

# Protection Under Pressure

## Sudanese and South Sudanese Refugee Experiences in Kampala and Kiryandongo, Uganda

July 2026



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*The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an independent humanitarian organisation helping people forced to flee. We work in crises across 40 countries, providing emergency and long-term assistance to millions of people every year. We stand up for people forced to flee, advocating for their rights.*

*This report was written by Cassandra Mathie, with research support from Claire Birungi Agaba. Florence Namugere led the data collection, and Claire Birungi Agaba supported the analysis.*

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**Cover photo:** Florence Namugere /NRC

NRC-facilitated focus group discussion in Kawempe, Kampala.

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# 1 Executive Summary

## Background, Purpose, Locations and Method

Since the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in April 2023, Uganda has received a rapidly growing number of Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers, adding pressure to an already under-resourced refugee response. By June 2026, Uganda hosted more than 2 million refugees and asylum seekers,<sup>1</sup> including approximately 1.06 million South Sudanese and 95,579 Sudanese.<sup>2</sup> The Sudanese caseload had increased more than fivefold since January 2024.<sup>3</sup>

The effects of these arrivals have differed between urban self-settlement and formal settlement-based displacement. In Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement, the concentration of new arrivals has strained reception capacity, humanitarian assistance and basic services. In Greater Kampala, where urban refugees are expected to pursue self-reliance, refugees face high living costs, dispersed services and barriers to livelihoods, registration and protection support. Wider funding shortfalls have further constrained the response.

Against this backdrop, NRC conducted Community-Based Protection assessments with predominantly Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers in Greater Kampala and predominantly South Sudanese refugees in Kiryandongo. The assessment examined protection risks, barriers to services and livelihoods, coping strategies, legal identity and registration, housing, shelter and HLP concerns, safety and wellbeing, unequal exposure to risk, and future intentions.

The assessment used a qualitative approach based on 22 focus group discussions conducted in May and June 2026: 13 in Greater Kampala and nine in Kiryandongo. The findings reflect the experiences of assessed participants and should not be interpreted as representative of all refugees in Uganda, as estimates of prevalence, or as nationality-based vulnerability profiles.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR (2026) *Uganda: Overview of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers as of 30 June 2026*. Available at: [UGANDA - Overview OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS as of 30-Jun-2026](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR (2026) *Sudan Situation Regional Update, 30 April 2026*. Available at: [Sudan Situation Regional Update, 30 April 2026](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR (2024) *Uganda: Overview of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers as of 31 January 2024*. Available at: [Overview of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Uganda, 31 January 2024](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

## Key Findings

### Future intentions reflected constrained options rather than settled preferences.

Staying was the most commonly discussed near-term option in both locations, meaning remaining in Uganda among participants in Greater Kampala and remaining in the settlement among many participants in Kiryandongo. Return and onward movement were discussed, but insecurity, destroyed property, weak livelihoods, disrupted services, documentation barriers, travel costs and family responsibilities limited what participants considered feasible.

**Livelihood insecurity affected households through different pathways.** In Greater Kampala, participants described unemployment and underemployment alongside irregular remittances, casual labour, informal trade and periods without income. Many reported professional, technical or business experience that they had been unable to convert into stable earnings. In Kiryandongo, humanitarian assistance remained the main source of support discussed, while farming, casual labour and small businesses offered limited opportunities for progression towards self-reliance.

**Food insecurity was closely linked to wider household and protection pressures.** In Greater Kampala, reduced food consumption formed part of a broader cash shortfall in which households balanced food against rent, health care, school fees and transport. Participants also described borrowing, reducing expenditure on health or hygiene and temporarily separating households. In Kiryandongo, food insufficiency was more directly linked to inadequate assistance, large household needs, limited livelihoods and distance to distribution points. Participants also raised school dropout, begging, child work and asset sales, although the assessment does not establish the scale of these practices.

**The existence of services did not ensure meaningful access.** In Greater Kampala, service access was constrained by transport costs, language, registration status, documentation requirements, confidentiality concerns and dispersed providers. In Kiryandongo, distance, queues, shortages, overcrowding, limited infrastructure and physical accessibility barriers restricted access. Older persons, persons with disabilities and caregivers faced particular difficulties where accessing support required long journeys, repeated visits or extended waiting times.

**Housing, shelter, WASH, HLP and legal or administrative concerns were interconnected.** In Greater Kampala, dependence on rented accommodation exposed households to eviction threats, deposit disputes, discrimination, overcrowding and inadequate privacy when income was interrupted. Registration barriers and confidentiality concerns also affected whether some participants felt able to approach formal systems or seek assistance. In Kiryandongo, participants described deteriorating shelters, flooding, theft, inadequate roofing, shared sanitation, limited water access and land-related pressure. Legal and administrative concerns centred more strongly on interrupted registration, deactivation, document recovery and limited access to reliable legal information.

**Protection risks were experienced unevenly.** Women and female-headed households described pressure associated with caregiving, income insecurity, restricted movement, harassment and inadequate privacy. Older persons and persons with disabilities faced cost, transport, distance, queueing and accessibility barriers.

Children and young people faced interrupted education, limited livelihood pathways, child work, distress and exposure to harmful coping practices. Men and boys also described provider pressure, livelihood exclusion, safety concerns and gaps in psychosocial support. These factors overlapped and should not be treated as separate or mutually exclusive categories.

### **Comparative Conclusion**

The findings show shared protection pressures across Greater Kampala and Kiryandongo, but different pathways of risk.

In Greater Kampala, protection risks were shaped mainly by irregular income, high cash costs, rental dependence, documentation concerns and dispersed urban services. In Kiryandongo, they were shaped more strongly by food insecurity, reliance on assistance, limited livelihood progression, distance to services, shortages and inadequate shelter and WASH conditions.

Protection responses should therefore be differentiated by context while remaining connected within the coherent national framework. Urban programming should address the financial, legal and practical barriers affecting self-settled refugees. Programming in settlements should combine continued basic-needs support with improved accessibility, service quality and pathways towards self-reliance. Across both settings, protection, livelihoods, legal assistance, housing, and progress towards self-reliance and durable solutions should be addressed through connected programming rather than separate interventions.

### **Priority Actions**

1. **Develop differentiated but connected protection delivery models.** Expand decentralised neighbourhood outreach and mobile services in Greater Kampala, while strengthening cluster-level outreach, case management and community protection and accountability structures in Kiryandongo.
2. **Improve registration, documentation and legal-information pathways.** Provide registration and documentation services accessible to urban-based refugees and establish clear procedures for interrupted registration, deactivation, document recovery, failed biometric or interview processes and unresolved registration cases in Kiryandongo.
3. **Strengthen context-specific livelihoods and economic inclusion.** In urban areas, address barriers to employment, business registration and formalisation, language learning and skills recognition. In Kiryandongo, connect livelihoods with food security, farming, small enterprise, youth pathways and refugees' existing professional, business, farming and livelihood experience.
4. **Protect access to essential services and reduce practical barriers.** Address cost, transport, language and documentation barriers in Greater Kampala, and improve food assistance, shelter, WASH, education retention, accessibility and alternatives to long journeys and queues in Kiryandongo.
5. **Establish coordinated referral pathways with follow-up.** Link legal aid, registration, health, education, child protection, GBV, shelter, livelihoods and psychosocial services, and verify whether referred individuals were able to access support.

6. **Strengthen age-, gender- and disability-inclusive services and psychosocial support.** Ensure accessible facilities, caregiver support and outreach to people with reduced mobility, alongside confidential, survivor-centred referral pathways for GBV, sexual violence, harmful practices and child-protection concerns.
7. **Provide flexible, multi-year funding and strengthen comparative monitoring.** Support programme adaptation through sustained financing and disaggregated monitoring by location, sex, age and disability.

# 2 Introduction and Background

Since the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in April 2023, Uganda has received a growing number of Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers, placing additional pressure on an already large and under-resourced refugee response. As of 30 June 2026, the country hosted more than 2 million refugees and asylum seekers,<sup>4</sup> including approximately 1.06 million South Sudanese and 95,579 Sudanese nationals.<sup>5</sup> The Sudanese caseload increased more than fivefold between January 2024 and June 2026.<sup>6</sup>

Following the Government of Uganda's grant of prima facie refugee recognition<sup>7</sup> to Sudanese nationals in November 2023,<sup>8</sup> most new arrivals were directed to Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement for registration from January 2024.<sup>9,10</sup> By April 2026, approximately 79,000 Sudanese were living in Kiryandongo, accounting for around 84 per cent of the Sudanese caseload and nearly half of the settlement's total population.<sup>11</sup> A further 10 per cent were living across Greater Kampala and the remaining 6 per cent resided in other settlements.<sup>12</sup>

These settlement patterns created different pressures in Kiryandongo and across Greater Kampala. In Kiryandongo, the concentration of new arrivals placed direct

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<sup>4</sup> Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR (2026) *Uganda: Overview of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers as of 30 June 2026*. Available at: [UGANDA - Overview OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS as of 30-Jun-2026](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR (2026) *Sudan Situation Regional Update, 30 April 2026*. Available at: [Sudan Situation Regional Update, 30 April 2026](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>6</sup> Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR (2024) *Uganda: Overview of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers as of 31 January 2024*. Available at: [Overview of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Uganda, 31 January 2024](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>7</sup> Prima facie recognition means that members of a group fleeing conflict or persecution are recognised as refugees on the basis of readily apparent circumstances, without an individual refugee status determination. Uganda applies prima facie recognition to refugees from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan.

