abandoned. But I made it in life."*

As she approaches graduation, Mandy has big plans. She wants to work in social services, maybe as a counselor or in child protection. But there is one thing she keeps coming back to; teaching.

*"If I will be lecturing, I can influence many", she says, hoping to inspire the next generation of refugees and students in Uganda.*

# Specialized education

## Nothing stops Baraka from dreaming big

*A partner management team accessing Baraka's (in a white T-shirt) welfare and living conditions at his home at Ntenugi B in Rwamwanja*

Thirteen-year-old Baraka Muzebwa, who has partial physical and cognitive impairments, faced significant challenges in being accepted and treated like any other child in his family. Living with his father and stepmother, Baraka enrolled himself in a nearby mainstream primary school after fleeing his home country, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Baraka and his family fled the DRC due to the uncertainty and insecurity caused by the war in the DRC.

Despite the teachers' best efforts, the 15-year-old struggled to keep up with the basic curriculum, which did not meet his specific needs. Thanks to support from Education Cannot Wait (ECW), UNHCR and its partners—FCA for education, ALIGHT for protection, and MTI for health—collaborated to identify students living with disabilities and assess their needs to provide tailored support. Following this assessment, UNHCR and partners enrolled him in a special needs education program at Sweswe Special Needs Education Centre in Kyaka II Refugee Settlement—marking a turning point in Baraka's life.

UNHCR has played a vital role in supporting Baraka's education by covering his school fees, providing scholastic materials, paying for his boarding facility fares, meals, personal effects, and transportation to and from school. This comprehensive support has allowed Baraka to focus on his studies, paving the way for a brighter future.

At Sweswe, Baraka has thrived. He has become proficient in English and has developed remarkable self-confidence. His transformation has been so profound that he is now planning a thanksgiving ceremony in January 2025 to celebrate his achievements.

Baraka's journey is a testament to the power of specialized education and the resilience of the human spirit. His story is a source of pride for those who have supported him and an inspiration to all who hear it. Baraka dreams of a bright future as a doctor. Despite the numerous challenges he has faced, Baraka remains determined to pursue his passion for healing and helping others.

*Baraka at school using books donated by UNHCR*

# Connected learning, digital skills and microwork in Nakivale

*Nicholas in the newly renovated computer laboratory at Nakivale Secondary School.*

Nicholas Nshuti is a student at Nakivale Secondary School in the Nakivale Refugee Settlement, southeast Uganda. He completed his secondary school Ordinary Level in 2024 having studied on a scholarship under the EU-INTPA, administered by Finn Church Aid (FCA).

Fleeing the DRC with his family in 2013, Nshuti faced uncertainty about his education. However, his passion for learning led him to enroll in digital skills training under the Connected Learning, Digital Skills, and M icrowork (CLDSM) program. Jointly designed by UNHCR, UNICEF, and ILO, CLDSM enhances livelihoods by equipping refugees with digital skills to access Uganda's growing digital job market. Through this initiative, Nshuti used Kolibri, an offline learning platform with a vast educational library, which greatly supported his research and learning.

*"Being a student of a new curriculum, Kolibri helped me a lot in terms of making research. Kolibri was easier to use since it was accessed at any time and it was offline," he said.*

The fully renovated ICT lab at Nakivale High School, equipped by UNHCR with laptops, solar power, new furniture, internet access, and teacher training, provided Nshuti with the opportunity to study in a conducive learning environment and acquire new knowledge about ICT.

Through the ICT support program, he developed a humanoid robot which fights viruses in his community, using knowledge gained from Kolibri.

*"The digital skills program has improved my knowledge of ICT and helped me to understand it in every corner digitally," he said.*

*"I would like to thank the teachers who have led us through the program well and made us understand it properly. I suggest that this program should not only be limited to some schools but distributed around the country."*

## General information on education

Newly arrived families in Uganda continue to place additional pressure on the overstretched education system. As of December 2024, at least **64%** of children and youth of school-going age (3-24 years) required access to education. Gross Enrolment Rates (GER) show that approximately **45%** of refugee learners are enrolled at the pre-primary level, **84%** at the primary level and only **9%** at the secondary level with less than **1%** enrolled in tertiary or university education. Net Enrolment Rates (NER) remain low in refugee-hosting areas with **55%** at the primary level and under **5%** at the secondary level implying a large number of overaged and underaged leaners in the schools. Currently, **37%** of the education institutions providing access to refugees and host community children across the 12 refugee-hosting districts are coded allowing them to be government-led and grant-aided. The Ugandan policy supports the inclusion and integration of refugees into the national education system. This further is strengthened by the Education Response Plan II which aims at enhancing coordination and the provision of quality education and sports for all. Education coordination is government led with UNHCR supporting co-leadership responsibilities.

Spotlight Initiative 2.0

# Empowering girls and young women in Uganda

The Spotlight Initiative 2.0 Joint Programme (SIJP) is a continuation of the successful EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, which focused on eliminating violence against women and girls. Under the Gender for Development in Uganda (G4DU) framework, this new phase aims to ensure that adolescent girls and young women have access to healthcare, fully enjoy their Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), and live free from all forms of sexual violence against women—whether at home, in public spaces, at work, or online.

*Refugee women in Kiryandongo awaiting to receive clothes at the WFP distribution point.*

## How the initiative is making a difference

The program is strengthening prevention and response mechanisms by increasing access to essential services for women, adolescent girls, and children in schools and communities. Through this initiative, UNHCR and partners are working to:

- Enhance institutional capacity to implement and monitor laws, policies, and plans addressing sexual violence and improving SRHR at national and local levels.
- Promote gender equality and social change by raising awareness of equitable social norms that prevent sexual violence against women and support SRHR in schools, communities, and refugee settlements.
- Expand access to life-saving services ensuring adolescent girls and young women receive quality healthcare, protection, and support services when they need them most.

