

POLICY BRIEF

BACKGROUND

Violent conflict across Africa and its disproportionate impact on young women and girls shines a light on their usual marginalization and vulnerabilities, often exacerbated during times of instability. This is clear in their distinct experience of armed violence, mass displacement, sexual violence, reproductive and productive life marked by higher instances of early marriage, unmet hygiene needs, personal insecurity and limited access to education and livelihoods among others. In cases of forced migration, the risk is heightened during transit but does not disappear once in reception centres and camps. Women and girls with disabilities are even more vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation, discrimination and limited access to adequate protection, sexual and reproductive health information and services.

It is important to understand and respond to young women's specific experiences of conflict across Africa's hotspots such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Northeastern Nigeria. UNSCR 2242 invites actors to track the gender focus of aid contributions and urges the redoubling of efforts to integrate women's needs and gender perspectives in all work in order to address deficits. As such, Isis-WICCE sought to capture the experiences of South Sudanese refugee young women and girls living in Uganda while assessing the extent to which their gender-specific needs are addressed. This is intended to inform policy and programming in humanitarian settings and serve as the basis for provision of urgent assistance based on identified need.

EXPERIENCES OF SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEE GIRLS & YOUNG WOMEN IN UGANDA

90%
of recent arrivals are women and (often unaccompanied) children under the age of 18

FINDINGS

With hundreds of thousands of refugees from Somalia, Eritrea, Burundi and Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan nationals form the largest percentage of refugees in Uganda. The December 2013 outbreak of armed violence fuelled a mass influx, with 90% being women and (often unaccompanied) children under the age of 18. With a necessary focus on emergency response, funding shortfalls, strained social service delivery such as local health systems, humanitarian response often falls short in meeting refugee girls' specific needs. In addition, Uganda's National Action Plans (NAP) for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, focused on women, peace and security, have historically excluded refugee women and girls, as well as their participation, sexual violence prevention and protection needs.

In November 2016, Isis-WICCE held conversations with South Sudan refugee women and girls in the West Nile sub-region, to contribute to the national review and design of Uganda's third UNSCR1325 NAP. Their stories revealed experiences of psychological and physical trauma; continued risk of sexual violence such as rape and early marriage; limited access to personal hygiene necessities including sanitary pads; low quality education; exclusion from meetings or decision making; and in the case of female household heads, limited access to land to grow crops in addition to insufficient food rations. Hear directly from Safa, Tabisa, Yom, Arual, Kuei, Regina, Amalia and Sadia (stories attached).

RECOMMENDATIONS

RATIONALE

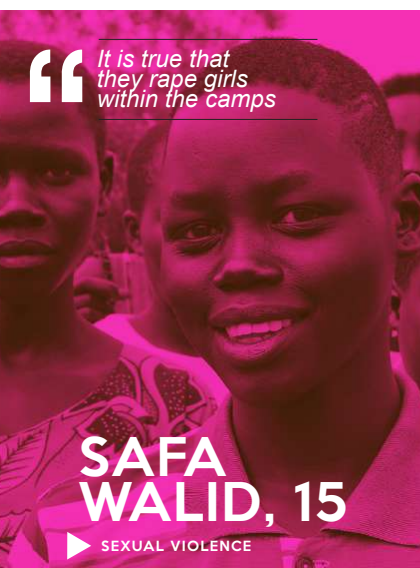
The 1951 Refugee Convention lays down the minimum standards for the treatment of refugees, calling specifically for the protection of unaccompanied children and girls as well as non-discrimination on the basis of sex, age, disability among others. Article 18 (3, 4) of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights calls on states to ensure elimination of every discrimination against women and the protection of the rights of women and children, including the aged and disabled. This is echoed in the Declaration on the Protection and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict; the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women; the Pact on Security, Stability and Development in the Great Lakes Region (article 11, 12); the Goma Declaration. UNSCR 2122 stresses the need for states and UN entities to address UNSCR 1325 implementation deficits, particularly women and girls protection from human rights abuses and violations, and resources to address their needs. It highlights the importance of ensuring humanitarian funding provision of the full range of medical, legal, psychosocial and livelihood services as well as sexual and reproductive health services for women affected by armed conflict. UNSCR 2106 reaffirms the primary responsibility of states to protect refugee women and girls in addition to calling for improved quality of information and analysis on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls at heightened risk of sexual and gender based violence and discrimination.

CALL TO ACTION

While these policy frameworks exist to ensure the rights and protection of refugee young women and girls, significant barriers to their implementation persist. As such, we call for;

- 1 Stronger response to young women and girls specific needs such as hygiene products and educational support.
- 2 Tracking, ensuring and strengthening the participation of young women and girls in decision making within refugee communities.
- 3 Enhance protection of refugee women and girls as well as zero tolerance to sexual exploitation and abuse against women and girls.

SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEE GIRLS' EXPERIENCES OF WAR



I left Sudan in 2013 because of the fighting in Kadugli. When we arrived in South Sudan, it was peaceful until 22nd December 2013. I lost my father and my uncle because of the fighting. My mother started taking care of five of us, including two of my cousins aged 12 and 5 years. We were scared. The day we left we only carried some clothes and left everything at home.

We walked for three days from Juba to Nimule. So many people were killed while we were walking. I would hear shooting out of nowhere but we never saw them and we would find people who had been slaughtered. We had carried some food and water but it got finished on the second day.

