REFUGEE ENGAGEMENT FORUM (REF)

24th REF meeting

Silver Springs Hotel Bugolobi

17th-19th March 2026

Meeting Report.

24TH REFUGEE ENGAGEMENT FORUM MEETING

HELD AT SILVER SPRINGS HOTEL BUGOLOBI 17TH - 20TH MARCH,2026

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

Background of the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF)

The REF is a pioneering refugee engagement mechanism that was established in October 2018 to ensure the representation of the refugee community at the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework Steering Group (CRRF S. G), the overarching national refugee response coordination forum in Uganda. Its creation marked an important step for systematic refugee participation in the refugee response. It is the first national-level refugee engagement and representation mechanism: there is currently no similar organizational structure for refugees elsewhere.

The REF empowers refugee leaders (REF members) from across refugee settlements and in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, to convene every quarter to discuss the concerns of their communities and to provide feedback on refugee response plans and initiatives. Based on these discussions, two (2) elected REF members take a seat at the CRRF SG quarterly, where they share the key messages from the REF meetings. From its onset, there have now been twenty-four quarterly REF meetings. The 24th REF meeting was facilitated by U-LEARN: a member of the REF Taskforce.

Day 1: 17th March.2026

Session I: Introduction and ground rules
Session time: 9:00 am- 9:30am
Session objective: To bring the house to order and get to know each other.

Key points represented:
The meeting officially opened with a prayer by a volunteer community leader, self-introduction by names and titles, and thereafter, the participants suggested the ground rules and mentioned their expectations from the meeting. The Ground rules included: having mobile phones on silence, good time management, active participation, one meeting at a time, equal participation, respecting one's opinion, every answer is correct.

Amongst the expectations were creating new friends, learning about Refugee prima facie, feedback from WFP on the appeal process, feedback from Representative of GROW Project, discussions on prioritizations and localizations, plans by partners for the refugees in 2026, updates on health referrals to Kampala, clarification on work of ULEARN, involvement of refugee leaders in the implementation of NDP IV, how is the SRM (Self-reliance Model) being implemented? Transportation refund for REF activities in the settlement to be disbursed in time, How is the REF empowering the refugee leaders to lead well in their communities, consideration for urban refugees in the REF (those beside Kampala), OPM- how is the system of refugee registration & verification working (registration of new arrivals), visibility for the REF members, Facilitations for the REF members to be revised, learn more on the transition process especially under health and education, what are the Refugee led organizations bring onboard as regards support to the REF.

Session II: Opening remarks by the Co-chair (Ms. Gloria from UNHCR)
Session time: 9:30am-10:00 am
Session objective: To officially welcome and open the meeting
Key points presented:

- She welcomed and thanked the refugee leaders for turning up for the forum.
- Emphasized that the refugee engagement forum continues to be a key and unique platform to make sure the refugee leaders present the voices of their communities which help to inform programming and inform policy at the various forum. She then urged them to actively participate in the discussions. Recognized and welcomed the newly elected REF members, especially from the Southwest.
- She inquired about the suitability of mode of transportation used which received a mix of feedback with those from the West Nile, and Northern especially those with breast feeding which are required to come with baby caretakers highlighting that they had challenges with public transportation. She advised them to provide feedback on what works and what is not working for further improvement. She also informed the leaders that using public transportation will be the norm for future engagement in Kampala.
- She thanked the U- LEARN for facilitating the session.
- She concluded by expressing her gratitude to the Government of Uganda for hosting and supporting the refugees in Uganda.

Responses to the expectations (Brian-Snr AAP manager, Gloria-UNHCR)

- The Snr AAP Manager (U-LEARN) informed participants that the U-LEARN project has been running for 6 years now, and it is closing on 31st March.2026. Informed them that even though the U-LEARN project is closing, he was optimistic that the REF would continue to operate with support from the other Taskforce members.
- Noted that the role of REF is voluntary and it's advocating for community members. This was a response raised when a new REF member raised an issue to understand how the new leadership will be empowered to be in position to support other members.
- Consideration of other refugee leaders in other urban hosting districts like in Arua, the response was that support will only be extended to REF members from the designated refugee settlements apart from those settled in Kampala. Those that settle in the neighboring urban centers do it on their own as there are gazetted refugee settlements where these people have been settled.
- Visibility for the REF members- the ULEARN procured visibility jackets that were distributed on the last day of the REF meeting- Facilitations for the REF members participating in the quarterly REF meeting is guided by a document on support for local Gov't and other actors. Which would be revised if the current document is reviewed.
- Consultation on the sustainability of the REF is ongoing, and the report will be shared widely with the REF members.

Session III: Key takeaways from the last REF meeting:

Session objective: To provide status updates on the implementation of the key takeaways and action points from the 23rd REF meeting.

NO	Action Point	Responsibility	Progress /Update
KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE 23rd REF MEETING HELD AT SILVER SPRINGS HOTEL BUGOLOBI, KAMPALA DATE; 25th-27th Nov. 2025			
1	REF members to create more information awareness on the We-link helpline and how it works.	REF members	-Adjumani adopted the use of various channels ie radio, and community meetings to create awareness on the We-Link and WFP toll free line. - In Palabek, Imvepi,Rhino, communities are aware of the We-Link and are using it. Community meetings at zonal level were used to create more awareness on the We-Link. They also used the Churches, social events, and Food distribution points to share info on the We-Link, In Imvepi particularly they disseminated posters provided by UNHCR which contain the We-Link number. Challenge: Language barrier, feedback delays, poor phone networks in Lobule. - They also used other avenues like the saving groups, the skills centers. - In Urban, the refugees are now aware of email, and the social media platforms.
2	Mobilize community members to save with NSSF.	REF members	- Numerous queries on access to NSSF money before the mandatory age. - Across the settlements, the leaders created awareness on NSSF but was hampered by the NSSF staff not appearing in the settlements despite earlier promises to do so. - Inadequate knowledge on how the NSSF works, the long distance to the nearest NSSF access point.