## Where the Initiative is implemented

- Terego (Rhino & Imvepi Settlements)
- Yumbe (Bidibidi Settlement)
- Kyegegwa (Kyaka Settlement)
- Kampala (Urban Refugees)

## Key achievements

**One-Stop Centers**
Four health facilities in 04 refugee settlements have been upgraded to provide comprehensive support to survivors, ensuring faster referrals and coordinated services.

**Women & Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS)**
11 safe spaces in refugee settlements have become hubs for support, empowerment, and mentorship.

**Education and awareness**
Teachers and school leaders in refugee settlements are now trained on teenage pregnancy prevention and support, helping more young mothers stay in school.

**Skills training for out-of-school girls**
Vocational training programs are giving young refugee women a second chance at education and economic independence, helping them make informed life choices.

By investing in these initiatives, the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 Joint Programme is creating a safer and more inclusive environment where girls and young women in refugee-hosting settlements can thrive and continue to build better futures.

# The healing power of business

**Grace Kiden a 52-year-old South Sudanese refugee and a single mother life in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, Zone 5. She is also a survivor of domestic violence. Grace lived peacefully with her husband and children in the settlement until 2020 when, her now, late husband started to abuse alcohol and then abuse her. Grace says,**

*"When we came to the camp, there is a lot of problems, people have a lot of stress. He was working as agriculture man and a farm manager but during the war, everything was taken, his documents were all burnt."*

Following the violent incidences, Grace enrolled at Asante Women and Girls Center in 2020 where she was offered psychosocial support and was also taught tailoring as part of her recovery journey. Grace believes the support she received from the center restored her hope for the future.

*"It helped me a lot, I can handle my stress, my problems I can control and then I can also focus."*

Grace was a fast learner and was soon supporting other women with their tailoring. At the completion of the course, Grace received UGX 500,000 (around US $135) from UNHCR, which she used to buy sewing machine and other tailoring accessories to establish her own shop.

Grace earns between 100,000UGX and 180,000UGX (around US$27 to $49) income each month which she uses to meet her daily family needs and to hire additional land from a local farmer, where she grew additional crops to supplement the meals for her family.

While at the center, Grace also joined a Village Savings and Loans Association - a local savings group - from where she borrowed money to set up a grocery stand at a local market.

*"From the business I am doing, I hire people to dig for me and when kids are around, we can dig together."*

From all the business ventures Grace is running, she is able to pay for her two sons to attend Bugema Adventist University in Kampala where one is studying Information, Communication and Technology and the other is training to be a nurse. Grace now feels empowered, she found the courage to overcome her violent past and continues to stand as a pillar of strength opposed to violence against women.

## General infomation about violence against girls and women

Violence Against Girls and Women remains a critical global issue, with one in three women experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime and affecting women and girls across all socio-economic backgrounds and regions. In Uganda, the situation is particularly alarming, with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2021) reporting that 95% of women and girls have experienced some form of violence, physical, emotional, or economic.

An average of 5,000 new incidents against refugee women and girls are reported annually across the 13 refugee-hosting districts. To address this, UNHCR and its partners adopt community-based approaches, engaging Refugee Women-Led Organizations focusing on prevention and response efforts. Awareness and education campaigns are essential and help victims to know their rights and the services available to them.

Strengthening referral systems ensures that survivors can access medical, legal and psychosocial support, while economic empowerment programs create opportunities for women, play a vital role in reducing their vulnerability to violence and build a safer environment for all women and girls.

## Communication

# Bidibidi FM

### Connecting people across Bidibidi

*Dedi Isaac a South Sudanese refugee in his "Community drive " show from 6:00pm to 9:00pm*

Welcome to BIDIBIDI FM 95.3 - UNHCR's local radio station covering the Bidibidi refugee settlement and surrounding area, which started broadcasting in May 2023. Registered by the Uganda Communications Commission (UCC), it operates out of Base Camp Bidibidi in Yumbe District, West Nile, northwest Uganda.

Bidibidi FM, the first community-based radio station in Bidibidi, is on air and online 24/7. It now has five crew members and six content creators and correspondents. Shows are presented in various languages, reaching approximately 200,000 refugees and 240,000 people from the refugee hosting communities, according to Dedi Isaac, the Programme's manager.

Run by and for refugees and their host communities, the station targets different groups, including children, youth, men, and women, aiming to entertain, inform, and inspire them to become active and self-reliant. Supervised by the Ugandan NGO Straight Talk Foundation and supported by DW Akademie and REF FM Foundation, Bidibidi FM focuses on issues directly related to refugees and local communities in the settlement and neighboring areas like Terego, Madi-Okollo, Koboko, Moyo, and Adjumani.

The station collaborates with Windle International and the Office of the Prime Minister on education through its "Go Back to School" campaign, reducing school dropout rates. It addresses problems such as water shortages, violence against women, and alcohol abuse through discussions and raising issues with governing bodies. Bidibidi FM keeps listeners updated on local, national, and international news, including South Sudan. Live events like World Refugee Day, International Breast-Feeding Week, and International Day of the Girl Child are broadcast to engage those who cannot travel.

Through broadcasting, the station has created a sense of identity and cohesion among diverse communities. Those facing discrimination or extreme poverty have found their voices amplified, challenging the status quo and supporting positive actions to eliminate negative behavior. It has helped build a peaceful environment within local communities through its mix of music, news, and Arabic content. Refugee listeners experience a home away from home, while Ugandan listeners enjoy programs in Aringa and Kakwa. Bidibidi FM connects communities and helps to ensure peaceful co-existence between refugees of different nationalities, the local people who host them, and the wider world.