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR (n.d.) *Uganda*. Available at: [Where we work, Uganda](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR (2024) *Sudan Situation: External Update, 7 February 2024*. [Sudan Situation: External Update, 7 February 2024](#). (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>10</sup> On 9 January 2024, the Government of Uganda restricted registration for newly arriving Sudanese refugees to Kiryandongo, requiring those seeking registration and assistance to travel from urban areas.

<sup>11</sup> Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR (2026) *Uganda Refugee Statistics, April 2026: Active Population by Settlement*. Available at: [Uganda Refugee Statistics, April 2026: Active Population by Settlement](#). (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR (2026) *Sudan Situation Regional Update, 30 April 2026*. Available at: [Sudan Situation Regional Update, 30 April 2026](#). (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

strain on reception capacity, humanitarian assistance and basic service provision.<sup>13</sup> In Kampala, where urban refugees are generally expected to be self-reliant, the growing caseload increased barriers to services, livelihoods and protection support.<sup>14</sup> These pressures were compounded by severe funding shortfalls and wider aid cuts. In 2026, UNHCR had received only 12 per cent of the US\$850 million required for Uganda's refugee response, further constraining food, health, protection and other essential services.<sup>15</sup> The 2026 Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan warns that rising needs and shrinking resources threaten both emergency assistance and longer-term solutions.

Against this backdrop, the Norwegian Refugee Council conducted a series of Community-Based Protection assessments in two distinct displacement contexts: urban self-settlement in Greater Kampala and formal settlement-based displacement in Kiryandongo. The assessments sought to identify priority protection risks, service gaps and displacement intentions among predominantly Sudanese participants in Kampala and predominantly South Sudanese participants in Kiryandongo.

### **Purpose, scope and intended use**

This report presents findings from Community-Based Protection assessments conducted with predominantly Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers in Greater Kampala and South Sudanese refugees in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement. It examines reported protection risks, barriers to services and livelihoods, coping strategies, legal identity and documentation, housing and shelter conditions, safety and wellbeing, unequal exposure to risk, and future intentions.

The report aims to inform evidence-based programming, strengthen coordination among humanitarian and government actors, and support advocacy to improve protection, access to rights and pathways towards durable solutions for refugees and affected host communities in Uganda. As a qualitative analysis, the findings are specific to the assessed participants and locations and should not be interpreted as representative of all refugees in Uganda or as nationality-based vulnerability profiles.

### **Comparative analysis**

The report compares experiences in Greater Kampala and Kiryandongo but does not treat the two locations or participant groups as directly equivalent. The analysis examines how these distinct displacement contexts shape protection risks, access to services, coping strategies and future options. Differences should also be read in light of the participant profiles, particularly nationality and duration of displacement. The comparison is intended to identify shared pressures and distinct protection pathways across the two settings.

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<sup>13</sup> NRC and IMPACT Initiatives (2025) *Uganda: Needs and Intentions of Newly Arrived Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Kiryandongo and Kampala*. Available at: [Needs and Intentions of Newly Arrived Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Kiryandongo and Kampala](#). (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>14</sup> NRC and IMPACT Initiatives (2025) *Uganda: Needs and Intentions of Newly Arrived Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Kiryandongo and Kampala*. Available at: [Needs and Intentions of Newly Arrived Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Kiryandongo and Kampala](#). (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR (2026) *Uganda: Operational Data Portal*. Available at: [Country - Uganda](#). (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

## Context Profiles: Greater Kampala and Kiryandongo

Greater Kampala and Kiryandongo represent two distinct displacement environments within Uganda's refugee response: urban self-settlement and formal settlement-based displacement. They differ in how refugees secure accommodation, access services and assistance, pursue livelihoods and navigate administrative systems. These differences provide the context for interpreting the findings in later chapters.

### Greater Kampala: urban self-settlement

Greater Kampala is an urban and peri-urban self-settlement context in which refugees live across dispersed neighbourhoods rather than within a designated refugee settlement. This reflects a wider trend towards urban self-settlement, as refugees increasingly relocate from formal settlements or settle directly in towns and cities after arriving in Uganda.<sup>16</sup>

As of 30 June 2026, Kampala hosted 173,074 registered refugees and asylum seekers, making it Uganda's fifth-largest refugee-hosting location.<sup>17</sup> The registered population included people from Eritrea, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan and other countries.<sup>18</sup> Official statistics may not capture the full urban refugee population, as some residents remain unregistered or retain registration in a formal settlement while living in Kampala.<sup>19</sup>

Urban refugees access health care, education and other services primarily through municipal and national systems, alongside support from the Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR and humanitarian organisations. Urban areas are often perceived to offer better employment prospects and access to services and resources than formal settlements.<sup>20</sup> In practice, however, urban self-settlement is characterised by rented accommodation, reliance on cash income and geographically dispersed services. Access to housing, livelihoods and support therefore depends heavily on transport costs, language, documentation and knowledge of urban service systems, creating particular barriers for new arrivals and unregistered households. Assistance is less centralised than in formal settlements, and urban refugees are generally expected to pursue self-reliance.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> NRC (2023) *Legal Protection Needs of Refugees in Secondary Cities in Uganda*. Available at: [Legal Protection Needs of Refugees in Secondary Cities in Uganda](#). (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>17</sup> Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR (2026) *Uganda: Overview of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers as of 30 June 2026*. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/uganda-overview-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-30-june-2026> (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>18</sup> Office of the Prime Minister and UNHCR (2026) *Uganda: Overview of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers as of 30 June 2026*. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/uganda-overview-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-30-june-2026> (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>19</sup> Omata, N. (2020) 'Cities as partners: the case for Kampala', *Forced Migration Review*. Available at: [Forced Migration Review, Cities as partners, the case for Kampala, 2020](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>20</sup> NRC and IMPACT Initiatives (2025) *Uganda: Needs and Intentions of Newly Arrived Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Kiryandongo and Kampala*. Available at: [Needs and Intentions of Newly Arrived Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Kiryandongo and Kampala](#). (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>21</sup> Development Action Platform (n.d.) *Uganda's Response to the Sudan Crisis*. Available at: [Development Action Platform, Uganda's Response to the Sudan Crisis](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

### Kiryandongo: settlement-based displacement

Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement is located near Bweyale in mid-western Uganda, approximately 200 kilometres north of Kampala. It occupies government-gazetted land designated for refugee settlement under Uganda's statutory refugee framework.<sup>22</sup> The settlement is organised through cluster-based residence, shared infrastructure and settlement-level systems for administration, assistance and service delivery.<sup>23</sup>

Refugees access humanitarian assistance, public services and livelihood opportunities through these systems, including allocated plots for shelter and small-scale cultivation. However, distance between households, water points, distribution sites and service facilities can create practical barriers, particularly for people with reduced mobility and caregiving responsibilities.

Kiryandongo is among Uganda's largest refugee settlements and has grown rapidly following arrivals from Sudan. Humanitarian actors have reported overcrowding, inadequate housing, limited WASH facilities and constrained health-service capacity, including heightened risks of communicable disease outbreaks.<sup>24</sup> Continued funding shortfalls and wider aid cuts have further constrained services and humanitarian support.

Kampala and Kiryandongo therefore represent distinct operational and protection environments. Greater Kampala is characterised by urban self-settlement, rental dependence, high cash costs and dispersed services. Kiryandongo is shaped by settlement-based administration and assistance, land allocation, shared infrastructure and distance from essential services.

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<sup>22</sup> Uganda (2006) *Refugees Act, 2006*. Kampala: Government of Uganda; Uganda (2010) *Refugees Regulations, 2010*. Kampala: Government of Uganda. (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>23</sup> UNHCR (n.d.) *Uganda*. Available at: [Where we work, Uganda](#) (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

<sup>24</sup> NRC and IMPACT Initiatives (2025) *Uganda: Needs and Intentions of Newly Arrived Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Kiryandongo and Kampala*. Available at: [Needs and Intentions of Newly Arrived Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Kiryandongo and Kampala](#). (Accessed: 21 July 2026).

# 3 Methodology

## **Assessment design and participant profile**

The assessment draws on 22 focus group discussions conducted in May and June 2026: 13 in Kampala and surrounding areas and nine across Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement.

Across Greater Kampala, participants were predominantly Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers living across dispersed urban and peri-urban neighbourhoods. The groups included both recent arrivals and longer-term residents, with reported displacement periods ranging from approximately eight months to 13 years.

In Kiryandongo, participants were predominantly South Sudanese refugees living in cluster-based settlement areas. They generally reported longer displacement, ranging from approximately 1 year to more than 12 years, while recent arrivals were underrepresented.

The FGDs included separate discussions with adult women and men, young people and persons with disabilities. Kiryandongo also included a discussion with older women. Coverage was weighted towards adults, with more limited representation of adolescents, young people, older persons and persons with disabilities. The composition of the FGDs reflects the assessment sample and not the demographic profile of the wider refugee populations.