3	Create awareness on the needs for refugees with national IDs to voluntarily hand them over to gov't before the systems (NIRA & PROGRESS) identifies automatically when merged.	REF members	- Work in progress - Need further discussions on this in another forum that involves both the host and refugee communities. - OPM to filter out those with double IDs and share with the refugee leaders to reach out to them. - Across the settlements, awareness is ongoing.
4	At settlement levels, establish how the Community protection desks will work. Suggest the number of Community protection desks per settlement	REF membes & protection partner & UNHCR	-In Kiryandongo the Protection desks are at cluster level. This is working well, - Kyangwali, the complaint desks are at zonal level, Zone A particularly didn't have but a desk (office walk-in) has now been established there, - Imvepi, the desks are at central places but the PWDs with mobility challenges were left out. This has been addressed by establishing reception hours, - Bidibidi, the protection desks are not yet fully functional, and communities are challenged when it comes to reporting protection issues, - Lobule, now uses mobile complaint desk which has improved access, - Rhino, the complaint desks are at zonal level. They also have mobile desks to reach out to those far away from the established desks, Orucinga, there is no particular day when the partners are available to listen to the clients. This has reduced the participation of the clients. UNHCR- Planned to pilot We-Link at the desk at Nakivale. More will be discussed during the presentation by We-Link

5	REF members create awareness in their communities on the need for refugee communities not to participate in the ongoing National electoral processes. The national election is for Ugandan citizens only	REF members	This was done and across the settlements, the refugees kept away from participating in the National elections except in Palorinya where some youths were arrested. The issues were resolved by the OPM and the refugee leadership.
6	Create more awareness in the community on GROW Project. The requirements and processes involved. Identify Women in those unique and creative businesses.	REF members & OPM	-Kyaka II- participated in training, Able SACCO launched receipt of the GROW money. -Kiryandongo, women have started receiving loans -Rhino, training is ongoing, and some women are already getting the loans. More yet to receive - Nakivale, women are trained, told to open A/C in Centenary bank, not yet received the loan. More sensitization to be done on opening the Able SACCO A/C - Bidibidi, two weeks ago women were trained in Yumbe but more training planned. More awareness is ongoing, - Lobule, the GROW project is silent and not aware who to talk to in relation to the GROW money - Oruchinga, trained in Bushenyi, Oruchinga was not given certificate. They have no info about GROW Project. - Adjumani, in 2025 refugee women were trained in OPM's office. In 2026 nothing new yet done. Women have opened bank a/c but are

			tasked to have 2M in their A/Cs to access the money, - Palabek, women were trained but currently they are silent. - Rwamanja- more than 40 women have received the GROW loan for eg one woman received 15M, - Kyangwali, not aware of the GROW project, not tangible outcome. - Imvepi, 70 women were trained. On the Women's Day the Woman MP updated them that their A/C was loaded with 400M GROW money.
	Encourage women in businesses to join the Women Entrepreneurship's Platforms (WEP). Create community awareness and mindset change.	REF members	-Kyaka II, Kiryandongo has platforms that bring both the host & refugee women. They share their experiences in business and learn from each other. Imvepi- no WEP platform yet, Women are willing to join, how can they join this platform. Action points: the GROW team to create more awareness on the GROW in other settlements (Imvepi, Adjumani, Palorinya,)

Session IV: Key Issues from REF Community feedback & Consultation meetings

Session time: 11:30am-1:00pm

Session objective: To highlight the key community issues/concerns and how they were addressed at the settlement level.

Key Community concerns/uses presented by the REF members.

The issues/concerns highlighted are across the three regions in all 13 refugee settlements. These are grouped below.

Health sector

Low level of staffing, shortage of medications at the Health Facilities, no health referrals beyond the regional referral hospitals, no facilitations for patients and caretakers admitted in the regional referral hospitals, limited ambulance services, Few Language interpreters in the health facilities, for example some of the facilities have only one interpreter who needs to work in Out patience, maternity, IPD, the whole day engaged hence reducing the quality of the service, Shortages of beds in the maternity wards hence forcing the mothers to deliver at home which is exposing them to more risks for example in Nakivale refugee settlement amongst others.

Prayer: Advocate for more funds, UNHCR and health team to allow the refugee leaders use the available tricycles to beef up the ambulance services, the health partner to engage the VHTs across the settlements since they are the first line health responders, if possible, make provisions for referrals to the National referral hospital for complex health cases.

"*On the health issue, the community members have chosen to treat people using the community –herbalist than taking them on referral in Kampala that involves costs associated, so they are like people better die in the communities than incurring additional costs if a patient is brought to Mulago, -Kampala*", reported a refugee leader from Kyaka II

Action: REF members to encourage refugee communities to adopt positive health seeking habits

Education Sector

Overcrowding in the existing schools compared to the reduced number of teachers, high school dues coming from the reduced funding to primary and secondary schools. This has forced many children, especially the girl child, to drop out of schools and engage in harmful economic activities like hawking, child labour amongst others for example "*more than 20% of children in Palabek are at home and cannot access education because of their inability to pay the school dues*", stated the RWC 3 C/P.

