

## **FUNDING GAPS THREATEN CRITICAL AID FOR REFUGEES IN UGANDA**

### **27 June 2018: Joint statement by 26 international NGOs in Uganda on the need for urgent action to address gaps in funding for the refugee response.**

Uganda hosts the largest number of refugees in Africa, and is among the top refugee hosting countries globally. Every day more people, mostly women and children, continue to arrive in search of safety. The Government of Uganda has shown tremendous generosity in opening its borders to so many vulnerable refugees and granting them access to land and services, freedom of movement and the right to work. However, the international community has not stepped up to share this responsibility, despite commitments made in the 2016 New York Declaration and the subsequent Global Compact for Refugees. Halfway through the year, Uganda's 2018 Integrated Refugee Response Plan (RRP) is only 6% funded and facing a critical shortfall. Where funding has been made available, it is largely short-term covering 3-6 months and unsuitable for the chronic long-term needs of vulnerable refugees.

Our organizations, working to support Uganda's comprehensive response, see the impact of this funding gap every day. The ongoing influx means services are seriously overstretched. Many refugees have no access to vital primary healthcare, and health centres are short of beds, medicine and staff. Access to water in some areas is just 60% of the recommended minimum standards, meaning refugees are going without adequate sanitation and safe water. Some refugees have to sleep overnight at tap stands in order to get water. This is putting lives at risk, as evidenced by the recent cholera outbreak in southwest Uganda which killed at least 49 people<sup>ii</sup>. After great effort the outbreak has only recently been brought under control, but could flare up again at any moment.

Having to walk several kilometres to access services means women and children are exposed to numerous risks. There are widespread reports of sexual violence against young children and women in and around settlements, yet the availability and quality of services is inadequate, which is also leading to under-reporting by survivors. For example, in Kyangwali settlement, just 1% of SGBV survivors receive health services<sup>iii</sup>. In addition, thousands of unaccompanied children are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation, and without increased investment in protection services their vulnerability will only increase. Many new arrivals show signs of severe psychological distress and trauma after their experiences, yet mental health and psychosocial support services are scarce.

Some 59% of refugee children in Uganda – around 300,000 children – are not receiving an education<sup>iv</sup>. Dozens of school structures that were constructed as temporary learning spaces are now on the verge of collapse, and there are no funds for repairs. Newly-built learning centres for new arrivals remain closed as there are no funds to open them. Meanwhile many teachers' salaries will soon run out, before the most critical time of the school year when exams must be sat. Girls are dropping out of school or failing to enroll, and as a result some are reverting to transactional sex or are married off early and often forcefully by their caregivers to make ends meet.

Some settlements, such as Kyaka II and Kyangwali, have doubled in size in recent months and the land and natural resources available for new refugees are rapidly shrinking, increasing the risk of inter-personal conflict within the settlements. In order to host new arrivals, existing refugees are being required to give away land they have depended on for cultivation, but have not been provided with alternatives to compensate them for the loss of food or income. Greater investment in diverse, dignified and durable livelihood options is needed if new refugees are to become self-reliant.

Given these huge needs and within a context of an already severely underfunded refugee response, we are extremely concerned by the allegations of fraud and corruption and fully support the donor

community's demands for greater accountability. In response to these allegations, in February UNCHR with the Government of Uganda launched the largest biometric refugee verification exercise worldwide. The exercise is now well underway, alongside implementation of other concrete steps, such as independent monitoring and improved reporting and referral systems, to ensure more transparent management of funds and aid in kind.

While verification goes on, it is clear the needs remain enormous and urgent. Refugees and their host communities cannot wait for assistance any longer. We urge the donor community to not only continue but urgently step up its contribution to the refugee response, to reflect the level of need.

We are extremely concerned that the funding gap is not only preventing effective service delivery and leading to a deterioration in welfare of existing refugees, but is also leaving Uganda seriously under-prepared for a major new refugee influx. More than 110,000 new refugees have already arrived in Uganda this year<sup>v</sup>, at an average rate of 767 people every day. The lack of funding and short-term nature of available funds means the humanitarian community was unable to prepare effectively for this influx. Another quarter of a million are expected by the end of the year, but any further escalations of violence or deterioration in food security in South Sudan or DRC could send this number spiraling. This time, donors must invest to ensure Uganda is better prepared to manage this ever-increasing number of refugees.

NGOs are already contributing significant financial and human resources, but we can only contribute so much. We urge donors to ensure that – while progress on the Joint Accountability Framework is monitored – the Refugee Response Plan is funded to reflect the scale of needs, and that, in the light and spirit of the CRRF, longer-term multi-year predictable funding is provided.

**Signed by 26 international organizations:**



<sup>i</sup> For example, UNHCR URRM settlement fact sheets Bidi Bidi December 2017, Imvepi January 2018, Rhino January 2018

<sup>ii</sup> UNICEF, Uganda CO humanitarian situation report, May 2018

<sup>iii</sup> REACH: Settlement factsheet, Kyangwali, March 2018

<sup>iv</sup> UNHCR, Uganda refugee response monitoring sector factsheet, education, January 2018

<sup>v</sup> UNHCR, as of 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018