## **Data Analysis and Limitations**

Qualitative data were analysed thematically and compared across FGDs to identify recurring patterns and contextual differences. Findings rely on self-reported accounts and may be affected by under-reporting, expectations of assistance, uneven participation and language or translation constraints. The findings are therefore indicative of the experiences discussed by participants and should not be interpreted as representative of the wider refugee population.

# 4 Key Findings

## 4.1 Displacement and Future Intentions: Staying, Returning or Moving On

Decisions about staying, returning or moving onward were shaped by family responsibilities, safety, access to services, travel costs and conditions in areas of origin. Staying was the most commonly discussed near-term option in both settings, meaning remaining in Uganda for participants in Kampala and within the settlement for many in Kiryandongo. This often reflected the lack of safe or feasible alternatives rather than a clear preference or pathway to self-reliance.

Return and onward movement were constrained by continuing conflict, destroyed property and uncertainty about whether families could rebuild homes, restore income, access health care and education, and remain together. Future intentions were closely linked to current pressures and to people's access to information, resources, documentation and support.

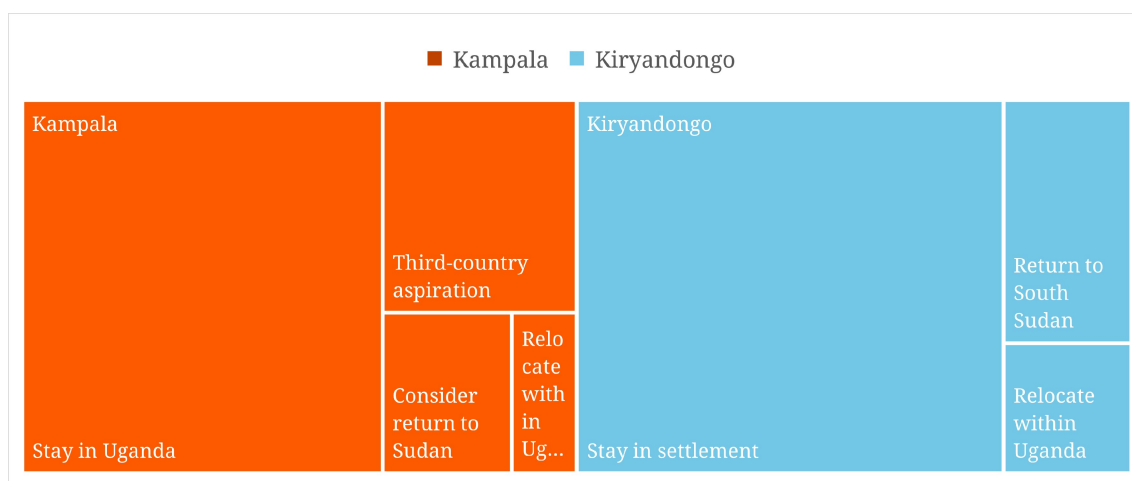


Figure 1: Self-reported near-term intentions: frequency of coded mentions in FGDs, by location

### Kampala: urban uncertainty, political fear and the cost of staying

In Kampala, future choices were shaped by the pressures of urban life and by political and security fears. People raised concerns about arrest, persecution, political monitoring and possible exposure through registration or visibility. In some FGDs, these fears extended beyond Sudan. In one women's FGD, participants reported concerns that they were being monitored in Uganda because of perceived political affiliations, while participants in other discussions expressed concern that Sudanese authorities might view those who had fled as opponents or rebels.

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“Some of us cannot go to Sudan because we receive threats due to the political difference back home.”

- *Sudanese female refugee participant, Kampala*

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Participants also linked these fears to return decisions, including concern that temporary travel to assess conditions could expose them to arrest or persecution. More broadly, these concerns appeared to shape how some participants approached authorities, registration processes and formal support.

For some households, uncertainty about legal identity and confidentiality sat alongside pressures related to rent, food, health care, school fees and support to relatives across borders. Discussions about the future included staying in Uganda, possible return, temporary travel and hopes of moving to a third country. These options were not described as equally accessible. References to third-country movement, including Rwanda, Canada, the UK, Turkey and Australia, appeared to reflect hopes or aspirations rather than concrete plans.<sup>25</sup>

Some participants described temporary visits to assess conditions or attend funerals before returning to Uganda. Others considered return because of the cost of living and limited livelihood opportunities. In one men’s FGD,<sup>26</sup> some participants discussed returning to join the army as one of the few available livelihood options.<sup>27</sup>

### **Kiryandongo: protracted displacement and constrained movement**

In Kiryandongo, future choices were shaped by protracted displacement and the realities of long-term settlement life. Family ties, educational considerations and burial obligations maintained connections with areas of origin, but return remained difficult. Participants cited insecurity, destroyed homes or property, weak livelihoods and poor access to services as key barriers.

Discussions focused largely on whether households could meet food needs, keep children in school, reach health services and afford travel. In one youth FGD,<sup>28</sup> some participants considered return for education or family reasons, while others intended to remain. In one older women’s FGD,<sup>29</sup> transport costs were described as a practical barrier to return. These discussions indicate that intentions were closely linked to both household considerations and the feasibility of movement.

### **Protection implications**

Participants’ stated intentions did not necessarily represent settled preferences or feasible plans. Limited alternatives, uncertainty and immediate household pressures

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<sup>25</sup> The FGDs did not establish that these pathways were available to participants.

<sup>26</sup> FGD Sudanese men, Seeta, Greater Kampala.

<sup>27</sup> This issue was raised in one FGD only. The available data do not indicate whether it reflects a wider pattern.

<sup>28</sup> FGD Youth, Cluster P, Kiryandongo.

<sup>29</sup> FGD older women, Cluster N, Kiryandongo.

could narrow the choices people considered realistically available and constrain informed and voluntary decision-making.

## 4.2 Livelihoods and Income

Livelihood conditions affected almost every part of household life. Across the FGDs, participants linked income to food, rent or shelter, health care, education, transport, legal support and their ability to plan ahead. Many referred to skills, work histories and experience, but few described opportunities to use these capacities to earn a stable income in their current location.

The central issue was not simply unemployment. Households also faced uncertainty about whether remittances, casual work, assistance or small-scale activities would continue or provide enough to meet essential costs.

Distinct patterns emerged between the two locations. In Kampala, discussions centred on remittances, informal work, small businesses and periods without earnings, with instability closely linked to rent and other cash costs. In Kiryandongo, humanitarian assistance was the main source of support discussed, while farming, casual labour and small shops played a more limited role, offering few clear pathways towards self-reliance.

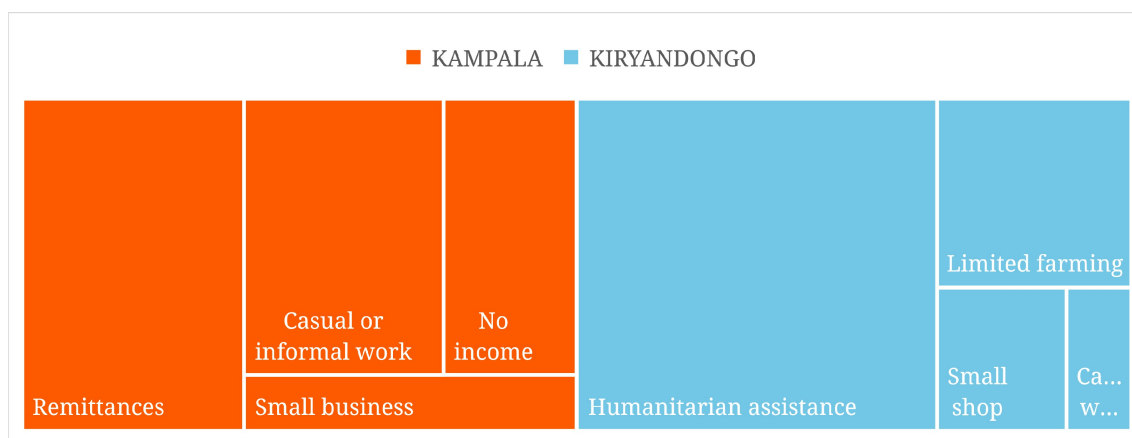


Figure 2: Self-reported household income sources: frequency of coded mentions in FGDs, by location

### Kampala: skills, remittances and unstable urban income

Participants in Kampala described a clear gap between their previous occupations and the work available in Uganda. Across all Kampala FGDs, participants reported being unemployed or underemployed, including engineers, doctors, nurses, teachers and business owners who had been unable to use their qualifications and experience to secure stable work.

Households described combining remittances from relatives abroad and in Sudan, casual labour, informal trade, limited NGO support and periods without income.

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*“We don’t have anything; we depend on our relatives for survival.”  
- Female Sudanese refugee, Kampala*

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In one women’s FGD,<sup>30</sup> participants mentioned hawking, selling cookies and trading perfume, but reported that earnings were generally insufficient. Although these sources helped cover rent, food, health care and education, their irregularity in a cash-based urban setting left households vulnerable to rent arrears, eviction concerns, interrupted schooling and difficulties reaching services.

