



The JLOS Bulletin



Special Edition on the SUPREME Project

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Bridging Gaps: Enhancing Access to Justice for Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda



INSIDE

The Strategic Impact of the SUPREME Project in Northern Uganda

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Editors' Note

Championing Justice and Human Rights for Refugees in Uganda



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Uganda has long been recognised as a global leader in refugee response, not only for its progressive open-door policy but also for its commitment to ensuring that refugees enjoy fundamental rights, including access to justice and the rule of law. In a world where displacement is on the rise, Uganda stands out for its integrated approach, offering refugees the opportunity to live in settlements rather than confined camps, granting them freedom of movement, and allowing access to services available to nationals. However, ensuring legal protection for refugees comes with its own set of challenges.

This special edition of the JLOS Bulletin delves into the achievements, milestones and successes of the Security, Protection and Economic Empowerment in Uganda (SUPREME) Project implemented in the Justice, Law, and Order Sub-programme (JLOS) with support from the European Union. We explore how institutions such as the Judiciary, Police, Community Service, Local Council Courts, and legal aid service providers have over the last two (2) years worked to uphold justice for displaced

populations and their host communities in northern Uganda. From land disputes and gender-based violence cases to legal representation processes, we examine the barriers refugees face in accessing justice and the efforts being made to bridge these gaps.

Through in-depth analysis, expert opinions, and on-the-ground narratives, this edition seeks to highlight both the progress made and the areas that require urgent attention. As Uganda continues to balance its humanitarian commitments with national development goals, ensuring that justice remains accessible to all—regardless of status—must remain at the heart of policy and practice.

We invite you to engage with these critical discussions, reflect on the role of justice in refugee protection, and join the call for stronger, more inclusive justice systems. Feel free to reach out to the editorial team with feedback.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts and opinions.

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Overview of the SUPREME Project (Project Brief)



Mr. Nicolas Gonze from the EU Delegation in Uganda and Mr. Robert Kasande, the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice, and Constitutional Affairs during the handover ceremony of SUPREME project equipment to JLOS institutions.

Program: Security, Protection and Economic Empowerment in Uganda (SUPREME)

Project: Increased access to justice, improved security and protection of refugees and host communities in Northern Uganda

Implementation Period: 2022 - 2025

About the project: The project will focus on addressing justice needs and protection of refugees and host communities in Northern Uganda by increasing the presence of frontline JLOS actors; enhancing their capacities to ensure delivery of justice and protection; and supporting activities aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of human rights.

Budget: EUR 4,707,262

Location: Northern Uganda (refugee hosting districts)

Key Components:

- Increased presence and reach of JLOS frontline actors in refugee settlements and host communities.
- Enhanced capacity of frontline actors to respond to justice needs of refugees and host communities.
- Increased knowledge of rights and obligations by refugees and host communities
- Strengthened coordination of JLOS actors and duty bearers for improved access to justice and protection of refugees and host communities

Beneficiaries

- Refugees
- Host communities (Local councils, Refugee Welfare Councils, Community Legal Volunteers)

Impact:

- Enhanced sustained delivery of access to / administration of justice through physical infrastructure, improved service delivery, capacity building of duty bearers, information dissemination, coordination, and monitoring
- Improved capacity of local and national structures required to maintain strong and resilient communities in support of harmonious interaction between refugees, host communities and JLOS actors.

Alignment with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF):

At the heart of the CRRF is the inclusion and integration of refugees in host communities with access to critical socio-economic services. This project shall provide refugees and host communities with access to justice services aligned to their unique needs and socio-economic contexts.

Implementing partners: Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs; Judiciary; Uganda Police Force; Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions; Ministry of Internal Affairs; Uganda Human Rights Commission; Uganda Prisons Service; Ministry of Local Government; Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development; Justice Centres Uganda; Uganda Law Society; Law Development Centre; and the Governance and Security (JLOS) Secretariat. **JLOS**

Coordination of JLOS actors and stakeholders for improved access to justice and protection of refugees and host communities



Ms. Margaret Ajok, the SUPREME Project coordinator (right) with other stakeholders during a monitoring and evaluation visit in Adjumani district (Magistrates Court).