> **"Bidibidi FM keeps listeners updated on local, national, and international news, including South Sudan"**

## Feedback, Referral and Resolution Mechanism (FRRM)

# The link to helping refugees every day

Operating seven days a week with **30** staff speaking **38** languages, a helpline network set up by UNHCR, has referred cases to over **1,000** staff from **60** organizations nationwide. In 2024, the helpline received over **232,000** calls, a **5%** increase on 2023 figures. Most calls received (around **40%**) were about community-based protection, general inquiries and food assistance. The helpline addresses urgent needs, offers guidance and connects individuals to essential services, ensuring that refugees receive the assistance they require to navigate challenging circumstances.

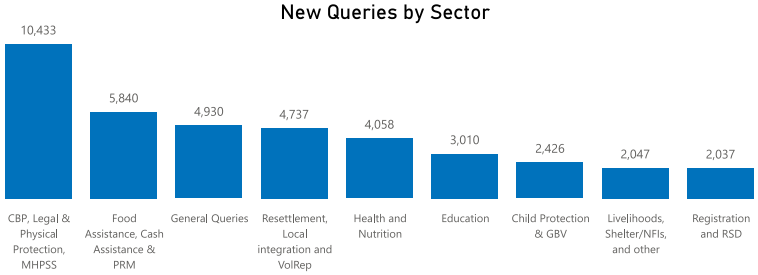
UNHCR and **70** plus partners work on the helpline that is part of a larger system which also offers complaints boxes, emails, community structures, protection desks and other hotlines run by UNHCR partners, that receives at least **36,000** feedback messages from the wider community.

The helpline software was upgraded in 2024 and with new functionalities such as a WhatsApp chatbot and a mobile application that will be added in 2025, accessibility has increased. These upgrades are intended to digitally support localization, promote inclusion, service refugees and those with special needs, and empower local partners to play a greater role in addressing community issues.

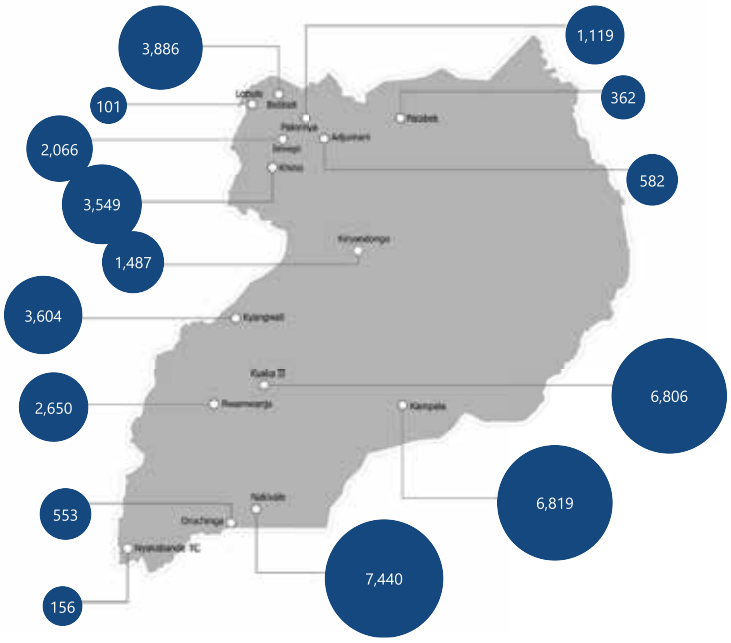
As UNHCR transitions essential services to the government for a more sustainable and localized approach in the coming years, this tool will play a vital role in providing improved links between refugees, the government and humanitarian and development partners. The upgrades and two-way communication would not be possible without the generous support of UNHCR's donors, whose commitments make it possible to continue to improve services for refugees.

*Feedback, Referral and Resolution Mechanism (FRRM) call attendants at the helpline center in Kampala.*

New Queries by Sector




New Queries by Location



# Helen Keleta: CEO, refugee, and peacemaker

*Helen in her office at the hospital in Kabalagala*

*"Working peacefully is better than anything...."* she says, *"I am happy living here, I don't have any plans of leaving Uganda, most of my friends are Ugandans. I enjoy living here."*

Helen Keleta is an Eritrean national, a registered refugee and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the East Africa Medical Center in Kabalagala, a suburb of Kampala. The medical center is known by refugees of all nationalities and has served refugees and Uganda nationals with quality health care for six over years.

After arriving in Uganda in 2016, Helen established the East Africa Hafeshawi Medical Center in January 2018, which later became the East Africa Medical Center in Kabalagala.

When Helen and her husband invested in healthcare, they wanted to solve the key challenge of language barriers between refugees and the Ugandan medical doctors and provide the best quality care possible. The facility can accommodate up to 18 inpatients and has an in-house laboratory (accredited by the Gulf Cooperation Council) and pharmacy. The Center is also accredited by the Uganda Medical and Dental Practitioner Council and offers dental, maternal health, ultrasound and other specialized patient services.

With almost 30 dedicated staff, Helen has employed over ten Ugandans including doctors, nurses and auxiliary staff, such as the medical supervisor, who work alongside staff, and like Helen, refugees from Sudan and Ethiopia, helping to provide health care to those that need it.

*"As refugees we are also contributing to saving lives in the community"* says Helen.

The center has extended its services to Ndeeba (south of central Kampala) and contributes to outreach programs that work with the refugee community and local Ugandan community, including the local council's blood donation drives, that happen at the Center.

After nearly ten years in Uganda, Helen has learnt some basic Luganda - a language commonly spoken in Kampala - and has adapted to the culture, mixing it with the culture of her Eritrean homeland.