#### **Kiryandongo: reduced livelihood options and limited progression**

In Kiryandongo, participants described livelihood conditions constrained by protracted settlement life and limited economic opportunities. Previous experience included farming, teaching, military service, business ownership and gold mining, but humanitarian assistance remained the main source of support discussed. Farming, casual work and small shops supplemented this assistance for some families, although their contribution was limited.

Participants referred to smaller farm plots, limited business activity, scarce casual labour and difficulty earning enough income to meet basic needs. In one men’s FGD,<sup>31</sup> participants linked reduced humanitarian funding support to no longer covering the needs of large families. Small-scale farming and informal activity offered some support but were not described as reliable routes towards economic stability or self-reliance.

#### **Protection implications**

Livelihood insecurity affected more than income. It weakened households’ ability to maintain housing, meet essential costs, use services and plan ahead, while leaving participants’ existing skills and experience underused.

## **4.3 Food Security and Coping**

While the previous section examined how households obtained income and support, this section focuses on how food shortages and wider financial pressure affected household choices and coping strategies.

Food shortages were not described as a single problem with a single effect. They shaped what households could spend, what they could postpone, whether children stayed in school, whether people could seek health care and how far families could stretch informal support. In both settings, participants described reducing food consumption, cutting other essential spending, borrowing and relying on family or community support to manage daily pressures.

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<sup>30</sup> FGD women, Kazo, Greater Kampala.

<sup>31</sup> FGD men, Cluster C, Kiryandongo.

The pattern differed by context. In Kampala, food insecurity sat within a wider cash shortfall: rent, school fees, health care and transport competed with food expenditure, while reduced remittances or irregular income could also increase rent arrears and eviction risk. In Kiryandongo, food insecurity was more directly linked to inadequate assistance, large household needs, distance to distribution points and limited livelihood options. In both locations, coping strategies reduced immediate pressure but could also affect health, dignity, safety, education and household stability.

### **Kampala: food insecurity within wider cash pressure**

In Kampala, unstable income led to difficult choices between food, rent, health care, education and transport.

Reduced food consumption was raised across all Kampala FGDs, indicating that households were adjusting food intake in response to financial pressure. Cuts to health or hygiene spending and temporary household separation or sending family members elsewhere to ease household pressure were also frequently discussed. These accounts suggest that households were not only cutting food, but shifting pressure across several essential areas at once. Borrowing was also reported, although the FGDs do not establish debt levels, creditors, repayment terms or whether it contributed to exploitation.

### **Kiryandongo: food insufficiency, distance and reliance on assistance**

Food insufficiency was raised across every Kiryandongo cluster FGD and was frequently described as one of the most immediate daily concerns. Participants described food assistance as insufficient for larger families, alongside limited supplementary livelihoods and reduced household resources. Reduced food consumption was reported as a common response.

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*“Food is available, but it is not enough.”  
- Young female South Sudanese refugee, Kiryandongo Settlement.*

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Distance created additional barriers to food access. Participants described long journeys to distribution points as particularly difficult for older persons, persons with disabilities and caregivers who could not easily walk, wait in queues or make repeated journeys. In one older women’s FGD, lack of food was identified as one of the most difficult daily challenges.<sup>32</sup>

Some coping strategies carried particular protection concerns. Begging, including child begging, was discussed in several FGDs. In one young women’s FGD, participants described sending children under 18 to work as a food-related coping strategy.<sup>33</sup> These accounts were accompanied by reports of school dropout, asset sales and other forms of household sacrifice, although the data do not establish how

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<sup>32</sup> FGD older women, Cluster N, Kiryandongo

<sup>33</sup> FGD young women, Cluster I, Kiryandongo.

widespread these practices were. Family, neighbours and informal mutual support provided some buffer, but the FGDs do not establish how reliable, inclusive or sufficient this support was.

### Protection implications

Food insecurity was not only a consumption issue. It contributed to trade-offs affecting health, hygiene, education and family arrangements, while some coping practices increased exposure to child work, begging, debt-related risks and household separation.

## 4.4 Essential Services and Access Pathways

Participants knew about some services, but knowledge did not always translate into access. Across the FGDs, participants described trying to access legal assistance, registration support, health care, education, food assistance, water, livelihoods support, literacy classes and charitable assistance. Their ability to use these services was constrained by cost, distance, language barriers, documentation requirements, shortages and uneven outreach. For some, the first barrier was knowing where to go. For others, it was affording transport, communicating with providers, waiting in queues, meeting documentation requirements or physically reaching the service point.

The main barriers differed by location. In Kampala, access was shaped by scattered urban services, transport costs, language barriers, unregistered status and uneven outreach. In Kiryandongo, services were more visible within the settlement, but distance, shortages, overcrowding and limited infrastructure often restricted practical access. For older persons, persons with disabilities, caregivers, women with care responsibilities, children and young people, these constraints could determine whether assistance was accessible in practice.

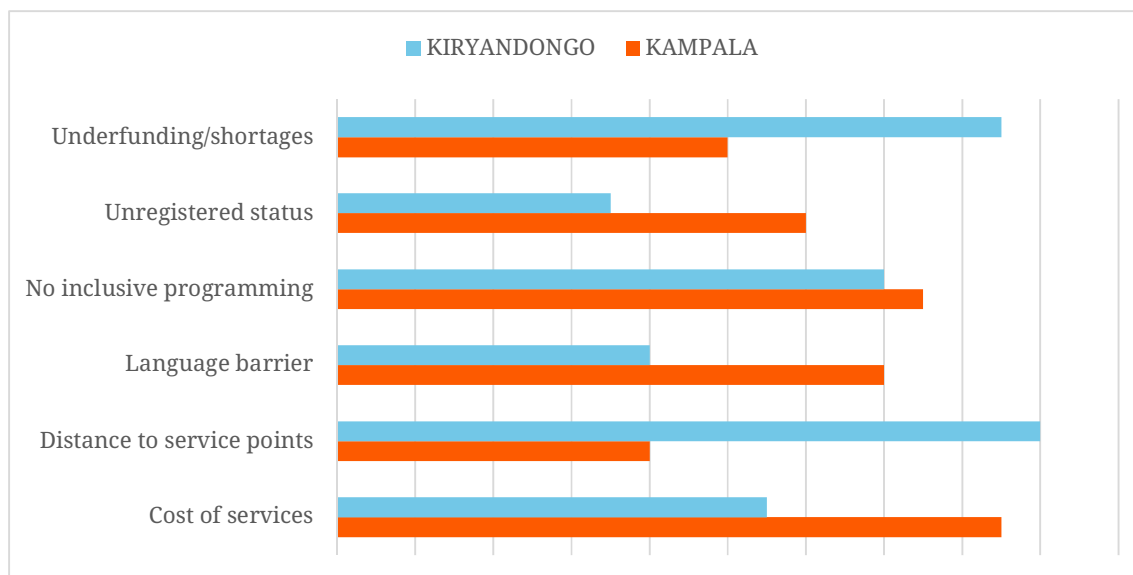


Figure 3: Self-reported barriers to accessing services: frequency of coded mentions in FGDs, by location

### **Kampala: scattered services, cost and documentation barriers**

In Kampala, participants identified legal, registration, education, health, livelihood, cash, literacy and faith organisation support. The most prominent access barriers discussed were cost, language barriers, unregistered status, limited inclusive provision and uneven outreach. Transport costs and the dispersed location of providers created additional difficulties.

Even when participants knew where to seek help, they could still be blocked by transport costs, associated fees, language, documentation requirements or repeated visits. In one FGD, participants felt that outreach to their area was more limited than elsewhere.<sup>34</sup> Youth raised school fees, limited opportunities to learn English and a lack of vocational, psychosocial and structured youth support, particularly for adolescents and young adults trying to rebuild education or work pathways. Persons with disabilities, older persons and caregivers described specialist services as costly, scattered or difficult to reach.

### **Kiryandongo: distance, shortages and constrained access**

In Kiryandongo, participants identified food and non-food item distributions, water systems, schools, health facilities, legal services and gender-based violence and child-protection support. Although these services were present within the settlement, participants repeatedly described barriers to using them.

Barriers operated through several pathways. Information and awareness gaps affected whether participants knew where to seek legal, gender-based violence or child-protection support. Cost and distance affected access to schools, health facilities, food distributions and water points. Administrative or procedural barriers affected some registration and legal processes. Physical accessibility and limited service capacity, including long queues, overcrowded schools, medication shortages and inadequate infrastructure, created additional difficulties.

These barriers were particularly significant for older persons, persons with disabilities and caregivers who could not easily walk long distances, wait in queues or make repeated journeys. In one FGD,<sup>35</sup> participants requested a school and lighting in poorly lit areas, **indicating that the location and safety of infrastructure also affected access.**

### **Protection implications**

The existence of a service did not ensure meaningful access. Practical, financial, administrative and physical barriers could leave people excluded from support even where services were formally available, with greater consequences for those with reduced mobility or caregiving responsibilities.

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<sup>34</sup> FGD women, Kazo, Greater Kampala.

<sup>35</sup> FGD, Cluster C, Kiryandongo.

## 4.5 Housing, Shelter and WASH

A place to stay was not always a place of safety, privacy or stability. In Kampala, participants described rented rooms and shared facilities within a context of irregular income and high urban costs. In Kiryandongo, participants described settlement shelters and shared infrastructure that affected privacy, health, accessibility and daily safety.

