

New Vision

ADVERTISER SUPPLEMENT

ACCORDING TO THE OPM, THE POPULATION OF REFUGEES IN

Uganda stands with

Uganda is set to host the solidarity summit on Friday. It is expected to be attended by over 30 heads of government, heads of agencies of the UN system and donors to secure new funding for the refugees and host communities in Uganda. Uganda hopes to raise \$2b (sh7.1 trillion) at the solidarity summit for refugees to provide services to the increasing number of exiles and the host communities. VISION REPORTERS write

Millions of refugees fleeing conflict and famine in South Sudan, Burundi, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo have found sanctuary in Uganda, thanks to the country's compassionate refugee policy.

Uganda is the second-largest refugee-hosting country in the world after Turkey, with a refugee population nearing one million. Uganda has one of the world's most compassionate refugee policies, which grants migrants land to build a home and rights to travel and work that are unheard of elsewhere.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Filippo Grandi, recently warned that Uganda was on breaking point, with over 3,000 refugees entering the country daily.

Initially, the UN expected roughly 300,000 South Sudanese refugees to come to Uganda in 2017, but by March this year, the estimate had risen to 400,000.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister, Ruhakana Rugunda, said: "Uganda has continued to maintain open borders, but this unprecedented mass influx is placing enormous strain on our public services and local infrastructure."

Focus on refugees

The World Refugee Day, which was celebrated yesterday is observed every year in order to raise public awareness about the plight of refugees throughout the world. The day was declared by the United Nations General Assembly in the Resolution 55/76 on December 4, 2000 and worldwide celebrations started in 2001.

The 2001 World Refugee Day celebration also coincided with the 50th anniversary of the 1951 Convention on Refugees status by the United Nations General Assembly. Since 2001, the day has been celebrated annually all over the world, although on different dates in many countries.

"In Uganda, refugees are provided with a variety of life-saving assistance, safety and protection by government agencies and organisations. The goal of celebrating this day is to increase public awareness among the public by sharing refugee-related stories," says



Refugees carrying supplies given to them by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees last week. Photos by Eddie Ssejjoba

Apollo Kazungu, the commissioner for refugees in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Refugee crisis

As of 2015, there were 65.3 million refugees in the world. Among them, nearly 21.3 million were categorised under the age of 18. The UNHCR says nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution.

In its mid-2016 report, the UNHCR indicated that low and middle-income nations in the Middle East, Asia and Africa carry the biggest refugee burden and Uganda features prominently in this group. Uganda is also host to a number of refugees from neighbouring DR Congo, Rwanda, Kenya, Burundi and the horn of Africa countries, including Somalia.

However, the biggest number of refugees in Uganda now is from South Sudan. Refugees continue streaming into Uganda to escape the fighting between armed groups in the youngest African state.

The latest round of fighting flared up hardly a year after South Sudanese president Salva Kiir and his embattled deputy, Riek Machar, signed a comprehensive agreement in August 2015. This was aimed at ending the fighting that broke out in December 2013 after Kiir sacked his deputy and dissolved the cabinet.

South Sudanese influx

In a report published on June 7, 2017,

the UNHCR disclosed that 6,260 South Sudanese refugees arrived in Uganda in the first week of June. The arrivals were an average of 894 refugees arriving in the country daily. The majority of the South Sudanese refugees reside in settlements in northern Uganda.

At least 272,206 are in Bidibidi, Yumbe district, 148,381 are in Palorinya, Moyo district, 86,770 are in Rhino camp, 107,330 in Imvepi, both in

Arua district and 23,625 are in Palabek, Lamwo in Kitgum district. The number of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda now stands at 956,822.

Aringa MP Ashraf Noah Olega, says Yumbe district's single biggest challenge is resource sharing.

"We share the same services, health centres, boreholes and other resources with refugees, thus straining the limited resources," he says.

Food requirement

The World Food Programme puts the monthly food requirement for the refugees to at least \$12m (sh42b). The UN agency for refugees in Kampala, in a recent statement, indicated that last year they received only 40% of the \$251m (sh889b) requested for humanitarian assistance and this year, they would need about \$558m (sh2 trillion).

Grandi, while in Uganda in March, stressed that Uganda cannot handle Africa's largest refugee crisis alone.

"The lack of international attention to the suffering of the South Sudanese people is failing some of the most vulnerable people in the world when they most desperately need our help," he said at the time.

In a joint statement, Grandi and Rugunda appealed to the international community for urgent and massive support for the thousands of South Sudan refugee. Rugunda said the surge in refugees had placed "enormous strain" on public services and infrastructure, with food and clean water running short.

According to Olega, the refugees are being continuously sensitised on how resources are strained and how to use them sparingly. He says although the Government and humanitarian organisations such as the UNHCR are providing support, increasing support would be crucial.

"We need more boreholes,

Challenges faced

According to the Minister for Disaster preparedness and Refugees, Hilary Onek, Uganda spent \$150m (sh544b) on providing, among others, security, education, health and sanitation facilities to refugees and host communities last year.