*Mugambe Emmanuel a Ugandan national and a radiographer scanning a patient at the facility*

*Aminah Nsigaye a Ugandan national and a nurse attending to a patient at the East African Medical Center*

# Refugee youth lead the way in peacebuilding

*Sabah El Basha, a UNHCR Protection Officer addressing the refugee youths from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan during the workshop Uganda's Capital Kampala*

*In November 2024, a group of remarkable young refugees from Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda gathered in Kampala for a workshop organized by UNHCR. These young peacebuilders, part of the Regional Youth Peacebuilding Programme (RYPP), came together to reflect on the achievements of Phase 1 (2023-2024), share their stories and plan for the next phase of their peacebuilding journey.*

**Phase 1** of the RYPP was generously funded by the European Union and showcased the incredible impact of refugee youth. In Uganda, they trained over 1,100 young people in peacebuilding skills and organized sports tournaments to unite communities. In South Sudan, youth mentors mediated conflicts and used radio programs to spread messages of unity. In Ethiopia, events like the 'Great Run for Peace' brought refugees and host communities together, fostering solidarity and understanding.

The workshop was a space for learning, connection and discussions about the future. They emphasized the need for more support for youth-led projects, stronger partnerships with other stakeholders and innovative solutions like digital training and sports for peace. They called for inclusive efforts that empower women, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups.

The message was clear: refugee youth are not just survivors — they are leaders and changemakers. With the right support, they can transform their communities and inspire hope far beyond their borders. This is a reminder that peace is built by people, not only policies. These young refugees are living proof that even in the face of adversity, hope and resilience can flourish. They are not just building peace; they are building a better future for us all.

*Some of the participants during the workshop*

Their courage and determination remind us that everyone deserves a chance to shine, and sometimes, that is all it takes to change the world.

## Field visits

### Missions in 2024

| MONTH | DONOR | LOCATION | THEMATIC AREA |
|---|---|---|---|
| JANUARY | UN General Assembly President | Nsambya Access Centre | Protection |
| | Denmark Ministerial & Ambassadorial Mission | Kisoro | Protection |
| | KSA - Sahara Microgrid (Solar Energy) | | Energy and Environment |
| | Sahara Desert Technologies | Kyangwali | Energy and Environment |
| FEBRUARY | Regional Bureau Director | Kampala, Arua & Yumbe | Executive Office |
| | Netherlands Embassy (Prospects) | Nakivale | Education and Protection |
| | ECHO Mission | Kiryandongo | Protection, Health & Food Distribution |
| MARCH | USA/PRM | Kiryandongo | Protection, Education & Food Distribution |
| APRIL | GIZ Special Representative for Denmark's UN Security Council Candidature | West Nile<br>Kyaka II | Protection |
| MAY | MWL | Adjumani | Livelihoods |
| | Ministers & Representative's Mission to Europe | London, Copenhagen, Hague, Brussels & Geneva | Fundraising |
| JUNE | RHPG Mission & Meeting | Kiryandongo & Kyangwali | Protection, Health, Education, Livelihoods, Environment, WASH, Vocational & Food Distribution |
| | Swedish Ministerial & Ambassadorial Mission | Kyaka II | Protection & Education |
| JULY | USA / PRM Mission - US Special Envoy for Sudan | Kiryandongo | Protection, Education, MHPPS & Gender |

*At the fish farm in Kashare, Rubondo, H.E. Kevin Colgan, the Ireland Ambassador, observes how Ireland's support to UNHCR is enhancing livelihoods in Nakivale. Initiatives like these provide refugees and host communities with essential resources for income and food security.*

*H.E. Kevin Colgan, the Ireland Ambassador, speaks at Base Camp during his visit to Nakivale. Accompanied by UNHCR Uganda Representative Matthew Crentsil, he discussed the significant impact of Ireland's support to UNHCR in Uganda, highlighting the importance of continued collaboration to assist refugees and host communities.*

## Field visits

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Uganda - Zambia Joint Government Mission | Nakivale | CRRF / JICA |
| | FCDO | Kiryandongo | Protection & Health |
| | (EU)/OPM and UNHCR | South West (Kyaka II, Rwamwanja, Nakivale, Mbarara) | Education, Health, WASH, Protection, Environment & Energy |
| **AUGUST** | ECHO (Protection) | Rhino Camp & Kiryandongo | Protection |
| | PROSPECTS Partnership | Rhino camp and Imvepi | Education and Protection |
| | Spain for UNHCR (EcA) | Adjumani & Kiryandongo | Protection, Livelihoods, Gender, Health & Education |
| | Ireland | Bidibidi | Protection, Gender & Livelihoods |
| **SEPTEMBER** | PROSPECTS Partnership | Rhino camp and Imvepi | Protection and Education |
| | ECHO (Environment) | Palabek | Environment |
| | ECHO (Media) | Kiryandongo | Protection, Health, WASH & Environment |
| **OCTOBER** | JICA Senior Vice President | Rhino Camp | Protection & Livelihoods |
| | Global Communications Services (GCS) | Kiryandongo, Rwamwanja & Kampala | Sudan Situation and High Commisioner Visit |
| | Netherlands Minister | Nakivale | Protection & PROSPECTS |
| | UNHCR High Commissioner & IOC President Visit | Kampala & Rwamwanja | Protection and Sports |
| **NOVEMBER** | GIZ | Kuluba TC & Rhino Camp | Protection & WASH |
| | JICA | Kiryandongo | Protection, WASH & Livelihoods |
| | ECHO Director for Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Asia and Pacific | Kiryandongo | Protection, WASH, Health & Cash |
| | ECHO Desk Officer | Nyakabande & Nakivale | Protection, Health, WASH, RLO, Livelihoods |
| **DECEMBER** | Spain for UNHCR (ECA) | Adjumani & Kiryandongo | Protection, Health and WASH |

*High Commissioner Filippo Grandi, along with Uganda Minister for Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, Hilary Onek, and UNHCR Representative in Uganda Matthew Crentsil, meets members of the Rwamwanja Refugee Welfare Council at the Mahani reception centre in Uganda*

## UNHCR efficiencies

# Paving way for efficiency and impact

In the face of progressively dwindling resources for the refugee programme in Uganda despite the significant increases in new refugee/asylum seeker arrivals (some 420,000) from 2022 to 2024 alone, and also as a good business practice, it is imperative for UNHCR in Uganda to establish a work culture that continuously focuses on efficient service delivery through judicious use of resources. This entails deliberate implementation of cost-saving measures through pragmatic and creative approaches to cover the needs of more than 1.8 million refugees in Uganda as well as their host communities, by creating more efficiencies in the refugee response.