Housing and shelter concerns took different forms in the two locations. In Kampala, the dominant concern was rental dependence and eviction risk. In Kiryandongo, concerns centred more on shelter condition, shared WASH facilities, privacy, accessibility and land-related pressure. This section focuses on **the physical and practical conditions affecting housing, shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene. Legal identity, registration and access to remedy are addressed in Section 6.**

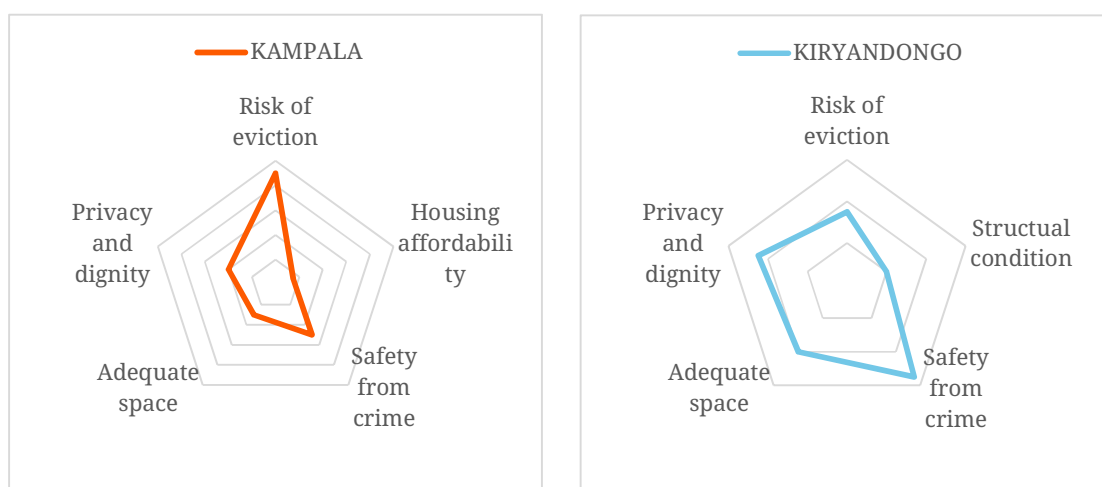


Figure 4: Relative prominence of self-reported housing and shelter concerns in FGD responses, by location

### Kampala: rental dependence and eviction risk

In Kampala, all groups described rented accommodation. No host-family or collective accommodation was reported in the FGDs. Housing access therefore depended heavily on households' ability to meet regular rental costs, often while relying on irregular income, remittances, casual work or informal trade.

Eviction risk was the most visible housing concern in Kampala. Participants described eviction threats after short periods of rent arrears, refusal of Sudanese tenants and houses being locked when rent was missed. Deposit-related disputes are considered in the following section. In some FGDs, participants reported discriminatory treatment by landlords, including being told to return to their country.<sup>36</sup> These accounts indicate that rental insecurity affected not only shelter, but also household stability, dignity, safety and people's ability to remain close to services, schools and support networks.

<sup>36</sup> FGDs women, Kawanda and Mukono-Seeta, Greater Kampala.

Rental pressure was closely linked to wider household costs. In one men's FGD, participants reported that reduced remittances from relatives in Sudan were creating direct eviction risk for families that had previously relied on that support.<sup>37</sup> For households' already managing food, school fees, health care and transport costs, a missed rent payment could quickly create wider protection concerns. Rented accommodation left many households exposed to rapid instability when income was interrupted.

Shared sanitation and privacy concerns were also raised in rented compounds. Some households described shared bathrooms, toilets and sleeping spaces, with facilities poorly maintained, lacking locks or without gender separation. Women and girls described discomfort and dignity concerns in shared sanitation facilities, while overcrowding affected family privacy.<sup>38</sup>

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*“In my compound, we have one bathroom and toilet and we are seven tenants.”*  
*- Female Sudanese refugee, Kampala.*

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Participants also described trade-offs between security and health within rented accommodation.

#### **Kiryandongo: inadequate shelter and shared infrastructure**

Across the Kiryandongo FGDs, collective shelters, tents and grass or mud structures were described as damaged, vulnerable to theft, prone to flooding and difficult to inhabit during temperature extremes. Some participants reported an expected shelter lifespan of only one to five months.<sup>39</sup> Others raised the need for roofing materials, blankets and other protection from cold.<sup>40</sup>

The condition of shelters affected participants differently. In one men's FGD, participants described shelters as unsuitable for persons with disabilities.<sup>41</sup> Women and older participants also raised concerns linked to flooding, cold, privacy and the ability to use shared facilities safely.<sup>42</sup> These accounts suggest that shelter concerns were about not only the structure itself, but also about whether people could live, sleep, move and care for others in safe and dignified conditions.

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*“Some people's rooms are not in good condition and could fall down at any time.”*  
*- Young female South Sudanese refugee, Kiryandongo Settlement.*

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<sup>37</sup> FGD men, Seeta, Greater Kampala.

<sup>38</sup> FGDs women, Kazo, and men, Seeta, Greater Kampala.

<sup>39</sup> FGDs men, Cluster B, and women, Cluster L, Kiryandongo.

<sup>40</sup> FGD older women, Cluster N, Kiryandongo.

<sup>41</sup> FGD men, Cluster B, Kiryandongo.

<sup>42</sup> FGDs women, Cluster L, and older women, Cluster N, Kiryandongo.

Land-related pressure was also raised in Kiryandongo. Participants described concerns about continued residence, shelter stability and pressure from original landowners. In one FGD, participants reported concerns about possible eviction of settlement residents.<sup>43</sup>

WASH access added to these pressures. Participants described shared pit latrines, long distances to water or sanitation facilities, limited water access and difficulties for older persons and persons with disabilities.<sup>44</sup> Women also described privacy and access concerns in shared sanitation facilities.<sup>45</sup> These accounts show that shelter quality, WASH access and accessibility were closely connected in daily life, particularly for people with reduced mobility, caregivers and women and girls.

### **Protection implications**

Housing, shelter and WASH conditions shaped whether households could maintain a safe, private and stable living environment. Financial interruption, poor physical conditions and inaccessible infrastructure could quickly translate into displacement risk, reduced dignity and barriers to daily functioning.

## **4.6 Securing Rights and Recognition: Legal Identity, Registration and HLP**

Documents, registration and legal information shaped whether participants could access services, resolve disputes, move safely and feel able to approach authorities or assistance providers. Participants described legal and administrative barriers in both settings, but through different pathways. In Kampala, legal concerns were closely linked to tenancy, eviction, registration barriers, travel costs and confidentiality fears. In Kiryandongo, they were more often linked to interrupted registration, border-crossing concerns, deactivation, document recovery and limited access to legal information.

This section examines the legal and administrative dimensions of HLP, together with legal identity, registration and legal information. Physical housing, shelter and WASH conditions are covered in the previous section.

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<sup>43</sup> FGD, Cluster S, Kiryandongo.

<sup>44</sup> FGD older women, Cluster N, Kiryandongo.

<sup>45</sup> FGD women, Cluster MR, Kiryandongo

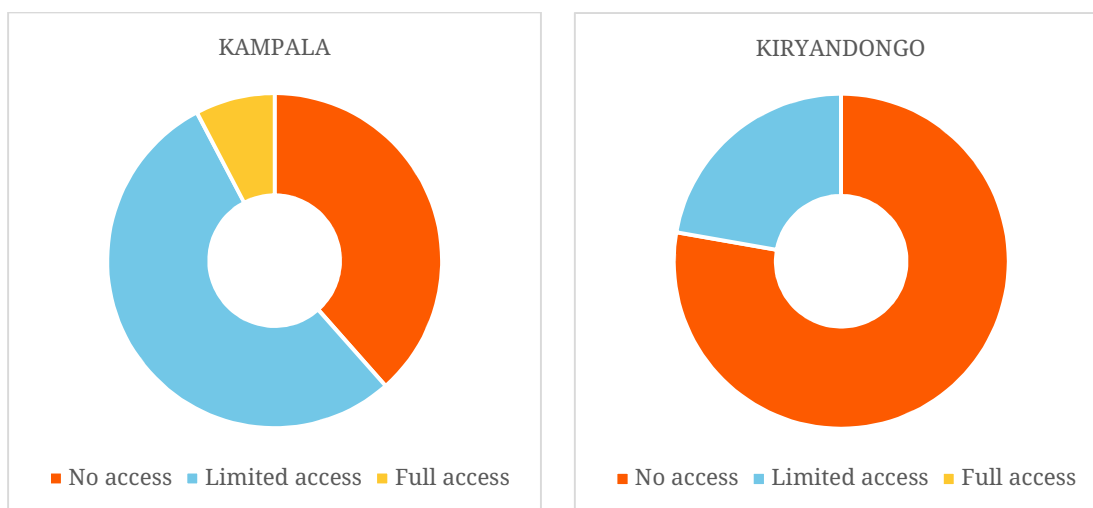


Figure 5: Self-reported access to legal information in Greater Kampala and Kiryandongo: frequency of coded mentions in FGDs

### Kampala: tenancy, registration and confidentiality concerns

In Kampala, tenancy or eviction disputes were the most prominent legal issue raised across the FGDs. Registration barriers and reported unofficial payment requests at border or registration points were frequently discussed. Participants linked these concerns to travel costs, limited neighbourhood-level legal information, uncertainty about registration pathways and fear of sharing personal information, all of which presented practical barriers to remedy.