Challenge with equating academic papers hindering refugees from accessing the job market, Challenges with coding the refugee community schools across the refugee settlements. The challenges are coming due to issues of land ownership, and limited funding to support education in the refugee settlements. This has led to some of the schools closing, hence forcing the refugee children to stay home**,** limited scholarship opportunities especially for those who have completed

S.4. This has made some students complete a level like S4, ending up looming in the communities, and some end up in early marriages.

Prayer: Advocate for more funding for the education sector

"*more than 20% of children in Palabek are at home and cannot access education because of their inability to pay the school dues*", stated the RWC 3 C/P.

Livelihood support, environment & food security sector

- Challenge is access to land across the refugee settlements, especially in the settlements where land is owned by private individuals.
- Need more tree seedlings across the refugee settlements. This will help to provide wood fuel.
- More funding be directed towards livelihood support as this would aid in addressing most of the other needs like education and health, amongst other services since they will be self-reliant.
- **Increasing cases of Child malnutrition across the refugee settlements**. Thank you to the partners who are supporting to fight malnutrition in settlements of Imvepi refugee settlement partner are supporting women with Cash for supplementary food for a period of 6 months. This is helping mothers fight malnutrition. Pray that this good practice be expanded to reach more mothers across the 13 refugee settlements.

"*We thank the WFP for reinstating some of the clients who appealed into the Food Assistance (FA) support. There is still need to source more funding to provide refugees with food assistance. Thank you for listening to the people This will increase participation of the refugee children in schools and reduce negative coping mechanisms"*, said a refugee leader from Juru, in Nakivale.

"*There are increasing cases of suicide in the settlement arising from the prevailing food insecurity. About 70% of single mothers are faced with challenges of taking care of their children. A good number are not on food rations. Their children are majorly hawking small-small items like mandazi. Sometimes the single mothers have contemplated ending their lives",* highlighted a community leader from Kyangwali refugee settlement.

Protection and refugee documentation:

Expired refugee documents across the refugee settlements has limited refugees from accessing essential services with many getting arrested for lacking valid documents. There are many refugees who are unregistered and lack the necessary refugee documents.

Responses from the UNHCR

- The UNHCR is ensuring that each school has two senior teachers to support recruiting community teachers (PTA teachers). The PTA teachers are supported by various community schools. Urged the refugee leaders to encourage their communities to support the community schools so as to be afloat as the UNHCR and partners are soliciting for more funding. There is hope.
- Health - with support from the World Bank, more former health staff who were working in the various health facilities in the refugee hosting districts are being rehired for them to continue serving their communities. This will help to increase the number of health staff and improve access to health services.

Session V: Presentation by the Hingo Director _ Ryan:

Session time: 2:00pm-2:30pm

Session objective: To familiarize the REF members with how HINGO works and how they support the refugee operations.

Key points presented

- Mentioned that 63 INGOs are members of HINGO and their main role is to advocate for issues affecting the refugee response. He encouraged REF members to continue raising issues with whoever needs to hear them.
- An issue around Advocacy on increased funding for refugee livelihoods was brought up by one of the REF members and that HINGO is advocating for more funding in many platforms, the advocacy also done to the members organizations but also the donor organizations

Session VI: Presentation of Issues raised during the self-reflection at the WFP meeting by the RWC III C/P kiryandong, & Rwamwanja

Session time: 2:30pm-4:00pm

Session objective: To provide feedback to the REF members on the issues discussed at the self-reflection meeting at the WFP meeting.

Key points presented:

- Successful refugee leaders' elections in southwest, an issue about harmonized dates for elections across the refugee settlements rather than one doing it at their own time,
- How the DEF & REF interface has supported to bring together the district and refugee leadership to advocate issues affecting the refugees and how the various settlements are receiving new arrivals amidst the constrained funding,
- One of the challenges raised was that as leaders come on board, these are not trained, lack of equipment that supports the daily operation of the RWC office, like stationery as this has constrained their work.

- Another challenge has been around the transportation of the leaders while delivering services, another was around expired documents of the refugees,
- Limited land for agriculture is another challenge faced by the refugees, but also, some leaders do not stick to their word as they have ended up taking the products of the refugees. The issue of aid has never been sustainable and when land is availed, then self-sustenance might be attained
- Limited inclusion like in the government programs like PDM, grow project where some refugee women have failed to be supported.
- Another issue is the poor access roads that hinder agricultural interventions.
- In kyaka, they received heavy rains that left the place very destroyed and the leaders call upon NRC and UNHCR interventions

Recommendations

- Request for community policing and emphasis on mobile courts to ensure access to justice.
- Need for verification of all refugees in Uganda as most of them have expired documents
- Lobbying for more scholarships for secondary and tertiary institutions.
- Partners coming on board to support leasing land for agriculture more so for the refugees.
- Gov't includes refugees in all programs because most of the refugees are being left out most of the government programs.
- On the health issue, the community members have chosen to treat people in the community –herbalist than taking them on referral in Kampala that involves costs associated, so they are like people better die in the communities than incurring additional costs if a patient is brought to Mulago, -Kampala.
- Continuous advocacy of the REF body to remain in play as it's the only platform where the refugees can raise their voices for support.
- Asked the government to present the number of refugees who are in employment to determine how may are coming from each district.
- Asked that refugee leaders to be included in the NDP4 plannings, such that the refugee voices are captured planning.