Since 2022, significant strides have been made in integrating services for refugees into national systems, fostering sustainable and diverse partnerships, moving to cleaner solutions, and examining internal administrative costs by changing the way we think and intervene in the operation. These efforts are highlighted through various achievements measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Here are some notable gains recorded since 2022

Furthermore, over the past 2 years UNHCR Uganda has reduced its workforce by 120 personnel (regular and affiliate) through the global staff rationalization exercises. However, as a result of a thorough review of our staffing structures (including closure of one Field Office) the staff reduction has not affected our operational delivery in any significant way. It is also worth noting that the staff reduction exercise did not significantly result in the reduction of regular staff costs due to increases in salary scales for locally recruited personnel as well as revisions of the post adjustment and base salary scales for internationally recruited personnel. Significant savings were however made on affiliate staff costs.

While some of the efficiency gains can be easily quantified in terms of money saved, others are qualitative and not easy to monetize. However, both quantitative and qualitative changes, including a culture of integrity and a congenial work environment, contribute to ensure efficiency in our delivery. The savings made have been used to address critical gaps in the refugee response including the following:

- Restoring soap and sanitary towel provisions for new arrivals which had been stopped early 2022.
- Supplying inexpensive mobile phones to support Cash-Based Interventions
- Procuring essential medicines and medical supplies
- Providing additional Core Relief Items (CRIs) and Non-Food Items (NFIs) for new arrivals.

## Operational Efficiencies – Savings in USD since 2022

**Administration**
**USD 2,853,136**
Suspended SIM cards, reduced travel expenses, reduced rent. Miscellaneous savings resulted in the reduction of the administrative budget from 12M to 8M annually since 2022

**Protection**
**USD 10,000,000**
Streamlined registration, integrated protection services, community-led desks, and new resettlement method.

**Education**
**USD 1,469,577**
Refugees included in national database, reduced teacher recruitment costs, integrated education services, and improved post-primary education access.

**Health**
**USD 1,460,000**
Trained healthcare workers, integrated refugee health services, and leveraged volunteers to boost healthcare capacity.

**Fuel & Fleet**
**USD 1,170,000**
Reduced fuel quotas auctioned and replaced vehicles for efficiency and launched a Road Safety Strategy with defensive driving.

**Cash Assistance**
**USD 1,009,651**
Transitioned to cash-based assistance and accelerating monetization for new arrivals.

**WASH**
**USD 827,308**
Reduced water trucking, improved hand pump management, optimized VHT ratios, and launched a WASH graduate mentorship program.

**Localization**
**USD 600,000**
Reduced costs by shifting some interventions to refugee led organizations.

**Warehouse**
**USD 476,000**
Centralized warehouse reducing rent and fuel costs.

**Monitoring**
**USD 190,000**
UNHCR direct implementation of the Results Monitoring Survey resulted in cost savings

**Solarization**
**USD 138,972**
Increased reliable power in health facilities, solarized water systems, and installed solar systems to replace

**Accountability**
Enhanced helpline, shared integrity concerns, and invested in risk management capacities and assessments.

**Funding**
Increased funding from the private sector and development donors.

**Urban**
Development of a strategy for better planning for protection and urban refugees and access to livelihoods.

Total Savings (Estimated)
**USD 20,194,644**

# Long lasting solutions for refugees

Entrusted by the United Nations General Assembly, UNHCR developed durable solutions. These solutions provide long-lasting solutions for Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDPs) in the world.

*Buses transporting Burundian refugees from Nakivale Refugee Settlement at Mutukula Border Point*

UNHCR ensures the safety and well-being of refugees as part of its mandate. These solutions aim to address statelessness globally – those people who are not considered as a national of any country - by providing safe spaces under which FDPs can access equal rights in their countries of origin, current asylum countries and future countries of resettlement. UNHCR established three durable solutions including, voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration. All have the goal of ending statelessness worldwide.

### Voluntary Repatriation

Voluntary repatriation involves FDPs returning to their countries of origin from their countries of asylum by their own will and judgment. With information provided by UNHCR, FDPs can make informed decisions about returning to their home countries ensuring that the reasons for their displacement no longer exist and that their lives and property will be safe upon their return. For cases involving conflict or fear of persecution which have ended, FDPs may decide to return and rebuild their lives with transport facilitated by UNHCR. Peace in the country of origin is a key factor that determines the return of displaced persons.

### Resettlement and complementary pathways

Complementary pathways are safe and regulated avenues for refugees that complement resettlement by providing lawful stay in a third country where their international protection needs are met. They are additional to resettlement and do not substitute the protection accorded to refugees under the international protection regime. Complementary pathways leverage existing admission avenues including humanitarian admission, private or community sponsorship and humanitarian visas for those in need of international protection and family reunification, education and labor mobility, that facilitate migration by enabling refugees to reunite with family, access higher education, or utilize their skills and qualifications. These pathways enhance refugee self-reliance and responsibility-sharing while aligning with individual capacities and connections in third countries. Further labor mobility allows refugees to contribute to workforce needs in third countries and education pathways provide scholarships that help refugees rebuild their lives.

UNHCR plays a crucial role in advocating for and coordinating the systematic and sustainable expansion of complementary pathways and identifies individuals for resettlement based on their protection needs ensuring access to durable solutions.

### Local Integration

Local integration is a gradual process by which refugees become legally, economically, and socially incorporated within the host community in the country of asylum. It includes acquiring rights and entitlements and establishing self-sufficient livelihoods.

