



GLOBAL FUND FOR
WOMEN

YOUNG WOMEN REFUGEE INCLUSION IN PEACEBUILDING IN UGANDA

POLICY BRIEF

Executive Summary

This policy brief is based on the findings of the assessment on young refugee women's participation in peacebuilding processes (The Peace Centre, 2021)¹. The analysis reveals low participation of young refugee women in peacebuilding due to low levels of education and thus affecting their positioning in leadership. This policy brief argues that to ensure young refugee women's participation in decision-making, there is a need for government and all humanitarian actors to promote refugee women's leadership and participation in decision-making in humanitarian and recovery efforts through the strategic engagement of women leaders and women's organisations.

- 1** *Women's International Peace Centre "Urban refugee Women's Leadership in Peacebuilding Baseline Report", 2022*
- 2** <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/uganda-country-refugee-response-plan-emergency-appeal-april-june-2022#:~:text=Uganda%20has%20received%20over%2035%2C000,Africa's%20largest%20refugee%20hosting%20country.>
- 3** <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/local-integration-urban-refugees-uganda-nrcs-community-based-and-integrated#:~:text=Over%2080%2C000%20refugees%20and%20asylum,to%20harassment%20and%20forced%20eviction.&text=NRC%20has%20been%20operational%20in%20Uganda%20since%201997.>
- 4** *Art 44 Ugandan Refugees Act 21 of 2006.*

Background

Uganda has received over 35,000 new arrivals fleeing war and persecution in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since January 2022. This is in addition to the 1.5 million refugees already hosted in the country, making Uganda Africa's largest refugee-hosting country². The majority of the refugees in the country are from South Sudan with others from Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Sudan. Most live in refugee settlements spread across different districts (UNHCR 2020). Over 80,000 (6%) refugees and asylum seekers live in Kampala, Uganda. They are scattered among low-income informal settlements, with insufficient access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and are vulnerable to harassment and forced eviction³.

In Uganda, urban refugees require special protection since the Refugees Act 2006 provides that refugees who live outside of the provided camps do not qualify for protection and humanitarian assistance from the government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)⁴. This practice obliquely coerces refugees to dwell in rural resettlements. Consequently,

most urban refugees who do not want to reside in the settlements end up residing in 'slums' or informal settlements on the fringes of urban areas. This circumstance impedes the protection and realisation of their rights, including access to services and opportunities that exist in urban areas. In 2020/2021, the challenges were further exacerbated with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic not only in terms of health implications, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) but also in terms of impact on livelihoods, safety and security.

In March 2017, Uganda launched its first Country Refugee Response Plan (CRRP). The CRRP provides a framework covering the period 2022-2025 and detailed planning for 2022-2023. It is a joint plan between the Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR and UN Agencies, and international and national partners. The CRRP aims to respond to challenges in a holistic, comprehensive, and integrated manner to achieve its strategic objectives: maintain asylum space, provide life-saving assistance, improve access to public services, strengthen co-existence and self-reliance, and pursue durable solutions.

In March 2021, Uganda's Third National Action Plan (NAP III) on Women, Peace and Security (2021-2025) was launched and aims to address current and emerging Women Peace and

Security (WPS) related issues such as those associated with the influx of refugees, socio-economic and demographic concerns, conflicts over natural resources, climate change and environmental stressors and disasters, transnational threats, organised criminal activities, cultural disputes, transitional justice, violent extremism, political and election-related conflicts, border disputes and women's participation in peacebuilding processes. Uganda NAP III responds to the objectives of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) and was developed to align with the Ugandan context and provide for improved meaningful participation of women in refugee settlements and refugee-hosting communities in decision-making for peaceful co-existence.

Methodology & Findings

The findings are based on the baseline assessment conducted in November 2021 in Makindye and Rubaga division in Kampala district, Uganda; a mixed methodology was employed (quantitative and qualitative, 4 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and 6 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and reflective meetings with the urban young women refugees documented in May 2022.

A. Young refugee Women's participation in peace building

Participation of young urban refugee women in decision-making and peacebuilding is paramount in fostering long-lasting peace and security in the community. However, due to the patriarchal nature of most societies in Uganda and Africa, women tend to be marginalised in making peace and security decisions. The findings from the baseline assessment indicated that less than half (40%) of the participants had participated in the decision-making process relating to peace building and resolution of conflict in the urban communities. The meaningful inclusion of diverse women and their voices in peacebuilding and decision-making aligns with global evidence showing that when

diverse women and their voices are meaningfully included, a peace process is more likely to address the root causes of conflict, have stronger legitimacy, broader ownership and significantly increased likelihood of successful peace outcomes⁵.