An action plan developed

- UNHCR promised to invite officials from the government to come and provide feedback on issues raised concerning government
- The Assistant Commissioner Mr. Douglas Asiimwe – emphasized on the document framework where the refugee document will be equated such that this support and get jobs in Uganda.
- The deputy representative from UNHCR in the final remarks promised to share feedback using the various platforms.

Session VI: Presentation of the decisions and Recommendations presented at the 24thCRRF SG, and proposed Agenda for the 25th CRRF SG - Jerry -UNHCR.

Session time: 4:00pm-5:30pm

Session objective: to provide updates on the decisions and recommendations from the 24th CRRF SG

Key points presented

The following decisions and action points were adopted at the **24th CRRF Steering Group Meeting**

SN	Decision/Recommendation	Responsible Agency
1.	Fast-track Cabinet approval of the National Transition Strategy (NTS).	MoFPED, CRRF Secretariat
2.	Meet the District Engagement Forum (DEF) to discuss financing of the NTS, the wage bill, and the recruitment ban.	MoFPED, MoPS
3.	Fast-track the launch and operationalization of the Uganda Self-Reliance Index before end of 2025, to be adopted as the standard measurement tool by all stakeholders promoting self-reliance.	MGLSD
4.	Prioritize and scale up block farming to increase food production through climate smart agriculture.	Implementing Partners, MAAIF
5.	Fast-track dissemination and operationalization of the Private Sector Engagement Strategy in refugee-hosting districts.	MoFPED, CRRF Secretariat, PSFU
6.	Strengthen and streamline coordination structures in the refugee response to maximize impact and ensure optimal use of scarce resources.	CRRF Secretariat, DoR and UNHCR
7.	OPM and MIA to **a.** Upgrade refugee registration into the national system. **b.** Expedite the issuance of refugee work permits. DoR and MIA commissioners	PS OPM, UNHCR, PS MIA, NIRA
8.	Expedite the approval of MoUs for Refugee Response Partners and ensure that partners are trained in MoU reporting procedures.	PS OPM
9.	Expand the SG membership to include additional DPG members.	CRRF and DPG

Agenda for the upcoming SG

- It was discussed and agreed by all the members that in the forthcoming CRRF SG, Ms. Milly and Mr. Innocent represent refugee views. This decision was reached upon based on the absentia of the main leaders who represent refugees in the SG discussions. The SG is scheduled for 26th March 2026, at Sheraton Hotel Kampala 9am to 1PM.

- An Agenda for the upcoming SG meeting was presented to the team to be able to generate discussion points that will be presented by the selected representatives (Milly and Innocent)
- The agenda presented will guide discussions for the group discussions and points of discussion.

Day 2: 18th March 2026

Session I: Group discussion and presentation by REF members

Session time: 9:00-10:00am

Session objective: To draft the key issues/concerns to be presented at the 24th CRRF SG

Key issues to present

Education: infrastructure, coding of schools, advocate for more teachers, advocate for more scholarship opportunities.

Health: Strengthening the referrals systems, recruitment of more health staff, increase the drug supplies, funding for health and nutrition to address the increasing cases of malnutrition.

WASH: improved on the motorization of the water system, visibility of Northern Umbrella in the North and West Nile

Livelihood, environment and food security

- Challenged access to land across the refugee settlements especially in the settlements where land is owned by private individuals.
- Need more tree seedlings across the refugee settlements. This will help to provide wood fuel.

Session II: Q/A sessions with the Dr. From MTI & AHA

Session time: 10:30am-12:00pm

Session objective: To provide updates on the various changes within the health operation.

Key points presented

- **Shortage of Translators / Interpreters.** The number of available translators is **limited**. This creates a **heavy workload burden** for existing translators. A request was made for support in **reducing the burden** or increasing the translator pool.
- The reduction in the number of health centers being operated by MTI due to limited funding does not allow them to operate all the previous health centers in the refugee

settlements. Forcing closure of some of them, for example in Imvepi refugee settlement, Rhino camp, and other refugee settlements

- MTI would not be supporting referrals beyond the regional referral hospitals, but they are looking around for resources and if all goes well, then they will make provisions for referral of complex cases to the National referral hospital.
- There will be no facilitations to the patient and caretakers admitted in the regional referral hospitals. The patients and caretakers will have to look for their own upkeep while in the hospitals.

Session III. Presentation on the We-Link by Isaac- UNHCR

Session Time: 12:00pm-1:00pm

Session objective: to create more awareness of how the We-Link works.

Key issues presented

- Introduction of WhatsApp and self-service phone, to help clients submit independently at their convenience, linked to the central database
- Introduction of the app linked to KOBO, to include additional information like the REF meetings etc.
- There is a reduction in the staff that handle cases at the helpline, creating longer queues hence the introduction of a help page.
- Hours for the operation are still the same other than weekends that have been introduced.
- Feedback submission form is only in English, with prospects to introduce additional languages to ease accessibility
- We link is an interagency feedback channel managed by UNHCR.
- The system has an option to provide anonymous feedback. It also allows feedback submission on behalf of another person; this is to reduce retaliation.