All durable solutions aim to safeguard the lives of refugees regardless of which durable solution is being pursued. These solutions provide more sustainable solutions for refugees while ensuring refugee protection. Durable solutions are achieved when FDPs transition from a temporary legal status to a permanent legal status.

# A path to success for refugees

The University Corridors for Refugees (UNICORE) initiative led by UNHCR Italy, offers refugee students in Uganda the chance to pursue higher education in Italy. This program provides a way for refugees to rebuild their lives through access to quality education.

The term 'complementary pathways' describes the safe and legal routes that allow refugees to relocate to another country for purposes such as education, work, or family reunification, outside of traditional programmes, that enable resettlement to another country. These pathways provide refugees with opportunities to rebuild their lives, achieve self-reliance and integrate into new communities, while also offering long-term solutions. Unlike resettlement, which is primarily focused on humanitarian protection, complementary pathways emphasize access to education, employment and other possibilities that empower refugees to thrive in their new environments.

As one of UNHCR Uganda's complementary pathways, UNICORE ensures that refugee students in Uganda can access higher education without resorting to dangerous journeys. The program supports students throughout their journey, from the application process to settlement, with the help of partner universities and organizations like Caritas and Centro Astalli in Italy.

A survey conducted among participants of UNICORE 5.0, (the fifth cohort of refugee students from Uganda), revealed that 75% were satisfied with the program and felt that UNICORE had played a key role in helping them integrate into their new environments, connect with academic mentors and build fulfilling lives. However, challenges such as language barriers, delays in financial support and possible discrimination, remain.

*Amanuel Tewolde*

***"I learned that FCA (Finn Church Aid an implementing partner of UNHCR's) was helping refugees with the application process, and when I approached them, I was helped for free."***

In 2023, 31 Ugandan refugees accessed UNICORE 5.0 scholarships in Italy and in 2024, this increased to 46 refugee students, funded by a consortium of 33 universities in Italy. Students came from 13 different refugee settlements and Kampala.

One of those student's was 27-year-old, Amanuel Tewolde Yosief originally from Eritrea. Amanuel is part of UNICORE and was settled into his new home in Italy by the UNICORE team.

Amanuel is currently pursuing a master's degree in Biotechnological and Chemical Sciences in Diagnostics at the University of Turin and is grateful to FCA and UNHCR for the support they have offered. He is seen as an inspiration by other refugees who understand how education has the potential to transform their lives. UNICORE demonstrates that protecting someone is not only about safety, but also about creating opportunities for people to succeed.

*UNICORE 6.0 beneficiaries before their departure to Italy*

# Opportunities for skilled workers abroad

*Pascal Mujombo and his family at the International Organization for Migration Transit Centre in Kampala ahead of their departure to Canada.*

Across Uganda's refugee settlements, refugees who are skilled, professionals face barriers to employment despite their qualifications. UNHCR Uganda's long-term strategy seeks to move away from a reliance on aid by leveraging refugee talents to create sustainable businesses and livelihood opportunities. The Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP) launched by Canada, has been instrumental in advancing this vision, by offering skilled refugees employment opportunities, which also allows Canada to address labor shortages in critical sectors such as healthcare.

The success of EMPP has not only transformed the lives of refugees in Uganda but also provided UNHCR Uganda's team responsible for complementary pathways with an excellent example to use when advocating for more train-to-hire programs. The model offers a viable pathway towards job creation and ensures that refugees receive targeted training, in line with the labor market needs, as well as allowing those who remain in Uganda to obtain valuable skills with which to secure local employment or if possible, to returning to their country of origin with expertise.

***Pascal Mujombo,*** is a 40-year-old professional nurse who was living in Kyaka Refugee Settlement, before moving with his wife and five children to Canada.

Despite his five years of experience as a nurse in Democratic Republic of Congo, legal and systemic barriers prevented him from practicing his profession in Uganda. After a rigorous process that took over 18 months, the EMMP program gave Pascal an opportunity to practice his profession in Canada. Pascal is delighted with the wonderful opportunity he has been given,

*"My children will get the chance to attend good schools, and we will finally have enough to eat, once I start earning a real salary."*

Pascal remains hopeful about advancing his career and plans to obtain his nursing license in Canada, while supporting his loved ones who are still in Uganda.

The train-to-hire model creates meaningful engagement with the private sector, enabling companies to invest in refugee talent, through provision of practical and relevant upskilling opportunities. The training also exposes refugees to a competitive labor market which improves their employability locally and abroad. Success stories such as Pascal's demonstrate the transformative impact of employment pathway models.

## General information on complimentary pathways

In 2024, complementary pathways in Uganda transformed from scattered efforts into a structured, impactful framework. Initially, access to settling in a third country through complimentery pathways was fragmented, however, a strategic approach has built on strengthened coordination and collaboration has led to a significant expansion of the potential pathway opportunities for refugees residing in Uganda.

Strategic partnerships around TVET (Technical Vocational Education and Training), educational institutions and the private sector have led to increased opportunities. Programs such as Ready for IT, an Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot an Italian train to hire initiative that offers refugees opportunities to relocate to Canada, and EU-Passworld, show the growth in complementary pathways, enabling refugee empowerment while also offering a sustainable solution for long-term impact.

*An aerial view of the newly completed EU-funded Nkoma A water system in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement a vital infrastructure set to enhance water access and integrate into the national supply network providing a sustainable solution for the community.*

# Transition

## Integrating services for a sustainable future

The integration of education, water, health and protection services led by UNHCR, to be part of the Government of Uganda's (GoU) service delivery system, is a priority of UNHCR's "Sustainable Programming" approach.