Factors influencing participation of young refugee women in decision making and peacebuilding

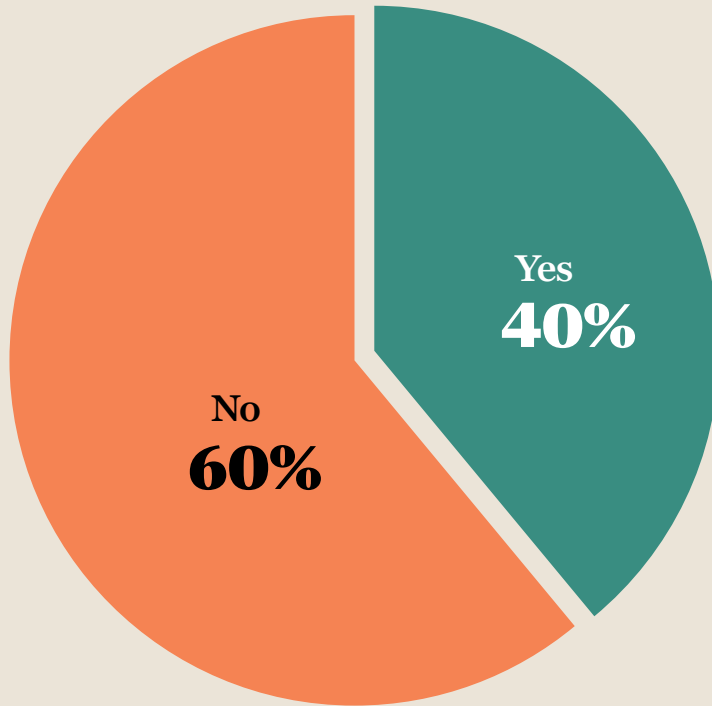
1. Cultural Beliefs & Practices

The cultural norms and beliefs position women far away from the decision-making table hence less contribution for women in conflict resolution and peace building. Conflict has traditionally been managed by elders (dominated by men) who continue to play a role in promoting social harmony. Participants in the baseline assessment, reported that women can play an important role in peacebuilding however, their participation is sometimes limited.

⁵ Erik Melander, "Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict," *International Studies Quarterly* 49, No.4 (2005): 695-714.

Participation of women in decision making

Have you participated in the decision making process in relation to peace building and resolution of conflicts?



Cultural barriers are still dominant. Refugee women are still influenced by the culture from their countries of origin. When a woman discusses any developmental issue, they say the woman has taken over the home. They start to ask who married who and the brothers will intervene that their brother's life is at stake.

— **Key Informant refugee**
Democratic Republic of Congo

2. Religious beliefs and practices

In addition to culture, the participation of urban young refugee women in peacebuilding was noted to be low because of religious beliefs and practices which encourage women to be submissive to their husbands. Participants alluded to some of the practices in the Islamic faith that deter women from mixing with men in the mosques and other functions thus affecting women's self-esteem and their effective participation in decision making.

3. Low levels of Education

It was noted that the education of young women was interrupted as they were forced to flee before they could complete their education and thus leaving them with the option of early marriage. Twenty percent (20%) of the young refugee women interviewed had not gone beyond the primary level of education and thus could not effectively comprehend and communicate as they seek for services; including health and legal services.

4. High levels of poverty

Related to the above, the high poverty levels affect young women negatively in the decision-making process. It was reported that young girls for example are married off to older and wealthy men after their parents negotiate

for property in exchange for the daughter's marriage with disregard to her consent. The situation is worse that, other young women refugees opt to marry off themselves to men (especially nationals) who are more economically placed to support them meet their personal needs. Culturally, once married the woman's dreams and opinions are shuttered because she entirely depends on the husband's decisions.

5. Negative impact of conflict trauma

There is no doubt that war affects women and men differently. Whenever there is conflict, women and children have been known to suffer disproportionately during and after war. Women and children are often the most vulnerable and prone to being hit the hardest forcing them to seek refuge in the neighbouring countries. Women who survive these atrocities often have to live with the vivid and terrifying images of rape, war, and death for the rest of their lives.

The assessment revealed that 55.3% of women refugees in urban settings have also suffered from sexually transmitted infections, stigmatisation, and sometimes unwanted pregnancies.

All the above factors have negatively affected the quality and effective participation of refugee women in decision making process related to peace building and resolution of conflicts due to low self-esteem and confidence to demand for their rights to be respected.

B. Participation of young refugee women in leadership

Participation of refugee women in leadership is important in enhancing their involvement in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The baseline assessment established that less than half (29.3%) of the participants held at least one leadership position in their community. Most of those in leadership were in village savings and loans associations (VSLAs), community volunteers, advisors, mentors, and youth and women chairpersons. More than half (68.3%) reported that they did not occupy any leadership position directly related to the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts although some of them had other positions. However, a number of organisations including Refugee Led Organisations (RLOs) have come out to support the empowerment of young urban refugee women both socially and economically through skills development but their ability to effectively participate in peacebuilding is still a challenge.

... more than half (59.7%) of the young urban refugee women reported that they have never been trained in peace building and conflict resolution while only 18.1% reported that they had received some basic training.

In terms of the leadership capacity and training more than half (59.7%) of the young urban refugee women reported that they have never been trained in peace building and conflict resolution while only 18.1% reported that they had received some basic training. Over 90% reported that they needed additional training to strengthen their capacity in leadership and peacebuilding. Only 3% reported that they did not need any training in leadership and peacebuilding.

