



Advocacy Issue Paper

Building An Inclusive Kampala City: Collaborative
Strategies For GBV Prevention And Child Safety Among
Urban Refugees.

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ACCROYNMS

AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CP/S - Child Protection/Services

CRRF - Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework

CTD - Convention Travel Documents

DCIC - Directorate of Citizenship and Immigration Control

DRC - Democratic Republic of Congo

FGM - Female Genital Mutilation

GBV - Gender-Based Violence

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

JCU - Justice Centres Uganda

KCCA - Kampala Capital City Authority

MoGLSD - Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development

NACF - National Action Coordination Framework

NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council

OPM - Office of the Prime Minister

PWDs - Persons With Disabilities

REPSSI - Regional Psychosocial Support Initiatives

UGANET - Uganda Network On Law, Ethics and HIV/AIDS

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees





UGANET Background:

Uganda Network on Law Ethics and HIV/AIDS (UGANET) is a national NGO established in 1995 to advocate for policies, legal frameworks, human rights, and ethical responses to health, gender, and HIV/AIDS in Uganda. UGANET promotes social justice by leveraging law, policies, and human rights as critical enablers for effective health, gender equality, and HIV interventions.

The organization aims to create social impact in communities, particularly targeting vulnerable and marginalized groups, including refugees. Through its efforts, UGANET strives to strengthen policies and frameworks that enhance health and human rights in Uganda. The organization's work is pivotal in addressing the challenges faced by marginalized populations.

Preamble

This Advocacy issue paper Paper highlights the successful implementation of Prospect 2.0, a ground breaking initiative aimed at enhancing the capacity of national and local government systems to protect refugees and host communities from all forms of violence and exploitation, in accordance with Ugandan law.


This pilot project, executed through a collaborative consortium including the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), UNHCR, NRC, UGANET, REPSII, and JCU, reflects a shared commitment to addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection (CP) concerns among urban refugees and host communities in Kampala.

Key issues highlighted include the leadership and strategic direction provided by KCCA, the combined resources and expertise of the consortium, and the power of partnerships in driving impactful solutions for GBV and CP concerns. The project has demonstrated that collaboration and shared vision can achieve transformative change. This publication serves as both a showcase of the project's achievements and a call to action for stakeholders to advance access to justice for GBV survivors and children at risk of abuse.

Urgent, coordinated action is needed from policymakers, service providers, local authorities, and community organizations to address GBV and child protection issues among urban refugee populations.

This Advocacy Paper calls for comprehensive, long-term strategies that prioritize safety, resilience, and empowerment, urging stakeholders to enhance support networks, strengthen protective legal frameworks, and allocate necessary resources. By implementing these recommendations, we can foster safer, more inclusive environments, enabling refugees, especially women and children, to rebuild their lives free from violence and exploitation.





Uganda has developed a comprehensive legal and policy framework to prevent and address gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection issues, safeguarding the rights of all individuals, including refugees.

- The 1995 Constitution prohibits discrimination and guarantees equal rights for all citizens, specifically recognizing women's rights and mandating affirmative action to address gender disparities.
- The Refugee Act (2006) and Refugee Regulations (2010) ensure the protection and dignity of refugees, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, children, and persons with disabilities (PWDs).
- The Domestic Violence Act (2010) aims to prevent and respond to domestic violence, defining it broadly and extending protections universally.
- The Children Act (2016), as amended, serves as the cornerstone of child protection, complemented by the National Child Protection Policy (2019).


Additionally, Uganda is a signatory to several international conventions, including the 1951 Refugee Convention, CEDAW, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which strengthen its commitment to protecting refugees and ensuring child safety.


These legal frameworks and international commitments provide a robust structure for addressing GBV and child protection, ensuring comprehensive protection and legal remedies for all individuals within Uganda.

Urban Refugees in Kampala Central Division: Vulnerabilities and Challenges

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a pervasive and pressing issue in Kampala Central Division, a vibrant hub of economic, social, and cultural activity within Uganda's capital. With an estimated 100,000 urban refugees from countries like South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Somalia (UNHCR, 2024), the risks of exploitation, abuse, and violence are heightened due to limited access to essential services, social support, and secure housing.