> *"The process of smooth transfer from parallel system of services (facilities and human resources) for refugees and host communities to a system sustainably managed by the Government with support by partners. This process should happen in a phased manner, based on a coordinated and integrated planning between humanitarian actors, development actors and Government of Uganda."*

The strategy to integrate services is being pursued because the current model of running parallel programs for refugees and local communities living locally to the refugee settlements is unsustainable and not cost effective. Integration is effective, efficient and aligned with the GoU's Global Refugee Forum (GRF) Pledge 2023:

> *"…to continue managing and integrating the infrastructure and services…The Government commits to put in place a transitional strategy and guidelines to facilitate coordinated transition planning and management."*

The GoU set up and started the transition process mid-2024.

### What is involved?

**Coordination and Advocacy:** UNHCR proactively supports GoU's GRF Pledge (see above) through advocacy, coordination, partnerships and technical support. UNHCR will gradually reduce engagement in the delivery of services, where these are best delivered by the GoU.

**Delivery of Protection Services:** In 2024, UNHCR Uganda's Protection team with support and funding from the PROSPECTS partnership, successfully implemented integration of child protection and violence against vulnerable people services into national systems supported by national and local groups, such as Kampala Capital City Authority, the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Office of the Prime Minister and community, civil society organizations.

**Engagement and Partnership**: UNHCR will pursue opportunities to work with partners who focus on development activities, to support the integration process and engage with refugees and local, host communities throughout the roll out of the strategy. They will continue discussions with World Bank, other financial institutions, development partners and UN agencies that could include refugee-hosting districts into their planned activities and aim to agree collective actions for responsibility sharing, through joint programming and the use of resources.

UNHCR foresees an integrated delivery of services to refugees, with UNHCR providing technical expertise, tailored support to people with specific needs and expanded support when there are emergency needs.

# EVENTS: World Refugee Day 2024

World Refugee Day 2024 was commemorated in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement, Terego District, under the theme "Solidarity with Refugees." At the time, Uganda was hosting 1.67 million refugees. Thousands of refugees, political leaders, and humanitarian workers gathered to mark the day. Leaders and humanitarian partners reaffirmed their commitment to stand with refugees and work together to build stronger, more resilient refugee and host communities.

# International Day of the Girl Child 2024

Mary Iyete (center, in red dress) with UNHCR Deputy Representative Jason Hepps and Plan International Country Director Phoebe Kasoga at the UNHCR office in Kololo, Kampala.

In commemoration of the International Day of the Girl Child, celebrated on 11th October, UNHCR's office in Kampala hosted a takeover by refugee girls, who took up the positions of Representative, Deputy Representative and Head of Protection, creating a new senior management team for the day. The annual event, was led by PLAN International, under the theme *'Girls Vision for the Future'*.

Mary Iyete, a 14-year-old South Sudanese refugee and girls' rights advocate from Bidibidi Refugee Settlement, took over as the UNHCR Uganda Representative, at a ceremony officiated by the Deputy Representative, Jason Hepps. Mary and her assistants visited various teams and led a senior member team meeting, where they discussed issues relating to girl empowerment and UNHCR Uganda's efforts in support of girls. Following the takeover UNHCR committed to improve access to scholarships (at secondary and tertiary level) and establish a wider network that ensures girls' participation in decision-making, within all the levels, from the grassroots to the heads of community.

Mary interacts with Md Maksud Hossain, Assistant Representative (Administration), during her office tour following her handover.

The Girl Takeover initiative is part of the broader 'Girls Get Equal' campaign launched in 2018 which aims to empower girls by allowing them to step into leadership roles for a day. Since its launch in Uganda, girls have taken over significant offices, including the Ministries of Education and Sports (MOES) and Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD), the National Planning Authority (NPA) and the British Deputy High Commissioner's Office. All these events highlight the potential of girls to lead.

## TICAD tournament

# Kicking for unity

### Pictorial of the 3rd edition of the TICAD tournament

A burst of energy, culture, and skill set the stage for the TICAD Cup, which kicked off on September 6, 2024, in spectacular fashion as female footballers—both refugees and Ugandans—performed the vibrant Japanese Soran Bushi dance.

Moments later, they swapped dance moves for dribbles and dazzling footwork, taking to the turf to showcase their exceptional football skills.

For three electrifying days, the FUFA Technical Centre in Njeru, Buikwe District was alive with music, dance, and intense football action, uniting players and fans, Ugandans and refugees alike, in a celebration of sportsmanship and cultural exchange.

Six teams battled for glory, with three teams from Adjumani and Rwamwanja bringing together 90 talented girls—a testament to the power of football in fostering inclusion, empowerment, and peaceful coexistence.

As the tournament climaxed, Jinja Queens and King of Kings put on an impressive show, but it was City Queens who emerged champions, clinching a 2-0 victory in a thrilling final.

A perfect blend of passion, skill, and cultural pride—TICAD Cup 2024, supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Uganda Office, was more than just a tournament; it was a celebration of unity and resilience through sports.

*Refugee and national girl footballers join Japan's Ambassador to Uganda, H.E. Sasamaya Takuwa; Commissioner for Refugees, Patrick Okello; UNHCR Country Representative, Matthew Crentsil; and JICA Uganda Chief Representative, Inoue Yoichi, to launch the 3rd TICAD Cup in Njeru, Buikwe District.*

# United Nations Day 2024

*UNHCR staff cheering during the game competitions in Lugogo.*

Every year on 24 October, the world celebrates United Nations Day, marking the anniversary of the UN's founding in 1945, following the end of World War II.

In Uganda, the 2024 celebrations took place at the MTN Omondi Stadium in Kampala, commemorating 79 years of the UN's commitment to peace, development, and human rights. The event brought together various UN agencies and kicked off with a city-center marching procession, followed by friendly sports competitions.

UNHCR staff and their families joined in the fun, participating in activities such as the egg race, sack race, football tournament, and Zumba dance sessions. It was a lively and joyful day, filled with laughter, teamwork, and celebration of the UN's values.