Reaction from the Participants

- Inquiry on clients not knowing how to use the Toll-Free Hot line
- The App allows for an offline version and then reconnects once the internet is available.
- There is a need for recruitment of people with language competency in the local dialects.
- Involvement of the UNHCR We-Link team in the sensitization and awareness sessions in the community.
- There is need of the 'kigegere', Congolese local language to be included.

Response

- More sensitization is required to boost the usage of We-Link.
- UNHCR team has been intentional in the recruitment of the personnel, however, they are going to have more competent assessment
- To shorten the time for response, it's now imperative for one to mention the country of origin at the beginning.

Session IV: Presentation on Prima Facie Refugee Recognition

Session time: 2:10pm-3:33pm

Objective: To enlighten the REF members with the basic understanding of the Prima Facie Refugee Recognition, and the implication of lifting the Prima Facie

Presenter: Carolyn Akello, UNHCR

Key points presented

- Prima Facie refugee recognition is when one who has crossed the border because of conflicts in their country of origin recognized at first sight as refugees.
- This is when refugees' recognition is done on group basis when the situation is already known and it is difficult to interview individuals one-by-one
- The UNHCR role here is to provide the Gov't with information on the country of origin,
- The decision to recognize one as a refugee on Prima Facie basis is made by the Gov't by an announcement made by the Minister,
- The key principles based on the understanding that it is fast and it is humanitarian situation where there is mass sudden influx,
- There is common circumstances and risks which drive the flight of a huge number of people to flee a particular country of origin
- It is anchored on the OAU convention and eventually was adopted in the Refugee Act of Uganda.
- This allows for rapid documentation of people and grants them access to various essential services
- It is used when there is urgency and practicality

Prima Facie Vs. Individual RSD

- Even when Uganda was recognizing individuals from South Sudan, DRC on prima facie basis, some other individuals were undergoing individua RSD which is based on a case-by-case. The individual RSD is personalized to individual risks profile,
- Prima facie is context based while under RSD the government request for detailed information on the reasons why one is fleeing

Limitations of the prima facie

- You may not have the time to know whether everybody arriving needs international protection
- Others might be combatants, and economic migrants
- Limited vulnerability assessment and screening
- Unsuited for mixed flows of people

How is the Prima Facie Applied?

- An assessment is done upon arrival at the border point to understand the reasons for fleeing, and the context in the country of origin,
- The Minister then makes a pronouncement that there will be temporary protection for all fleeing from a particular country

- It is time bound,
- Then there comes mass registration and documentations issues. Those identified as vulnerable are screened out and those deemed not worthy of international protection are also screened out,

Implications of lifting the Prima facie

- Everyone now must undergo the individual RSD,
- Leading to slow access to services,
- Legal limbo where people would wait for a longer time for them to receive necessary documentation
- Most people will continue to be on the asylum status position
- Increased protection related situations, for instance arrest and detention
- REF community to encourage those new arrivals to acquire asylum seeker certificate to avoid be arrested and possibly being returned to Country of origin
- The space for refugee protection might be affected. The open-door policy is not affected

Key challenges-

- Ensuring that there is accurate inclusion of all applying for Refugee status. Persons that were active in combat for instance or in some way part of the reasons why people are fleeing might take longer to be considered
- Accountability and fraud,
- Funding shortfalls
- Individual vulnerabilities. Those that are most vulnerable end up suffering for a longer period
- Coordination complexity arising from the asylum backlog

Action point

- REF members to share information on the different process involved in the RSD,
- Encourage them to call the We.Link in case of need
- Support to identify the most vulnerable individuals and refer them to the protection partners and UNHCR/OPM
- Participate in providing feedback to the community members
- Promote peaceful coexistence in their communities

Q/A session/ Concerns from the REF members

- It takes long to grant refugee status to a refugee. What will happen to the receiving settlements who are receiving over 400 new arrivals per month?
- How will these individuals be supported to first survive economically in Uganda?
- How will the Burundians coming back to Uganda especially in Rwamwanja be supported.
- whether the prima facie can work for refugee children born in Uganda with parents already registered in Uganda as refugees.
- What would happen to those refugees who didn't have opportunity to be verified?
- In Urban with refugees from Somalia, Eretria, which were not in Prima facie. How can they provide proof of identity. Is it possible to register these new arrivals unconditionally?

- To mitigate the likely protection risks that might arise due to the individual RSD, where should refugee, leaders refer those newly entering Uganda for appropriate documentation?
- Likely protection risks because there is a likelihood that children might be registered independently hence affecting family unity. What is the Gov't thinking about family reunion?
- For refugees in Uganda, what will happen to children, will they be registered on their parents' card or will be treated individually as asylum seekers?
- Where should they redirect those who miss verification in 2018 & 2022?
- Why are some other tribes not registered in Rhino Camp (receiving only dinkas and Nweri)