Women and children, representing the most vulnerable segments, are particularly affected. The shift of refugees to urban areas, driven by economic opportunities and better access to services, has increased their vulnerabilities, especially concerning GBV and child protection. Gender-Based Violence in Kampala Central Division manifests in various forms, significantly affecting women and girls.



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- Domestic violence, driven by economic pressures and traditional gender roles, remains prevalent and underreported.
 - Urban refugees experience sexual violence in public spaces, workplaces, and schools. This violence takes various forms, including rape, harassment, and exploitation. Women, girls, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) are particularly vulnerable to these abuses.
 - Economic violence, such as the denial of financial resources and control over earnings, disproportionately affects women in the informal sector. Emotional and psychological abuse, often invisible, leaves lasting scars.
 - Harmful practices, though less common in the urban areas, continue to affect marginalized populations, including child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) in some refugee communities.

These unique circumstances lead to increased exploitation and abuse, with severe psychological, physical, and economic impacts on survivors, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to protect these at-risk populations.

Contributing Factors of GBV among Urban Refugees in Kampala Central Division.

Economic Inequality: Poverty and unemployment create power imbalances, with women and girls often at the receiving end of abuse and exploitation.


Cultural Norms and Attitudes: Deeply ingrained patriarchal norms perpetuate the notion of male dominance, discouraging victims from speaking out, seeking help, or reporting incidents.

Urbanization and Population Pressure: High population density, housing shortages, and the informal settlement lifestyle contribute to stress and conflict within households and communities, often escalating into violence.

Weak Legal Enforcement: Despite robust legal frameworks addressing GBV in Uganda, enforcement remains insufficient. Many victims lack access to justice due to fear of stigma, financial barriers, or mistrust of legal institutions.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) leaves devastating effects on individuals, families, and the community at large. Survivors often face physical injuries, psychological trauma, and economic hardship, while families experience disruption and long-term instability.





The disparity between Alternative Justice Systems practised by some refugee communities and the Formal Law in Uganda acts as a barrier to reporting cases of violence, perpetuating inequality and limiting the potential of affected individuals, which ultimately undermines community cohesion and development.

Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Kampala Central Division requires a multi-faceted approach involving various stakeholders and ongoing interventions funded by Prospects 2.0, among other GBV actors.

Key activities include strengthening community awareness through continuous campaigns to challenge harmful cultural norms and empower women and young girls to report GBV cases. Support systems are being improved by establishing safe spaces, providing psychosocial support, and enhancing access to healthcare and legal aid for survivors.


Law enforcement officers are being trained to handle GBV cases sensitively and efficiently, ensuring accountability through strengthened local justice systems. The Uganda Police Force plays a crucial role in addressing GBV and child protection, working closely with refugee community leaders to build trust and facilitate effective reporting and response mechanisms.

Economic empowerment programs in Kampala, such as vocational training in jewelry making, tailoring, and shoe making, are reducing women's dependency and vulnerability to GBV by providing skills training and access to credit. Though not all refugees participate, these initiatives mark a positive start towards enhancing their economic independence and safety.

Collaborations among local authorities, NGOs, and community leaders are fostering a coordinated response to address the root causes of GBV while offering timely support to survivors.

Uganda's open-door policy for refugees supports protection and integration, with legal frameworks such as the 1995 Constitution, the Refugee Act, and various international conventions ensuring refugees' rights to life, liberty, and security. However, these policies must balance well-intentioned humanitarian principles with effective service delivery to prevent environments where GBV and child protection issues can thrive.

Countries with open-door immigration policies like Uganda face significant challenges in addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and child protection concerns among refugee populations. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, including rape, trafficking, and forced prostitution, often perpetrated by fellow refugees and people in positions of power.