Tenancy and eviction concerns also included deposit-related disputes and registration questions within families. In one women's FGD, participants raised withholding of security deposits as a legal concern.<sup>46</sup> These accounts show that rental insecurity involved not only the threat of eviction, but also difficulties recovering money and seeking remedy.

Participants reported that there was no accessible registration point in Kampala, leaving some households to consider travel to settlements or other the points of entry, and reported costs and repeated delays in registration processes.

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*"Most of us don't have the refugee ID. We pay about UGX 40 to 50 thousand to get the IDs and most times when we go for this service, the workers keep giving us excuses."*

*- Female Sudanese refugee participant, Kampala*

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Some participants also described unofficial payment requests at border or registration points,<sup>47</sup> while others expressed concern that registration could expose their location or information to authorities. These fears appeared to affect whether

<sup>46</sup> FGD women, Kazo, Greater Kampala.

<sup>47</sup> FGDs Kawanda, Kawempe and Entebbe, Greater Kampala

some participants felt safe approaching formal systems or sharing information. In one men's FGD, participants reported that children of mixed-nationality couples were not always registered.<sup>48</sup> These examples illustrate how legal and administrative concerns arose through housing, family status and documentation processes.

Legal services were known in Kampala, particularly NRC legal services, which participants described as a valued free resource. Other legal resources were also mentioned. However, participants raised concerns that available support did not meet the level of reported need. The discussions indicate that access depended not only on whether legal support existed, but also on whether it was affordable to reach, available near urban neighbourhoods and trusted by people with confidentiality concerns.

### **Kiryandongo: registration interruption, deactivation and information gaps**

In Kiryandongo, legal concerns were more strongly linked to registration processes and access to information. Participants raised border-crossing concerns, registration barriers, reported corruption and document recovery issues. Some described registration being interrupted or stopped, referral to Yumbe, failed biometrics or interviews, and households remaining unregistered after arriving as visitors and later deciding to stay.<sup>49</sup>

Registration problems were described as affecting access to services. In one women's FGD, participants reported household-member deactivation from registration records,<sup>50</sup> which prevented access to settlement services.<sup>51</sup> Participants also described people giving up on registration processes where unofficial payments were reportedly requested.<sup>52</sup> These accounts indicate gaps in legal information and administrative access that could leave some residents unable to complete processes or identify available remedies.

Across the Kiryandongo FGDs, participants, particularly younger participants, described limited or no access to legal information.<sup>53</sup> Distance and mobility constraints also appeared to affect whether people in remote clusters could reach available support.

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**“We don’t have information on legal services.”**  
*- Young male South Sudanese refugee, Kiryandongo Settlement.*

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<sup>48</sup> FGD men, Seeta, Greater Kampala.

<sup>49</sup> FGDs multiple clusters, Kiryandongo.

<sup>50</sup> The FGDs did not establish how many residents were unregistered or had been deactivated. The scale of the issue therefore remains unclear.

<sup>51</sup> FGD women, Cluster MR, Kiryandongo.

<sup>52</sup> FGD youth, Cluster P, Kiryandongo.

<sup>53</sup> FGD youth, Cluster P, Kiryandongo.

## Protection implications

Legal identity, registration, legal information and access to remedy functioned as gateways to other rights and services. Where procedures were unclear, costly, inaccessible or not trusted, people could remain unable to resolve disputes, complete administrative processes or access assistance.

## 4.7 Safety, Wellbeing and Coping

Safety concerns were closely tied to the pressures participants were already carrying. In Kampala, participants spoke about theft, robbery, eviction threats, family separation, harassment, discrimination and distress in the context of urban insecurity and financial strain. In Kiryandongo, safety concerns were more often linked to scarcity, shelter insecurity, shared facilities, food insecurity, youth exclusion and tensions within the settlement.

Wellbeing concerns also differed by location. Across the Kampala FGDs, participants referred directly to depression, anxiety and stress, linking these experiences to unemployment, difficulty meeting household needs, family separation, trauma from flight and uncertainty about the future. In Kiryandongo, distress was more often discussed through household tension, idleness, substance use, conflict, restricted opportunities and prolonged reliance on assistance. These accounts reflect participant-reported wellbeing concerns rather than clinical diagnoses.

### **Kampala: urban insecurity, family separation and distress**

In Kampala, theft or robbery, depression or anxiety and family separation were raised across all FGDs, while eviction threats were also frequently discussed. Participants described harassment, discrimination, intimidation and urban insecurity, including concerns about alleged extortion by individuals said to be impersonating security actors. Women and girls also raised mobility-related safety concerns. Household composition also shaped perceptions of safety.

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**“Most of us women are just living with our children, no men. So we live in fear due to the insecurity of theft and robbery.”**

**- Female Sudanese refugee, Kampala.**

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Participants described substantial distress linked to unemployment, inability to meet household needs, separation from family members, trauma from flight and uncertainty about the future. In one youth FGD, participants reported that remarks about their country of origin could trigger traumatic memories.<sup>54</sup> In another FGD, the discussion had to be discontinued due to the significant emotional distress experienced by participants.<sup>55</sup> These examples indicate substantial reported distress,

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<sup>54</sup> FGD youth, Mukono-Seeta, Greater Kampala.

<sup>55</sup> FGD women, Kazo, Greater Kampala.

although the FGDs do not establish the scale or clinical nature of mental health needs.

Family, faith and community networks provided emotional and practical support, particularly where formal assistance was limited or difficult to access. Participants' accounts nevertheless suggest that informal support did not always meet the level of need described, especially among young people, separated families and those under pressure to provide for others.<sup>56</sup> Participants also indicated that available formal psychosocial support did not match the level of need described.

### **Kiryandongo: scarcity, safety and social tension**

In Kiryandongo, theft or robbery, food insecurity and shelter insecurity were raised across all FGDs. Participants linked safety concerns to overcrowding, inadequate lighting, shared facilities, resource shortages, and movement within the settlement. They also raised intra-community violence, and limited opportunities for young people.<sup>57</sup> Some male youth reported that perceived idleness increased their exposure to arrest and also linked competition over scarce resources, perceptions that assistance favoured newer arrivals, to resentment, theft and gang-related activity.

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*“Since we are youth, we are sometimes unlawfully arrested because we are idle.”  
- Young male South Sudanese refugee, Kiryandongo Settlement.*

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Wellbeing concerns were often discussed in relation to food insecurity, household resource shortages, overcrowding and prolonged reliance on assistance. Participants also referred to household tension, youth idleness and substance use, although the FGDs do not establish direct causal relationships between these issues.<sup>58</sup>

Relations with the Ugandan host community were generally described as peaceful.<sup>59</sup> Some participants nevertheless raised specific tensions between Sudanese ethnic or tribal groups within the settlement. These concerns were raised by some participants and were not described as characterising relations across the settlement. Scarcity and limited opportunities were nevertheless discussed alongside pressure on relationships within some communities.

### **Protection implications**

Safety and wellbeing concerns were mutually reinforcing. Insecurity, family separation, material pressure and uncertainty could compound distress, restrict movement and place strain on household and community relationships. Informal family, faith and community networks provided some support, while participants indicated that available formal psychosocial and protection support did not always match the level of need described.

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<sup>56</sup> FGD men, Seeta, Greater Kampala.

<sup>57</sup> FGD men, Cluster C, Kiryandongo.

<sup>58</sup> FGD youth, Cluster P, Kiryandongo.

<sup>59</sup> FGDs women with disabilities, Cluster E; older men, Cluster G; Cluster S; and women, Cluster MR, Kiryandongo.

## 4.8 Unequal Exposure: Gender, Age, Disability and Caregiving

Protection risks were not experienced evenly within households and communities. Gender, age, disability, caregiving responsibilities, household composition and youth exclusion shaped how participants experienced service barriers, housing or shelter insecurity, livelihood pressure, safety risks and access to information. These factors often overlapped: a woman might also be a caregiver, an older person might have a disability, and a young person might face both livelihood exclusion and safety concerns.

In Kampala, persons with disabilities were repeatedly identified as facing particular barriers, alongside women caring for children alone, caregivers of children with disabilities, older persons and young people with limited education or work pathways. In Kiryandongo, older persons, persons with disabilities and women or female-headed households were prominent in discussions, with risks shaped by distance, queues, food access, shelter conditions, WASH access and care responsibilities. These patterns are discussion-level signals of who participants considered most exposed, not a ranking of vulnerability across the wider refugee population.