Responses from UNHCR

- Refugees from Rwamwanja who have taken long to be recognized, last year there was REC there but there were a big number of no shows. Urged leaders to mobilize the community members to show up when there is a REC organized in their settlements. The decisions are made quicker when one is attended to.
- Burundian coming from Tanzania, the Gov't of Uganda has not declared a cessation clause that there is no more war in Burundi. The Burundian must present themselves to the Gov't for registration. Urged those coming to report to Gov't to be supported and explain why they are in Ug.
- For refugee parents with unregistered children can beaded onto their parents' documents whenever they have documentation to show that those are their children, and reasons why the children were not registered with their parents. The principle of family unity is taken seriously.
- Those who were already at the reception centers, the understanding that the Gov't gave is that they will still be recognized on prima facie basis. Need to work with the OPM on the ground to sort it out
- Continuous engagement with OPM, on the requirement of proof of identity and nationality
- Every asylum seeker must have asylum seeker certificate. There is still ongoing discussions on how to support this and quicken the process,
- Immediately one arrives at the refugee settlement, one will be allocated plots as they wait for the RSD, and appropriate documentation.
- Family reunification- children born in Uganda are automatically added onto their parents' documents if they do not have a separate asylum claim, and are not 18 years and above
- The responsibility to settle refugees is in the hands of Gov't and if there is free land there, the OPM will decide on how to handle that.
- Another verification is planned for May 2026, urged the refugee leaders to encourage their communities to access the services at the litigation desks for support,
- Those who missed verification should take advantage of the forthcoming verification planned for May 2026,
- For those who have returned to their country of origin, and have come back, they will become asylum seekers automatically. This is to discourage the high back and forth movement to countries of origins. They will have to start the process afresh.
- REF members discourage their community members from the back & forth movements to Countries of Origins.

Session V: Presentation by the RLOs by Batali & Benson from South Sudan Refugee Association (SSURA), and CECI respectively

Session time: 3:40pm- 4:30pm

Session Objective: To build the REF members' understanding of the RLOs and how they operate for them to find ways of collaborating and working together.

Key points presented

- Brief background on SSURA and CECI highlighting on what they do and the kind of support they provide to refugees.
- Through creative solutions they are working to solve community issues.
- They are working to improve the economic situation in Uganda. They are compliance to the rules and regulations in Uganda. Work to promote self-reliance which is at the core of their implementation.
- Develop positive minds and work to improve one's life
- Let localization take shape which will help to improve the livelihood of the people we serve.
- Urged leaders never to stay alone but learn to work with other people as this will to create social bond, and integrate locally with the host communities,

Q/A session, and responses

- How will they plan to remain sustainable?

Response: Good relationships with local governments is a tool that promotes sustainable implementation of their activities for SSURA,

At CECI, they have income-generating activities, they also have their own offices which help them to continue operating. Both SSURA and CECI are sub-granted by the Koboko Local Government

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Day 3: 19th March 2026

Session I: Group presentation by the REF members

Session time: 9:00am-10:00am

Session objective: to zero down on the key issues advocacy at the CRRF SG

Education challenges

- Limited number of teachers across all the settlements,
- Overcrowding in the available classrooms

Recommendations to address the challenges under education

- Recruit more teachers to address the limited number of teachers

- Need to consider classroom expansion
- Provision of scholastic materials
- REF to continue with advocacy and lobbying for funds
- Increase in the number of scholarship opportunities
- Appeal to Gov't to code the schools

Health challenges

- Limited drug supply,
- Inadequate staffing at the health facilities leading to over waiting for patience at the facilities
- Limited space for patients
- Delays in referral

Recommendations

- Increase in drug supplies
- Recruit more health staff
- Upgrade some of the facilities eg H/C III to H/C IV
- Improve on the infrastructures
- Increase on the number of ambulances
- Need to quicken the process of fuel approvals to health partners to support the ambulance service,
- Prioritize supporting referrals to include referrals at the National level

Challenges under WASH

- Low coverage of safe water
- Limited repairs of the broken boreholes of water tap stands
- Poor sanitation coverage eg latrines
- Poor waste management

Recommendation to address WASH challenges,

- More funding for safe water, solid waste management,
- Timely repair of the broken-down boreholes and tap stands,
- Continue sensitizing on hygiene and sanitation
- Expand the water motorization across the settlements to increase access to safe and clean water.

Peaceful coexistence

- Steep competition over limited available resources
- Language barriers
- Cultural differences
- Conflict over limited livelihood opportunities

- Poor communication between the higher authorities and the local leaders
- Delays in response by service providers eg the Police
- Partners prioritizing assistance or categorizing clients. Also, some of the government programs are exclusive in nature for instance PDM. This sometimes leads to conflict

Recommendations to address the challenges under peaceful coexistence

- Community policing, community dialogues, to derive collective local solutions
- Joint livelihood support to include both the host & refugee communities
- More information awareness
- Capacity building of the cultural leaders to promote social cohesion

Coordination,

- Communication gap,
- Untimely feedback/ delayed or no feedback
- Limited involvement of the refugee leaders in meetings

Recommendations

- Allocate budget for coordination
- Capacity building of the leaders

Funding challenges-

- Over reduction of the funding
- Global conflicts
- Earmarked funds

Recommendations

- Continue the REF/DEF to advocate for fundings
- Gov't to strengthen coordination mechanisms
- Initiate dialogues over conflicts through the regional bodies
- Intergovernmental engagements
- Prioritize the localization of the response as this would improve access to essential services
- CTD- quicken the CTD processes

Key issues to present

Education: infrastructure, coding of the schools, advocate for more teachers, advocate for more scholarship opportunities.
Health: Strengthening the referrals systems, recruitment of more health staff, increase the drug supplies, funding for health and nutrition to address the increasing cases of malnutrition.

WASH: improved on the motorization of the water system, visibility ot Northern Umbrella in the North and West Nile

Action point:

- Invite Ministry of Water and Northern Umbrella for the Next REF meeting.