Unaccompanied minors face severe risks of trafficking, forced labor, and sexual exploitation in unsupervised environments. Resource scarcity hampers comprehensive child protection programs, leading to missed education opportunities and long-term psychological effects. Multi-dimensional solutions that address immediate protection needs and promote long-term empowerment are essential to safeguarding these vulnerable populations.

Proposed Strategies and solutions to address the challenges of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Child Protection in Uganda requires a multi-faceted approach involving various stakeholders.

The following measures are proposed in this Advocacy paper.

- Governments and international organizations must increase funding for refugee protection programs, prioritizing the safety of women and children. This includes enhancing resources for shelters, mental health services, and legal aid, along with improving the infrastructure of refugee shelters to provide gender-segregated and secure environments.
- Specialized GBV response services, such as counseling, legal support, and emergency hotlines, also require increased funding (UNHCR, 2021).
- The Government of Uganda should strengthen its legal frameworks to ensure survivors of GBV have access to justice and protection. This includes enacting specialized laws for GBV that extend to migrant and refugee populations, covering sexual violence, domestic abuse, trafficking, and exploitation. Stronger child protection legislation is needed to prevent exploitation, trafficking, and recruitment into armed forces, with special provisions for unaccompanied minors. Ensuring access to legal aid and representation for GBV survivors and at-risk children is critical to uphold their rights and hold perpetrators accountable (Human Rights Watch, 2019).
- Collaboration between humanitarian actors, including international organizations, refugee-led organizations, local NGOs, and community-based groups, is essential to provide integrated services addressing the complex needs of refugees. Enhancing coordination between child protection, GBV prevention, and mental health services is crucial.
- Community sensitisation and empowerment programs can reduce stigma and prevent violence by educating both refugees and host communities about rights and available resources. Vocational training, language skills, and income-generation opportunities for refugee women can help break the cycle of poverty and exploitation.





- Establishing language and skilling centers supports integration and empowerment within communities, fostering resilience and self-reliance among refugees and vulnerable populations (UNICEF, 2020).
- Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and child protection issues in Uganda requires a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders.
- Increased funding and resources from governments and international organizations are essential to enhance refugee protection programs, including gender-segregated shelters, mental health services, and legal aid (UNHCR, 2021).
- Strengthening legal frameworks is vital, with the Government of Uganda ensuring that national laws explicitly address the unique risks faced by refugees and migrants, particularly concerning GBV and child abuse (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Law enforcement officers, immigration officials, and judicial systems must receive regular training on trauma-informed care and cultural competency to handle GBV cases sensitively and efficiently.
- Collaboration among humanitarian actors, including international organizations, refugee-led organizations, local NGOs, and community-based groups, is crucial to provide integrated services.
- Community sensitisation programs that raise awareness about rights, safety, and available resources can help reduce stigma and prevent violence, while vocational training and income-generation opportunities for refugee women can break the cycle of poverty and vulnerability.
- Establishing confidential reporting mechanisms and improving data collection on GBV and child protection risks can enhance response strategies and resource allocation.
- Promoting positive masculinities and engaging men and boys in prevention efforts are also key to addressing harmful gender norms. Finally, fostering international cooperation and supporting initiatives like UNHCR's Safe from the Start program can help prevent GBV from the moment refugees arrive in new countries.



- The Government of Uganda has integrated refugee children into the national education system and provided funding to enhance their education. To further improve, they can simplify registration procedures and increase registration centers. Prospect 2.0 stakeholders, including local authorities, international organizations, and NGOs, offer financial and technical assistance, while UNHCR advocates for inclusion and provides logistical support, ensuring comprehensive educational programs for refugee children in Uganda.

In conclusion, to combat Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and protect vulnerable children, it is imperative that all stakeholders unite in a coordinated effort. The Government of Uganda must prioritize funding for protection programs and enforce robust legal frameworks. International organizations and local NGOs need to enhance collaboration to provide comprehensive services. Community sensitisation and empowerment initiatives are essential to break the cycle of violence and exploitation.

Together, we can create safer, more inclusive environments, upholding the rights and dignity of all individuals, especially refugees and migrants.

