



# LOCAL INTEGRATION OF URBAN REFUGEES IN UGANDA

NRC's community-based and integrated programming approach

## BACKGROUND

Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting country in East Africa, with over 1.4 million refugees from more than ten nationalities including South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Burundi. Recently the country have seen an increase in Somali, Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Rwandese refugees, amongst others.

Over 80,000 refugees and asylum seekers live in Kampala. They are scattered among low-income informal settlements, with insufficient access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and vulnerable to harassment and forced eviction.

## NRC IN UGANDA

NRC has been operational in Uganda since 1997. With the outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in 2013 and escalation of violence in 2016, the country experiences a massive influx of refugees. The majority live in refugee hosting districts integrated within the host population. Considering the multiple nationalities of refugees, NRC uses a nationality-sensitive approach in its programming.

NRC's urban response started mainly in 2019 with support from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). NRC is applying integrated programming using a community-based approach and community-based protection analysis to support vulnerable refugees and displacement affected community members.

## CONTEXT

Protracted displacement  
Out of camp  
Urban

## CORE COMPETENCIES

Livelihoods and Food Security (LFS), Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA), Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Shelter

## GLOBAL STRATEGY

Integrated Programming to build self-reliance in displacement affected communities as the basis for Durable Solutions

## APPROACH

Community-based interventions that combine market-based approaches and ICLA and related housing, land and property (HLP) rights, highlighting protection considerations

NRC's urban response focuses on lifesaving, long-term support anchored on livelihoods and food security, encompassing cash and voucher assistance as part of a market-based approach, and complemented with information, counselling and legal assistance (ICLA) and related housing, land and property (HLP) rights, highlighting protection considerations, WASH, and education.

## LESSONS FROM UGANDA

### Collaborating with Government in Policy and Practice

The Government of Uganda's (GoU) favourable policy and regulatory environment on refugee hosting is anchored in a number of national strategic initiatives which are further described below. These initiatives have brought refugees and citizens closer together and are aligned with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), where Uganda was the first country to officially roll-out the framework. NRC has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Uganda Office of Prime Minister (OPM), laying out their implementation modalities at the national level.

In 2018, the Ministry of Education introduced its Education Response Plan (2018-2021) to respond to the additional strains placed on the educational system in refugee-hosting districts. Following this lead, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Water and Environment began developing integrated response plans, released in the second half of 2018 and early 2019. NRC's work with the Ministry of Education and the Department of Elderly and Disability through its urban protection programme provides cash grants and vouchers to more than 500 households to support children at school, including children with special needs.

Kampala is a member of international initiatives such as the Mayors Migration Council and the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, of which NRC is also a member. Kampala formed the Kampala Coordination Forum for Displacement, Migration and Urban Refugees, a city-level coordination platform modelled after a similar forum created by the Municipality of Athens. The platform is a unique coalition of urban actors with direct access to state representatives and a privilege space to contribute to the refugee policy agenda. Though led by the city this initiative brings together different stakeholders.

To facilitate urban programming, NRC has agreements with local authorities and relevant MDAs. The thematic coordination forum provides NRC direct access to the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), where they raise concerns affecting displaced people and provide joint solutions ranging from protection to access to public services. NRC's agreement with KCCA has facilitated information sharing and capacity building activities for technical departments to improve monitoring and provide an oversight role in urban programming. Moreover, joint training of teachers has led to on-the-job training where KCCA staff are now at the forefront in implementing programmes with NRC playing a facilitator role.

### Diversity in Urban Partnerships

To support implementation of urban programmes, NRC has partnered with a wide range of organisations. These include the KCCA, as mentioned above, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and its donors Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA), the Makerere University, Uganda's National Examination Board (UNEBC), and the private sector, among others.

NRC is a UNHCR implementing partner for Urban Protection and Assistance since 2020. Being the lead protection partner has enabled NRC to play a structural and technical leadership role in urban programming, as NRC's advocacy efforts amongst key stakeholders has led to multi-funding partnerships that provide sustainable solutions for urban refugees and displacement affected communities.

A community-based assessment that was conducted jointly with KCCA informed the creation of two community-based protection centres that serve as a 'one-stop-shop' for refugee's needs. The two centres are based in Rubaga and Makindye located within host communities. Four additional smaller ICLA centres were also established in Kampala in partnership with a private sector company called Lifeshelter that is providing sustainable and dignified low-cost shelter solutions to refugees and displacement affected persons.