Session II: GROW Project presentation by Fridah A

Time: 10:42am- 12:00pm

Key points presented

- Started by inquiring how many has businesses and have kept appropriate records, how many have registered? How many has received some kind of support like loan, grant to grow their businesses?
- GROW support women enterprises. These are businesses where the female has more shares than the man if the business is jointly owned.
- GROW is a 5-year project,
- The project development objective is to increase access to
- Minimum amount of the GROW loan reduced too 1M from 4M
- **Low**ered down the requirements
- GROW is for businesses that have been running for 1+ years
- **Work** with local financial services providers like UGAFOD,
- Need for compliance to the financial regulations
- Common user production facility (shared space & shared equipment). Provision of childcare facility, sanitary facilities for women.
- **GROW is** operating in 12 refugee settlements including Kampala. 1577 totally trained. Yet to do more in the West Nile & Northern,
- **In the** Southwest the turn up was beyond the target. Thanked the refugee leaders for mobilizing the women to participate in the project.
- **Ur**ged them to follow the policies
- Components: Grow Financing eg the Portfolio expansion grants. A PFI will earn 20% of the amount of the loan given to refugee or a national in the RHD. The grant is given upfront.
- **Window 2:** Beneficiary performance Grant
- **Window 3:** Line of credit- provides funding for Grow Loan
- **Window 4:** Innovation Grant & Learning Lab
- **GROW** Loan Eligibility: individual woman entrepreneur or a business in which a woman or women own more than 51%.

Discussions

- **Business** must be complaint with the E&S requirements
- Centenary, Pearl Bank, DFCU, Equity, Finance Trust, and Stanbic Bank now have the GROW money.
- Until three weeks ago, there are only 5 women refugees from the settlement have just got the loan.
- REF members to encourage the refugee women in businesses to do their part to let the GROW project succeed.
- GROW money is not a start-up but it is for growing existing businesses,
- 45 refugee women entrepreneurs supported to prepare bankable financial records and linked to PFIs
- Business development services

Concerns from the REF members

- Nakivale has three zones, women who were trained have not receive the certificate of participation, need to improved communication with the settlement refugee leaders,
- Initiate projects that can support then men too.
- When will the training for Northern be done?
- Need to give special attention to the urban refugees to promote their self-reliance and resilient. How do the urban refugees benefit from the GROW project?
- How are the Financial Institutions being managed? The banks seem to be promoting their other products compared to GROW
- How flexible is the project based on the context? How many of the refugee women in businesses benefit from this project and meet the requirements?
- Since the project is left with only 1 and half year to go, is there opportunity to extend this, and how will they bridge the gaps?
- Is there a way of facilitating the WEP in the settlement for them to support the project?

Responses

- Ministry of Gender is responsible for setting up the WEP and the WEP is expected to last beyond the GROW,
- TIN number and formalities required by banks, the banks are taking full responsibility for all the risks, and there is already a process of setting up an apex body which will help to see the revolving money beyond the project period,
- Men can benefit when the enterprise is 51% or more owned by women, The other option is through the Skillings.

- There is a mindset program which will help the economically empowered women to peacefully coexist with the men

Session III: Presentation by WFP by Nelson Okao

Session Time: 12:00pm – 1:00pm

Session objective: To provide updates on the Food assistance and SRM

Key points presented

GFA operation update

- 770,894 refugees receiving GFA
- CBT is the modality of assistance across all locations from Feb to May 2026. This is to reduce the costs of delivering services.
- Rations adjusted back to prioritised rations (100%, 60%, 30%) from Feb 2026.
- Appeals and prioritization: 46000 refugees reinstated into Cat1, 529 individuals with critical cases reinstated from Feb 2026, 85706 refugees effective the April/May 2026, WFP in consultation with the UNHCR and OPM will agree on the optimal timing for the next recategorization. This will also review the eligibility criteria.

Self-Reliance Model (SRM)

10,302 new HH onboarded to participate in SR this year, 8711 HHs planned to be graduated by end of 2026

Feedback from the REF

WFP and cooperating partner at help desks, protection desks, distribution points or during community visits. Urged the Refugee leaders to engage with the WFP and share their concerns and the concerns of the community.

Q/A and concerns from the REF members

- On the SRM, there is a lot of confusions where people are given two-month-old chicks, and immediately after giving the chicks, the recipients are exited from the GFA. In Lobule those under the SRM have already been removed from the GFA in Dec 2025
- **Nakivale:** Being a receiving settlement, when the new arrivals are receiving money for the first time, their money is already picked, also sometimes the new arrivals are missing on the system.
- **Adjumani:** How will the WFP involve the refugee leaders. Need to first identify the PSNs, and most vulnerable community members,
- **How can** the machine allow people to receive double? Situations where a HH of say 15 workers, there is only money for 3

- **The** persons delivering the services are sometimes rude to the refugees
- For the categorization, it is good to always work with the leaders when categorizing the clients,
- **Imvepi:** Thanked the WFP for reinstating the vulnerable individuals to the GFA. The planned refugee verification, when will it be? what are the planned livelihood activities for refugees? Will WFP listen to the leaders on the CBT.
- **SRM**, Kyaka II is not reflected and yet they are missing partners who are supporting in livelihood,
- **Urban:** how will the refugees in urban benefit from the SRM?
- **Palabek:** during the CBT, the staff have not considered time for distribution (the time has been reduced to just 1 day and "we have close point A and now we cannot open it",), why should food be taken back to stores when vulnerable people are there in the settlement
- What informs the minimum expenditure basket?