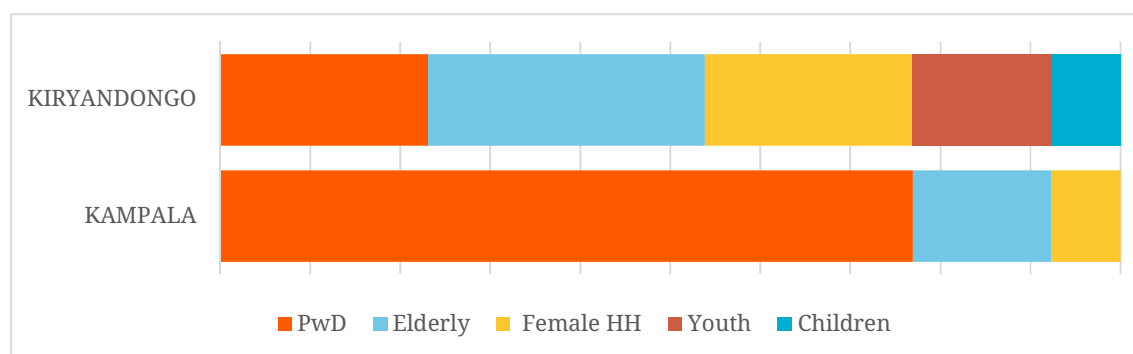


Figure 6: Groups identified by participants as facing heightened protection risks: frequency of coded mentions in FGDs, by location

### Women, girls and caregiving responsibilities

In Kampala, women described the pressure of raising children alone where partners remained in Sudan or were absent. Irregular income intensified the burden of meeting rent, food, school, health and transport costs. In one women's FGD, participants described many households as led by women without partners, while caregivers of children with disabilities described additional barriers linked to transport, cost, stigma and the difficulty of leaving children unattended.<sup>60</sup>

Women and girls also described safety and dignity concerns in daily movement and household life. Limiting movement after dark was raised as a common safety strategy across Kampala discussions. Girls described harassment on public transport,

<sup>60</sup> FGD women, Kazo, Greater Kampala

fear of unlit roads and discomfort passing bars at night.<sup>61</sup> Shared bathrooms without gender separation also raised privacy and dignity concerns.<sup>62</sup> These accounts indicate that women and girls often managed safety risks by restricting their own movement.

In Kiryandongo, women and girls' concerns were more often linked to food pressure, care burdens, school dropout, early marriage or pregnancy, restricted movement and WASH access. Female-headed households and women with care responsibilities were described as facing substantial pressure to secure food and meet household needs.

Gender-based violence, sexual violence and female genital mutilation were raised in several Kiryandongo FGDs, including by male youth. Participants in some groups also reported that cases of sexual or domestic violence could be handled through clan negotiations rather than formal reporting or referral pathways.<sup>63</sup> These accounts point to protection risks that may remain partially hidden, particularly where disclosure is constrained by stigma, cultural norms or limited referral options.

### **Older persons, persons with disabilities and caregivers**

In Kampala, persons with disabilities and caregivers faced barriers linked to cost, transport, scattered specialist services and limited ability to work or seek help. Older persons faced transport and language barriers. In one women's FGD with persons with disabilities, participants reported leaving, and in some cases locking, children with disabilities at home when they needed to work or seek services. This reflected the difficult trade-offs created by inaccessible support and care arrangements.<sup>64</sup>

In Kiryandongo, older persons and persons with disabilities faced long queues, distance to food and water points, inaccessible shelters and WASH facilities, and reduced ability to reach services, including health care. Participants described shelter and WASH facilities as difficult for some people to use safely, including older women and persons with disabilities.<sup>65</sup>

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*“Due to the long distances and queues at health facilities and water points, it is hard for us, the elderly, to access some services.”*  
*- Older female, South Sudanese refugee, Kiryandongo Settlement.*

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Older participants also described continuing to carry substantial household responsibilities despite reduced physical capacity. In one FGD, older women reported a perception that available organisations could offer them little support.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> FGD adolescent girls, Seeta, Greater Kampala.

<sup>62</sup> FGDs women, Kazo, and men, Seeta, Greater Kampala.

<sup>63</sup> FGDs women, Cluster L; young South women, Cluster I; older women, Cluster N; and youth, Cluster P, Kiryandongo.

<sup>64</sup> FGD women with disabilities, Kawempe-Mbogo, Greater Kampala.

<sup>65</sup> FGDs older women, Cluster N; men, Cluster B; and women, Cluster MR, Kiryandongo.

<sup>66</sup> FGDs older women, Cluster N Kiryandongo.

## **Children and young people**

In Kampala, young people described constrained access to education, English-language learning, vocational training and university pathways. Boys and young men were also reported to face pressure to provide, frustration, language isolation, political and security concerns, alleged extortion and gaps in trauma-related support. Some participants perceived psychosocial support as more available to girls than to boys, despite reported trauma and distress among boys and young men.

In Kiryandongo, school dropout was raised across most FGDs and was linked to school costs, long distances, overcrowding, limited household income and children working to support household needs.

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*“We cannot even go to school anymore because there is no [money for] school fees.”  
- Young male South Sudanese refugee, Kiryandongo Settlement.*

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Participants also raised limited livelihood pathways, conflict between community or national groups within schools, weak access to legal information, arrest concerns, substance use, gangs and violence among boys and young men.

## **Protection implications**

Protection risks were experienced unevenly and were intensified by overlapping factors including gender, age, disability, caregiving responsibilities and youth exclusion. These factors shaped who could reach services, maintain livelihoods, move safely, preserve privacy and use coping strategies without assuming additional risk. Sensitive concerns may also remain under-reported where disclosure and referral options are limited.

# 5 Comparative Analysis: Different Protection Pathways, Unequal Capacity to Absorb Shocks

The findings point to shared protection pressures across Kampala and Kiryandongo, but not to a single pattern of risk. In both settings, participants described difficulty meeting basic needs, uncertainty about the future, barriers to services and legal information, household strain and reliance on coping strategies. These pressures affected safety, dignity, health, education, wellbeing and people's ability to make informed decisions about the future.

The pathways through which these pressures were experienced differed by setting. In Kampala, protection risks were shaped largely by irregular income, dependence on rental housing, high cash costs, documentation concerns and dispersed urban services. In Kiryandongo, they were shaped more strongly by food insecurity, constrained livelihoods, distance to services, shortages, inadequate shelter and WASH conditions, and prolonged displacement. These differences reflected the distinct urban self-settled and formal settlement environments in which participants lived, including variations in service delivery, mobility, income, documentation and social support. They should not be interpreted as nationality-based risk profiles.

## **Shared pressures, different pathways**

In both locations, participants described overlapping pressures around food, income, services, housing or shelter, legal information, safety and future options. Housing, shelter, WASH and HLP concerns were not stand-alone technical issues. They interacted with income security, legal identity, service access, gender, disability, age, caregiving responsibilities and social support.

Future intentions also need to be read in this context. Decisions about staying, returning or moving onward were shaped by current conditions, constraints and available options, rather than fixed preferences. For many participants, “staying” reflected limited alternatives as much as intention: the absence of safe return, uncertainty around onward movement and the difficulty of meeting daily needs where they are now.

### **Kampala: cash pressure, rental exposure and dispersed services**

In Kampala, protection risks were closely linked to the cost of living and the need for cash. Income disruption could affect several areas at once: rent payments, food expenditure, health care, school fees, transport and access to support. This meant that a change in income or remittances could quickly produce several interconnected protection consequences.

Rental dependence was a central feature of the urban protection environment. When remittances or informal earnings were interrupted, households could quickly face eviction threats, withheld deposits, discriminatory landlord practices or disruption to household stability and proximity to services and support networks. Documentation and registration concerns added another layer of risk, particularly where participants feared exposure, could not afford travel to registration locations or did not know where to obtain reliable legal information.

Access to services also failed in distinctly urban ways. Services may have been known, but not reachable, affordable or trusted. Cost, language barriers, unregistered status, confidentiality concerns, transport requirements and scattered providers meant that people could remain excluded even when services existed.

### **Kiryandongo: food insecurity, distance and prolonged settlement pressure**

In Kiryandongo, protection risks were more closely linked to food insufficiency, limited livelihood progression, reliance on assistance, distance to services and shelter or WASH conditions. These conditions contributed to repeated household trade-offs and reliance on coping practices that could affect health, education, dignity and family stability.

Food and service access were also tied to mobility: older persons, persons with disabilities and caregivers faced particular barriers where distribution points, water points or services required long walks, queues or repeated journeys.

Shelter and WASH concerns also shaped daily safety and dignity. Participants described deteriorating shelters, shared sanitation facilities, limited water access, privacy concerns and inaccessible facilities. Poor shelter conditions, shared infrastructure and accessibility barriers placed greater pressure on people with reduced mobility, women and girls, and those with caregiving responsibilities.

Legal and administrative barriers followed a different pathway from Kampala. In Kiryandongo, concerns centred more on interrupted registration, deactivation, document recovery, border-crossing issues and limited access to legal information. Where people lacked clear information or were unable to complete administrative processes, access to services and future decision-making could be affected.

### **Unequal capacity to absorb shocks**

Protection risks were not experienced evenly within either setting. Persons with disabilities, older persons, caregivers, female-headed households, children and youth were identified as facing particular barriers to accessing services, maintaining livelihoods, securing housing or shelter and using informal coping strategies safely. These categories overlap and should not be treated as separate or mutually exclusive.