C. Strengthen young refugee women's participation in peace processes and negotiations

Refugee women continue to be excluded from peace processes in their home countries with no linkages to women back home. They also lack access to information to keep up with what is happening, which continues to affect their participation. During

a conversation on the role of young women refugees in decision-making and peace processes, Noella Kabale, a Peace Mediator in the Congolese refugee community noted that despite efforts to engage in peace processes back home in Democratic Republic of Congo, barriers persist including: social and cultural norms about women's participation and language barrier, when agreements are written in English. Elizabeth Yuol, a young peace mediator and refugee from South Sudan was disheartened by the fact that even when they get an opportunity to participate in peace processes, they do not receive feedback on the outcomes and it is discouraging that their efforts are not recognised.

To strengthen the participation of young women in peace processes and negotiations, more than half (57.4%) proposed training in peacebuilding and conflict resolution to enhance their skills and establishing women refugee peace groups. Other proposals included encouraging and supporting women to form groups and networks for collective advocacy (28%), supporting and financing young urban refugee women with practical

skills and start-up capital for Income Generating Activities (IGAs); Over 70% percent of the respondents revealed that it is difficult for women to restore peace when they are economically incapacitated which makes them vulnerable to all forms of violence hence less opportunities to participate in decision making.

D. Gender Based Violence on young urban refugee women

Gender-based violence continues to be a major national scourge including among refugees. It takes many diverse forms, both offline and online, including domestic violence, sexual violence, early and forced marriages, and trafficking in persons. Data on both police-reported violent crimes and national demographic health surveys report that women and girls represent the majority of the victims⁶. It's however, worth noting that reporting of GBV cases remains low, investigations poor, and legal cases experience dismissal more often than conviction, resulting in impunity for many GBV-related crimes. Survivor support services remain extremely limited and uncoordinated. Many communities and duty-bearers continue to believe that GBV is acceptable, silencing survivors and pressuring them not to report the abuse or receive help.

⁶ https://www.ubos.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/02_2022VAWG_qualitative_report.pdf

Fifty four percent (54%) of the participants in the assessment reported having witnessed gender-based violence cases and of this sexual violence - (rape, defilement, early marriage) is leading at 44% followed by physical violence at 22% and Emotional violence at 7%. Of those who witnessed gender-based violence 62% of the cases were reported to the authorities including implementing organisations and police, of this only 11 % were successfully handled and the remaining 89% were never resolved.

Conclusion

While there is no doubt that young refugee women are engaged in a variety of activities in building and sustaining peace, their roles remain under-recognised and underfunded. This brief indicates the low participation of young women refugees in peacebuilding, both in terms of numbers and the quality of representation, as most young women refugees are not in any leadership positions and some are of low levels of education. Women's effective engagement and participation in peacebuilding processes is essential for gender mainstreaming and towards the implementation of the National Action Plan on UNSCR1325. The Women Peace and Security Humanitarian Action Compact also calls for the meaningful participation of women and youth affected by conflict and crisis, including women refugees/internally displaced women, and women in host communities, in developing and implementing Regional Action Plans, National Action Plans, and Local Action Plans on WPS, as well as in developing policies and programs for the long-term socio-economic recovery from COVID-19. It is crucial to acknowledge and include the diversity of voices, and address the diverse needs of young refugee women.

Recommendations

Civil Society organisations

- Need to integrate peacebuilding within the skills empowerment programs because women refugees face all the forms of violence due to overdependence and clinging on the mercy of those that can provide for them and their children basic needs i.e., food, shelter, clothing, health and education. Once urban women refugees are empowered economically then to some extent peace will be realised in their communities.
- Need to engage and partner with refugee-led organisations in order to respond more effectively to the specific needs of urban refugee women.
- Establish safe spaces to break the conceptual “silent space” on Gender Based Violence and child protection. For example, training service providers to address multiple forms of violence and expanding existing programs to address common risks factors.

Government

- Strengthen and enhance multisectoral services in supporting refugee women, including district and local-level structures (divisions and Local Councils).
- Consider the inclusion of young refugees in dialogues around peace processes in South Sudan and DRC through the ICGLR and EAC mechanism.
- Enhance the case management capacity of Gender Based Violence protection actors through systematic training and mentorship;
- Improve facilities and strengthen coordination and referral mechanisms, including local leaders, refugee welfare committees and local women groups.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms for preventing Sexual and Gender Based Violence especially gender-sensitive and pro-active policing and justice mechanisms to protect women and girls from violence. This will contribute to increasing women’s access to justice and health services.

UNHCR

- UNHCR together with the Office of the Prime Minister should reconsider the policy that only focuses on refugees residing in government gazette settlements as eligible for relief and humanitarian assistance. This excludes the urban refugee caseload from the mainstream refugee assistance and protection and yet they are highly confronted with immense difficulties accessing basic services such as health care, shelter, and food.
- Ensure that refugees participate in the design and delivery of programmes so as to make them more effective, efficient, and respectful of refugees' dignity and capacities.
- Need to engage in partnership with refugees in order to achieve strengthened refugee initiatives; through building on the capacities of the refugees and their communities for self-reliance programmes as opposed to the tendency individual focus of service delivery to refugees.



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