Responses from the WFP

- Right information on the verification will be communicated to the refugees before the process begin,
- Exiting was done in two phases i.e exiting from the GFA, and Graduation will be based on the SR indicator
- Will routinely monitor the CBT and identify and report some of the anomalies, for them to be addressed.
- Because of funds, the SRM could not include the older settlements like Kyaka II but when more funds are available there is possibility to expand to the older settlements. The good news is that the livelihood and food security sector is very strong and would take up other settlement.
- **Urged the** REF members to massively mobilize their communities when the distributions are planned. This should be in consultation with the partners conducting the distributions.
- **Those** who do not collect their rations for 3 times in a row are automatically removed from the manifest. Urged the leaders to sensitize their communities to always strive to be present during the GFA,
- **There is** a lot of criteria taken to discuss who goes to Cat.1, 2 or 3. This is more intentional to involve the refugee leaders in the decisions.

Session V: Presentation by RELON discussing the Refugee Led organization on the refugee operation.

Objective: to update the REF members on how RELON works.

Time: 2:30pm-3:16pm

Key points presented

- RELON strengthen the capacities of refugee led organizations,
- RLOS, are founded, led and governed by refugees themselves,
- The RLOs understand the community needs, respond faster during crisis, promotes dignity and self-reliance, essential actors in displacement response, advocacy, empowering the refugees through the RLOs, innovation and local solutions. Viewing refugees as leaders and partners in the refugee operations in Uganda, "RELON don't take for granted the goodwill of the government of Uganda, this calls for working together with the host community and the government to promote social cohesions"- concluded a presenter.
- Fight and change the narrative that refugee organizations have no capacity, they are here today and gone tomorrow. RELON strives to address these gaps so that the local organizations become more visible.
- Barriers the RLOs are facing regulatory barrier (legal & financial hurdles), Limited recognition (RLOs are seen as implementer not partners), Limited funding (RLOs receive a fraction of funding compared to partners)
- Support refugee leaders to access advocacy platforms even outside the country.

Discussions:

- Does RELON have modules for capacity building and how long does it take to complete. Response: they have modules for eg financial management which would require as long as a month, they support the refugee led organizations to develop grant winning proposals,
- Support to the Refugee Engagement forum (REF) activities. RELON to increase their presence in the settlement,
- How have RELON selected the RLOs to be capacitated?

Session VI: **Focus group discussion with the REF members on the sustainability of the refugee engagement forum (REF).**

Time: 3:16pm-4:00pm

The REF members in two groups discussed the sustainability of the Refugee Engagement Forum (REF) beyond the support from the Taskforce members.

Summary of Key action points

1. REF TF to invite Rep from Ministry of Water to the next quarterly REF meeting at Kampala,
2. UNHCR and OPM to keep the refugee community informed on when the planned refugee verification will happen in time to allow better community mobilization by the REF members
3. **REF** members to work with WFP and partners to mobilize their community members to turn up for GFA support when planned. This is to avoid cases of no shows. Also, REF members to create more awareness in their communities of the importance of Community members showing up for the distribution as planned.
4. REF members sensitize their community members to desist from the back & forth movement to Countries of Origins. Also, REF members to support in creating information awareness on the uplifting of the recognition of refugees on Prima Facie basis. REF members to work with the UHCR, OPM & Protection partners on group to create awareness on the RSD
5. **UNHCR and OPM** to harmonize the dates for refugee leaders' elections across the refugee settlements.
6. REF members to support to identify the most vulnerable individuals and refer them to the protection partners and UNHCR/OPM for appropriate documentation.
7. **REF mem**bers to continue encouraging their community members to adopt positive health seeking habits,
8. **UNHCR and OPM** and partners to fast track the coding of the refugee community schools.
9. UNHCR, OPM and partners to prioritize the localization of the response as this would improve access to essential services to the most vulnerable community members.
10. REF members to encourage their communities to keep the community schools afloat to provide access to basis education to refugee children while the UNHCR & partners continue to lobby for funds to support the schools.
11. UNHCR, OPM and Partners to organize more mobile courts in the settlements as this helps to reduce of the caseloads.

Closing remarks

- Thanked the government of Uganda for the keeping the open-door policy active and for offering refuge to the people we serve,
- Confirmed that there will be two more quarterly REF meetings at Kampala,
- Expressed her gratitude that she has always learned something new when she comes for the REF meeting. This means that there is Value for Money and provides justification for continued support to the REF.
- She also stated that the REF members have been empowered and are ably representing their communities at different forums,
- Recognized participation of the partners representatives.
- Expressed her gratitude to the ULEARN team for supporting the REF for the past 6 years,
- Finally, she closed the meeting at 4:30pm.

Attendance: 39 REF members

Partners represented: U-LEARN, UNHCR, NRC, WFP, GROW project team from Ministry of Gender, RLOs (RELON, CECI & SSURA), GIZ,

Compiled by:

U-Learn team.
23rd March 2026.

Appendix

- Prima facie presentation by the UNHCR https://rescue.box.com/s/u68m9hpzplu3y89lvehz4g68189dxfg0
- GROW Project Presentation: https://rescue.box.com/s/kmgwpci9v1yjxtn8yjxv4ahu7pw3o68a
- Pictures: https://rescue.box.com/s/0nckbrx3s97qbmmd2jf9vi6bleah758i