In addition, the UN system spent \$15m. More money is needed to restore the broken infrastructure and degraded environment caused by the refugee influx.

Consequently, the UN resident co-ordinator, Rosa Malango, stressed the need to relieve the host communities of the pressure presented by refugees, especially in West Nile, which has high poverty levels and low human development index.

The UNHCR says the recent flooding of refugees from South Sudan has affected the provision of accommodation for refugees in a number of settlements, including Palorinya and Palabek. The organisation says in many cases, parents are not able to secure jobs outside the camps to provide income for their families.

Furthermore, because of school shortages in the overcrowded settlements, refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than non-refugee children.

Preventable and treatable diseases like diarrhoea, measles and malaria also threaten the health of refugee children, especially those under five, reports the UNHCR.

REFUGEE DAY

ADJUMANI HAD ALMOST OUTSTRIPPED THAT OF RESIDENTS refugees, needs support

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infrastructure and even support going towards the education sector to accommodate the refugees we have welcomed to our district," Olega says.

Why more support is needed

Uganda's approach to dealing with refugees has long been among the most progressive anywhere on the African continent. Upon receiving refugee status, refugees are provided with small pieces of land in settlements integrated within the host community.

This approach has enhanced social cohesion and allowed both refugees and host communities to live together peacefully.

The land for these settlements is provided by the Government in the mid and south-western Uganda.

In northern Uganda, where the vast majority of South Sudanese refugees are being hosted, the land has been donated by the host community, an

outstanding display of generosity towards people fleeing war and conflict.

As a result, Uganda was chosen as a role model for pioneering a comprehensive approach to refugee protection, which complements humanitarian responses with targeted development action, benefiting both refugees and the communities hosting them.

This was adopted as part of the New York Declaration on Refugees and Migrants at the UN general assembly last year and is now also being rolled out in other displacement crises — offering hope to millions of refugees worldwide.

However, in the face of severe underfunding and the growing refugee emergency in the world, Uganda's ability to realise a model that allows refugees to thrive now risks being jeopardised.

According to the UNHCR, it urgently needs more than a quarter of a billion



New arrivals. About 800 refugees arrive in the country daily

US dollars to support South Sudanese refugees in Uganda this year.

Settlements

Refugees reside in settlements namely; Nakivale, Oruchinga, Kyangwali,

Nyumanzi Bidibidi, Pagirinya, Kyaka and Yumbe Imvepi. There are also urban refugees, who mostly reside in Kisenyi and Nsambya in Kampala. Bidibidi in Yumbe district currently hosts 272,000 refugees, the highest

number in any other place in the world.

Uganda's open borders have exposed it to an influx of refugees, which is straining the country's resources and services in 12 districts. These currently have over 5.8 million people according to the 2014 census by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics — Yumbe is one of those districts.

Others are Kamwenge, Kyegegwa, Isingiro, Hoima, Kiryandongo, Rukungiri, Kampala and Kyenjojo. Five of the 12 districts are located in West Nile and part of Acholi, through which an average 2,000 refugees enter the country daily, according to the OPM and UNHCR statistics.

According to the OPM, the population of refugees in Adjumani had almost outstripped the number of locals, who are about 220,000. UNHCR and the OPM estimate that a further 400,000 refugees will arrive in Uganda before the end of the year due to the recurring cycle of instability and insecurity, mainly in South Sudan.



FINN CHURCH AID (FCA)

Improving access to Quality Education in Uganda

Finn Church Aid's (FCA) operations in Uganda span across the rights to quality education, sustainable livelihoods and peace. FCA's role and responsibility has grown in response to the massive influx of refugees from South Sudan since July 2016.

The resource-scarce West Nile region hosts the majority of over 900,000 South Sudanese refugees, and we seek to enable more and more children to obtain quality education.

Other key areas include skills training and supporting the livelihoods, particularly of young people and women. All our education responses have inter-linkages with protection activities to ensure children have an opportunity to study in safe and protective learning environments.

In 2016, FCA reached 14 935

direct beneficiaries in Uganda (9,128 women, 2,675 men, 1,481 girls and 1,651 boys).

Following the renewed fighting in South Sudan, the number of South Sudanese refugees has increased rapidly in Uganda. As a reliable humanitarian actor, FCA was invited by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) to respond to the influx in July 2016. In the initial phases, FCA participated in the overall response by providing support staff to the registration process of the refugees at the transit centres along the border entries, and later mobilised internal resources to construct the first permanent classroom structures in Bidibidi settlement to facilitate safe and protective learning of the students.

OPM and UNHCR acknowledged FCA's work and selected FCA as an implementing partner in

education and livelihoods for 2017 in Bidibidi, Yumbe district — the world's largest refugee settlement.

FCA supports and manages the education sector response in the settlement through the provision of school materials, construction of permanent classrooms and latrines, facilitating teacher training, and enhancing the capacities of the school staff and families to advocate for sustainable solutions to protection and livelihoods. FCA's other current donors in the refugee response include the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO) and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland.

Website: <https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/en/work/africa/uganda/>



Photo: Hugh Rutherford



Photo: Hugh Rutherford