It's the spirit of openness, confidentiality and specialist care that has enabled victims and vulnerable displacement affected individuals to seek assistance from the centres. The programme collaboration with the government and other actors further enabled the centers to be a point for two-way information sharing, where local actors and NGOs advocate for the displaced people's needs to government officials, whilst vulnerable community members receive assistance.

Urban refugees face challenges in finding affordable and safe housing. They are forced to live in low-income, congested areas, relying on little and fluctuating income to pay rent, leaving limited funds for other basic needs such as clean water. NRC entered into an MoU with the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) to help deliver token meters and maintain water sources for refugee and displaced communities.

Asylum seekers face an additional challenge with the temporary closure of the OPM during the Covid-19 lockdown as they no longer process refugee status determination, and they do not issue and renew or replace expired or missing identification documents. This increases asylum seekers' risk of arbitrary arrest, exploitation, denial of service and forced eviction. NRC is closely working with the Ministry of Internal Affairs to support case management and provide legal aid. It also has a separate partnership with a legal firm to assist refugees with court cases providing all-around legal assistance.

Further, NRC's agreement with Makerere University and Uganda's National Examination Board (UNEBC) has enabled legal documentation to be translated into English, allowing UNEBC to equate the certificates to the Ugandan education system. This way, refugees can use their certificates to enrol in a local university of their choice. NRC's multiple partnerships break barriers and ensure a sustainable collective outcomes.

## Community Based Approach Proves Effective in Breaking Barriers to Access

NRC's urban interventions are unique because programming priorities and targeting are informed by community-based protection analysis. Threats, risks, fears, and barriers to access are identified and ranked according to the community's priorities. The root causes and possible consequences are discussed, resulting to evidence-based decision making and programming response.

"I am being demanded three months' rent since April 2020. I am scared I will be evicted very soon as I don't have money to pay for the arrears, and I still need to pay for this new month."

A Congolese refugee from Katwe

NRC's protection programme uses existing community-based structures. In Kampala, there are nine refugee communities that elect their refugee leaders every year with the help of the OPM. NRC works closely with these elected leaders to access communities, facilitate sensitisation activities and improve targeting of the most vulnerable. Continuous capacity building has placed in refugee leaders, community workers, caseworkers, and team leaders at the forefront of programming implementation.

Vulnerable households commonly face forced evictions and threats of eviction have intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020, the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development issued a moratorium on evictions, including existing eviction orders.

An interim measure to protect the rights and obligations of both landlords and tenants, the moratorium failed in practice because landlords continue to evict tenants. NRC identified vulnerable members through its community structures and supported them with rent and legal assistance through its partnership with a legal firm that reviewed tenants' agreements and provided service.

NRC has also ensured physical access by locating ICLA centres within the refugee communities. ICLA field offices are located strategically at the centre of refugee settlements, enabling provision of services in a timely manner. NRC's "stay and deliver strategy" during the Covid-19 pandemic has given the access centres credibility and built.

The use of data and technology through a digital hub located at the access centers has proven vital in providing online courses, training and two-way communication with community members. An online platform is used to send bulk short messages (SMS) directly to targeted communities. Information sent includes notification on cash and other resources distribution and Covid-19 guidelines. All messages are translated into various languages by NRC's trained translators who are refugees from the community. NRC also emails refugee leaders vital information to disseminate to their respective communities. All this has been vital in continuing to provide support to refugees and displacement affected communities during Covid-19 restrictions.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

NRC's urban response in Uganda highlighted a number of lessons when it comes to supporting local integration of urban refugees:

- NRC's success is grounded on its community-based urban programming approach, that combines market-based approaches and ICLA and related housing, land and property (HLP) rights, highlighting protection considerations for refugees and displacement affected communities.
- Sustaining Uganda's non-camp settlement model requires concrete collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders to advocate for solutions that build self-reliance in displacement affected communities as the basis for Durable Solutions. Partnerships with a diverse number of actors in Uganda, notably local government, has been a crucial component of NRC's urban programming.
- NRC was able to provide continuous support to refugees and displacement affected communities during the Covid-19 pandemic by leveraging technology and establishing digital hubs in its community-based protection centres
- Sustaining Uganda's open-door asylum policy presents a challenge, as there are insufficient funds and limited local government capacity to support the increasing number of refugees (only 20% of the required resources have been funded). The current policy focuses on providing refugees with assistance primarily in refugee settlements. Advocacy should be focused on furthering the reach and targeting of urban policies to support refugees who are living outside refugee settlements.

## RESOURCES

NRC Uganda Country Strategy (to be added)

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