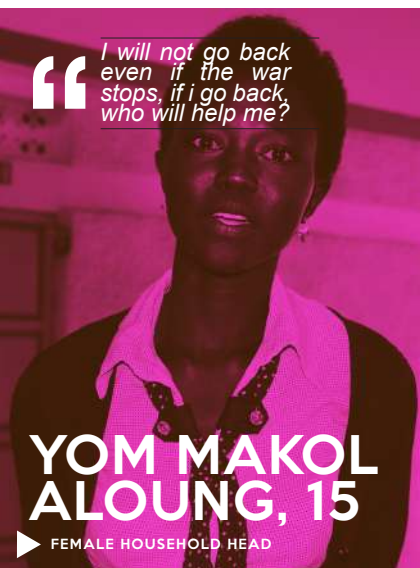
We arrived in Eleguand they brought us to the settlement. I am now in primary 7 and I like the school. It is more secure here but it is also true that they rape girls within the camps. So we do not move around at night because young men admire you.

SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEE GIRLS' EXPERIENCES OF WAR



When the war began, my parents ran in different directions and we were separated. I fled with my sister to Labarab and the UN team took us to Boma, gave us food and other necessities. While we were there, war broke out again and this time we ran to Kapoeta. My sister left me and travelled to Uganda because when we were running away from Bibor, she was shot in the leg. So someone took her to Kampala for treatment but no one was able to heal her and after some time there was no money to help her.

I arrived at the Boroli settlement in February 2016. When my sister joined me she went to the health centre but was advised to go back where she was first treated. Now she stays inside, her leg is paining and she has developed ulcers.



We started running away at night when we heard the guns and people fighting. My father is old, over 70 years so we did not carry anything. Those who did not have children could carry bags. My mother was 15 when she got married and it was a forced marriage. So when she turned 35 she left our home and married another man. We left Bor and struggled to get onto a boat. From Juba we got a car to Nimule and arrived in Elegu on 4th February 2014. They put us under the mango tree, we stayed in some rooms for 16 days and they gave us food and medicine because we all had diarrhoea.

On 20th February we moved to Nyumazi settlement. My sisters and I started school and in 2015 I completed senior 4. My father went back to Bor because he is more used to that climate. Now I am the head of the family. I explained to the camp leaders and I hope they told the UN people. I do not get time to see the opportunities on the board because I am always at home taking care of the children. I want to pursue my A level education in Uganda since here I have food and a house. If I cannot continue with school, I will find something to do to help my family. I will not go back even if the war stops because if I go back who will help me?



I left my home in Bor, Jonglei state at 3:00 am. We were sleeping and there was fighting right near our home so we ran to the bush. My mother, my three brothers, two sisters and I stayed in the bush for three days. My brother then sent us a boat from Juba. When it arrived people were fighting to enter the boat because if you stayed behind they would shoot you.

We arrived in Bahr el ghazal at 1:00am and waited for one day before my father picked us to go to Juba. From Juba we moved to Nimule and then ended up at Elegu. We spent three days there and it was very cold, had many mosquitoes and we slept on the floor. When we moved to Nyumazi settlement we got things like blankets and tarpaulin and I started going to primary school.

In 2015 my father went back to take food to soldiers, he was abducted and no one knows whether or not he was killed. Life is okay in the settlement but not completely safe for me because I lack things like sanitary pads. I have now finished my primary level exams and I believe I am going to pass.

SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEE GIRLS' EXPERIENCES OF WAR

“ I want to become a doctor... I hope to get a scholarship.

KUEI DENG ANYANG, 13

▶ EDUCATION

We left Malakal in April 2014 and walked for weeks before we reached the airport in Paloich. It was my mother, stepmother, father, four stepbrothers and I. You needed money to use the planes and we had no money so we waited for the free one. There were many people so you had to fight to enter the free UN planes. They let us in but our parents stayed behind. When we arrived in Juba, we called our elder brother and he gave us the phone number of a relative who let us stay in his house.

We waited for our parents for one month without going to school because we did not have the money for school fees. My father died soon after they arrived in Juba due to illness. So I started the trip to Uganda with my mother and two relatives. In the settlement they offered us food and shelter but after some time, my mother moved back to Juba. It is not so easy now that food rations are not enough; so if my mother does not send money it is hard to beg relatives since everyone is getting less. I want to become a doctor. I completed primary seven but my mother's business does not give her enough to pay for food and school fees. So I hope I can get a scholarship.

“ It's hard being the head of the home.

ARUAL MAGOR DENG, 17

▶ FEMALE HOUSEHOLD HEAD

I left Bor in January 2014 because of the war. We escaped by boat and it was really bad. I remember when the boat was in the water and they were shooting at us. I was with my three sisters and brothers because my mother remarried and moved to the village. My father was stabbed with a spear during a tribal fight and they took him to Kenya. So I am the head of our family.

We spent one day in Juba then we travelled to Elegu and arrived empty handed. Life in the camp is good because they serve us food. Sometimes when the food gets finished early we get help from relatives and other times we sleep on empty stomachs. It is hard being the head of a home.

“ Sometimes in the night I remember the sound of the gunshots and I get scared.

AMALIA STEPHEN, 17

▶ PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA

We ran away from the fighting in Malakal in 2013. It took us three days to reach Poloch and from there it took us two hours to reach Juba. From Juba we used a vehicle to reach Uganda. We spent nine days in Elegu and were taken to Nyumazi. I am here with my mother, father, four sisters and three brothers.

When we were running away we would meet people and they stole our food, our water and even clothes. So for the two days before we reached Poloch we had no food or water.

I prefer it here because there is no shooting, you do not see guns or anything related to guns. I miss home but I hate so much that they are fighting and killing people. I lost some friends who were shot when they were running away. Sometimes at night I remember the sound of gunshots and I get scared.



With the Support of
UN Women &
Women Have Wings Fund
of Tides Foundation.

Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural
Exchange (Isis-WICCE)
program@isis.or.ug / www.isis.or.ug
Facebook.com/IsisWICCE
Twitter.com/IsisWICCE