The form of exclusion differed by setting. In Kampala, exposure was often intensified by cost, transport, language, scattered services and the difficulty of combining caregiving with work or service access. In Kiryandongo, distance, queues, food access, shelter and WASH conditions created more prominent physical and practical barriers.

Women's and girls' risks also differed by setting. In Kampala, restricted movement, single-parent or household burden, harassment, unsafe transport, dark routes and WASH privacy concerns were more visible. In Kiryandongo, school dropout, early marriage or pregnancy, GBV or sexual violence, FGM, household burden and restricted movement were more prominent. Men and boys also faced specific pressures, including provider stress, youth exclusion, limited livelihood and education pathways, legal-information gaps, distress and safety concerns.

### **How access fails differently**

In both settings, the existence or awareness of a service did not establish that it was affordable, safe, confidential, inclusive or possible to use. In Kampala, practical access was constrained mainly by cost, language, registration and documentation concerns, confidentiality fears, HLP exposure and dispersed services. In Kiryandongo, access was constrained mainly by distance, shortages, infrastructure limitations, accessibility barriers, limited information and shelter-related conditions.

Legal and HLP access also followed distinct contextual pathways. In Kampala, legal need was strongly linked to tenancy and eviction concerns, registration barriers, confidentiality fears and the difficulty of reaching dispersed legal and support services. In Kiryandongo, legal need was more closely linked to registration interruption or deactivation, document recovery, limited legal information, border-crossing concerns, shelter insecurity and land-related pressure.

The central issue is therefore not only whether services exist, but whether people can use them safely, practically and with dignity.

### **Agency, coping and future options**

Households in both settings drew on remittances, family networks, informal livelihood activity, faith, neighbours and available services to manage pressure. These resources represented important capacities, but participants described them as uneven and often insufficient to absorb repeated shocks. Some coping strategies reduced immediate pressure while affecting food, health, education, safety, mobility, housing or shelter stability.

The findings indicate that access to rights, services, reliable information and material resources affected not only immediate safety, but also people's capacity to preserve agency and future options. Return, remaining in Uganda and onward movement should therefore be understood as decisions shaped by changing constraints and opportunities rather than fixed or independent preferences.

# 6 Recommendations

The following recommendations arise from the report's comparative analysis of FGDs with self-settled Sudanese refugees in Kampala and South Sudanese refugees in Kiryandongo Settlement. While grounded in the experiences of these specific populations and locations, the research identifies wider issues relevant to Uganda's refugee response.

Urban self-settled and formal settlement contexts create different protection risks and access barriers. The recommendations therefore support differentiated but connected responses, integrated within the wider refugee response, that reduce immediate risk while preserving agency, future options and pathways to self-reliance and durable solutions.

## Recommendations to Donors

1. **Fund differentiated protection delivery models within a coherent national response.** Financing should allow protection actors to adapt programme design, staffing, outreach and referral systems to the distinct risks and access pathways affecting urban self-settled refugees and refugees living in formal settlements.
2. **Prioritise flexible, multi-year funding for legal aid, registration and documentation support.** This should include decentralised and confidentiality-sensitive urban outreach, as well as support addressing registration interruption, deactivation, document recovery and legal-information gaps in formal settlement contexts.
3. **Increase investment in context-specific livelihoods and economic inclusion.** Urban programming should reflect reliance on informal work, self-employment and cash-based markets, while settlement programming should account for constrained farming, limited casual labour and dependence on assistance. Funding should recognise refugees' existing professional, business and farming experience. In settlement settings, financing should connect livelihoods with food security and protection outcomes.
4. **Fund accessible mental health and psychosocial support at a scale proportionate to reported need.** Support should be available to women, men, girls and boys and integrated into wider protection, legal and referral systems, while maintaining access to specialised services.
5. **Support regular, disaggregated protection monitoring and comparative analysis.** Data systems, including PowerBI and related dashboards, should enable analysis by location, sex, age and disability and track changing protection risks over time rather than relying on one-off assessments.

## Recommendations to Government

1. **Extend accessible registration and documentation services to urban-based refugees and strengthen administrative pathways in settlements.** Urban refugees should not be required to travel to settlements to access registration and documentation services, while clear procedures should

address registration interruption, deactivation, document recovery and failed biometric or interview cases.

2. **Clarify and communicate refugees' rights in relation to freedom of movement, arrest and detention.** Information should explain applicable procedures, legal safeguards and confidential options for seeking assistance or reporting alleged arbitrary arrest, detention, extortion or unofficial payment requests.
3. **Strengthen coordination between OPM, Kampala Capital City Authority, municipal authorities, local government and relevant line ministries.** Urban refugees should be integrated into local service planning, while coordination in settlements should strengthen service coverage, referral pathways and planning around distance, shortages, accessibility and infrastructure constraints.
4. **Review work permit and right-to-work processes affecting access to formal economic opportunities.** In urban settings, reduce legal, procedural and practical barriers to employment, business registration and skills recognition. In settlement settings, address barriers affecting farming, small enterprise, casual work and the use of existing professional and livelihood experience.
5. **Improve equitable and accessible health, education, protection, shelter and WASH services across both contexts.** Improve equitable and accessible health, education, protection, shelter and WASH services across both contexts. In urban settings, this should include reducing cost, transport, language and documentation barriers and improving access to dispersed services. In settlement settings, it should include addressing distance, shortages, inadequate shelter, WASH conditions and accessibility barriers.

#### Recommendations to INGOs, including NRC and international partners

1. **Design protection and legal assistance programming as differentiated but connected models under one country strategy.** Urban programming should use decentralised urban outreach including mobile legal assistance where appropriate, while settlement programming should strengthen settlement-based case management, paralegal structures and cluster-level outreach. Legal and information services should support informed decisions on remaining in Uganda, return, temporary travel or onward movement without promoting a particular outcome.
2. **Strengthen coordinated referral pathways across legal aid, registration, health, education, protection and psychosocial services.** Referral systems should include follow-up to determine whether transport, cost, language, documentation, confidentiality or accessibility prevented people from reaching or using support.
3. **Develop context-specific community protection structures.** Develop context-specific community protection and accountability structures. This should include trained and supervised neighbourhood focal points and information networks in urban settings, and trained and supervised cluster-level structures in settlement settings, with clear safeguarding standards, feedback channels and links to formal service providers.
4. **Integrate psychosocial support and safe referral into protection and legal case management.** Programming, including ICLA programs, should address the distinct concerns raised by women, men, girls and boys, including unmet support needs among boys and young men and confidential referral needs relating to GBV, sexual violence and harmful practices.

5. **Use comparative protection evidence for coordinated advocacy and programme adaptation.** Priorities should include urban registration, access to work and economic inclusion, food security, education retention, shelter and WASH conditions, and disability- and age-inclusive services.

#### Recommendations to National and Local NGOs and Specialised Service Providers

1. **Develop coordinated, context-specific referral pathways using neighbourhood level approaches in urban settings and cluster-level approaches in settlements.** These pathways should link legal aid, registration, health, education, child protection, GBV, shelter, livelihoods and psychosocial services, with follow-up to confirm whether referrals were completed.
2. **Expand accessible and verified information on registration, documentation, legal assistance and available services.** Information should be provided in relevant languages and formats and should account for disability, age, literacy and confidentiality concerns.
3. **Strengthen age- and disability-inclusive service delivery.** This should include accessible facilities, alternatives to long queues, caregiver support and outreach to people who cannot make repeated journeys to distribution or service points.
4. **Maintain confidential, survivor-centred referral pathways** for GBV, sexual violence, early marriage, female genital mutilation and child-protection concerns. Community mediation should not replace specialised support or access to formal reporting and remedy options where survivors choose to use them.
5. **Expand child- and youth-focused support around the strongest identified barriers** including school retention, language learning, vocational pathways, legal information and psychosocial support. In urban settings, attention should focus on cost, dispersed services and transitions into education and work. In settlement settings, particular attention should be given to school dropout, child work, overcrowded schools and limited livelihood pathways.

#### Recommendations to Refugee-Led Organisations, Community-Based Organisations and Community Leaders

Actions should be undertaken according to each actor's mandate, capacity and safeguarding competence.

1. **Provide trusted neighbourhood- and cluster-level information** on registration, documentation, legal services, health care, education, referrals and available assistance, clearly distinguishing verified procedures from rumours, unofficial advice and requests for payment.
2. **Identify and safely refer people facing additional access barriers,** including older persons, persons with disabilities, caregivers, female-headed households, unregistered residents and households affected by registration deactivation. Community actors should avoid investigating sensitive cases or collecting personal information beyond what is necessary for safe referral.
3. **Establish confidential links with specialised GBV, child-protection, legal, health and psychosocial providers.** Serious protection cases should not be resolved solely through fines, family negotiations, clan mechanisms or pressure on survivors to accept informal settlements.

4. **Support meaningful participation and feedback** by women, caregivers, persons with disabilities, older persons and young people. Youth participation should include adolescent girls, boys and young adults rather than relying only on adult community representatives.
5. **Promote peaceful coexistence without stigmatising particular groups.** Responses to resource-related tensions, discrimination, theft, substance use and gang-related concerns should avoid collective blame, connect affected people with formal protection and psychosocial support, and recognise young people as participants in community solutions rather than primarily as security risks.