# A triumph of grit and determination

*Irakoze Beatrice was born into a family of six siblings and learned sacrifice at an early age. She is 22 years old, from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and now living in Nakivale Refugee Settlement. She has become a champion in her community through sports. With limited resources, she made the difficult choice to leave school after she had completed her primary education so that her younger siblings could continue learning. Instead of giving in to despair, she became a pillar of support, working alongside her parents on the family farm. Waking up before dawn to tend crops, she found purpose in providing for her family.*

Her hard work was rewarded when UNHCR's partner Windle International sponsored her to train as a tailor. Tailoring became a source of income for her and her family and alongside farming, tailoring gave her the independence she needed to forge a new path.

Beatrice also embraced sports to build resilience. Football became her passion, providing joy, camaraderie and personal growth. Her leadership skills shone on the field, earning her the captaincy of her team. She led with enthusiasm and determination, continually encouraging her teammates to do their best.

Beatrice's talent stood out during the girls' tournament organized by the Sports for Peace and Protection Project (SfP), funded by FC Barcelona. Through teamwork and her leadership, the team was victorious, and Beatrice was named the player of the tournament. With SfP's continued support, she attended a football coaching course, gaining valuable skills in player development and coaching methodology.

Returning as a certified coach, Beatrice founded Morning Star, a football team for girls in her village. She leads training sessions where she instils the importances of teamwork, discipline and perseverance. She is now mentoring the younger players. Under her guidance, the team has thrived, gaining regional recognition and inspiring others. Beatrice's journey proves that with passion and perseverance, one person can transform a community.

# ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ACF | Action Against Hunger |
| AMP | Aid Management Platform |
| ART | Antiretroviral Therapy |
| CAO | Chief administrative Officer |
| CBO | Community Based Organization |
| CRRF | Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework |
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CLDSM | Connected Learning, Digital Skills and Microwork |
| COVID | Coronavirus |
| CRI | Coronavirus |
| CSO | Core Relief Items |
| DCA | Dan Church Aid |
| DIMA | Data, Identity Management and Analysis |
| DIT | Directorate of Industrial Training |
| DLG | District Local Government |
| DoR | Department of Refugees |
| DRC | Democratic Republic of Congo |
| ECP | Emergency Contraceptive Pill |
| ECHO | Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations |
| EMIS | Education Information Management Systems |
| EMPP | Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot |
| ESSP | Education and Sports Strategic |
| FAO | Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations |
| FCB | Football Club Barcelona |
| FCA | Finn Church Aid |
| FDSP | Forcibly Displaced and Stateless Person |
| FM | Frequency Modulation |
| FO | Field Office |
| FRRM | Feedback, Referral and Resolution Mechanism |
| FSNA | Food Security Nutrition Assessment |
| FU | Field Unit |
| FUFA | Federation of Uganda Football Associations |
| GDA | Generous Designs Africa |
| GCR | Global Compact on Refugees |
| GER | Gross Enrolment Rates |
| GIS | Geographic Information Systems |
| GoU | Government of Uganda |
| GRF | Global Refugee Forum |
| HC | High Commissioner |
| HDP | Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus |
| HIV | Human Immuno Deficiency Virus |
| HON | Honorable |
| ICT | Information Communication Technology |
| IFI | International Financial Institutions |
| IM | Information Management |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organizations |
| INTPA | International Partnerships |
| IT | Information Technology |
| JLIRP | Jobs and Livelihoods Integrated Response Plan |
| KAP | Household Knowledge Attitude and Practice |
| KCCA | Kampala Capital City Authority |
| Kw | Kilowatt |
| LWF | Lutheran World Federation |
| MDA's | Ministries, Departments and Agencies |
| MHPS | Mental Health and Psychosocial Support |
| MGLSD | Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development |
| MSNA | Multi-Sector Needs Assessment |
| MTI | Medical Teams International |
| MTN | Mobile Telephone Network |
| MoES | Ministry of Education and Sports |
| MoLG | Ministry of Local Government |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MoWE | Ministry of Water and Environment |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NGE | Nakivale Green Environment |
| NER | Net Enrolment Rates |
| NFI | Non-Food Items |
| NIRA | National Identification and Registration Authority |
| NPA | National Planning Authority |
| NRC | Norwegian Refugee Council |
| NOA | National Officer Grade A |
| OPM | Office of the Prime Minister |
| PA | Participatory Assessment |
| PFA | Partnerships Framework Agreement |
| PEP | Post Exposure Prophylaxis |
| PLE | Primary Leaving Examinations |
| PSEA | Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse |
| PRM | United States Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration |
| REC | Refugee Eligibility Committee |
| REF | Refugee Engagement Forum |
| RDO | Regional Desk Officer |
| RLO | Refugee-led organization |
| RMS | Results Monitoring Survey |
| RSD | Refugee Status Determination |
| RYPP | Regional Youth Peacebuilding Programme |
| SACCO | Savings and Credit Cooperative |
| SG | Steering Group |
| SfP | Sports for Peace and Protection Project |
| SGBV | Sexual and Gender-Based Violence |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics |
| TC | Town Council |
| TB | Tuberculosis |
| TICAD | Tokyo International Conference on Africa Development |
| UCC | Uganda Communications Commission |
| UCRRP | Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan |
| UGX | Ugandan Shillings |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNBS | Uganda National Bureau of Standards |
| UNEB | Uganda National Examinations Board |
| UNCRC | The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICORE | University Corridors for Refugees |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| WASH | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene |
| WGSS | Women & Girls Safe Spaces |
| WHO | World Health Organisation |
| WRD | World Refugee Day |
| USD | United States Dollar |
| VHT | Village Health Team |
| VSLA | Village Savings and Loans Associations |
| VAC | Violence Against Children |
| WFP | World Food Programme |

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