By Margaret Ajok and Edgar Kuhimbisa

Communication, Cooperation and Coordination (the 3Cs) are the embodiment of strategies embraced by the Governance and Security Programme (GSP)/JLOS Secretariat in its interactions with actors to ensure effective and efficient service delivery. The Justice, Law, and Order Sector (JLOS) initiative, which has evolved into the Justice, Law and Order Sub-programme under the Governance and Security Programme (GSP), plays a pivotal role in improving access to justice and the protection of refugees and host communities in Uganda. The JLOS initiative was initially set up by the Government of Uganda to streamline and reform the

justice sector, bringing together multiple institutions and actors working on justice-related issues. Its goal is to create a more coherent and effective justice system, ensuring that justice is accessible to all individuals, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

The 3Cs strategy strengthens the concept of the justice chain which requires actors to work together, be well coordinated, with clear communication lines, and collaborate to offer closely linked justice services to people. It promotes a seamless interaction between actors who are empowered to deliver justice effectively and efficiently to all.

The initiative to provide access to justice and protection for refugees and host communities through the SUPREME Project was conceived upon the realisation that while access to justice and protection is desired nationally, it is particularly challenging for refugees and host communities who compete for the meagre resources and services in their communities making them extremely vulnerable. In the justice chain, these communities are particularly challenged by poverty – making them unable to pay for private lawyers, the unfamiliar structure of the justice system – particularly for refugees, language barriers, long distances between the courts of law and the refugee settlements/host

communities among others. These communal challenges are worsened by internal JLOS institutional challenges such as inadequate personnel in hard-to-reach areas, vast areas of operation, and sparse physical representation of

of refugees and host communities, the JLOS actors continue to utilise existing coordination structures at institutional and sub-national levels (Chain-Linked Committees) at Regional and District levels to ensure a coordinated approach



While access to justice and protection is desired nationally, it is particularly challenging for refugees and host communities who compete for the meagre resources and services in their communities.



JLOS institutions in hard-to-reach areas across the country.

To address these challenges, the actors must be well coordinated.

The actors and stakeholders include communities, government and non-governmental institutions, organisations, Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) as well as communal structures whose mandate enables them to act on matters related to the provision and support of justice services. On the government side, the MDAs implementing this project include the Judiciary, Uganda Prisons Service, Uganda Police Force, Uganda Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Internal Affairs- Directorate of Community Services, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Ministry of Local Government, Justice Centers Uganda, and the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs (JLOS/ GSP Secretariat). The non-governmental actors include the UN agencies, and NGOs providing humanitarian aid, Legal Aid, and support services.

The stakeholders also include development partners like the European Union (EU). Through the SUPREME Project, the EU is generously supporting efforts towards providing access to Justice for all persons living in Uganda regardless of their citizenship – particularly refugees.

To strengthen the coordination of JLOS actors and duty bearers for improved access to justice and protection

and enhanced assessment of justice service delivery in target areas - Yumbe (Bidi Bidi), Terego (Imvepi), Madi-Okollo (Rhino camp), Koboko (Lobule), Moyo (Parolinya), Adjumani, and Lamwo (Palabek/Padibe).

The JLOS institutions and stakeholders have been pivotal in coordinating, and monitoring the progress of project interventions, reporting matters, and emerging issues, and providing the necessary feedback to ensure improved service delivery. This has been done through joint and independent monitoring visits of the actors, which has ensured an accurate evaluation of the project results.

The Judiciary in particular plays an important role in maintaining a coordinated workforce of justice actors at the regional and district levels through the Regional Chain Linked Committees and (RCC) the District Chain Linked Committee (DCC). RCCs and DCCs are coordinating platforms that ensure the effective functioning of the Justice chain at the regional and district levels. These Committees meet quarterly and monthly respectively to jointly plan, supervise, monitor, and evaluate performance against set targets. They also rally all district-based JLOS and non-JLOS resources towards the attainment of JLOS targets individually and collectively. The meetings are chaired by the most senior judicial officer in the region or district.

Under the SUPREME Project, the JLOS/GSP Secretariat has so far supported 27 DCC meetings, 19 inspections and 12 JLOS open days in Northern Uganda

The JLOS Open Days are publicity campaigns and an opportunity for the institutions to interact with the public and showcase the services provided by the institution.

These interventions have been largely successful and have witnessed an increased number of refugees and host communities accessing justice services.

Other successful interventions where actors have closely worked together during the implementation of the SUPREME project are: the mobile courts on justice for children and sexual and gender-based violence; the community service reform programme for petty offenders; the legal aid and support services by Justice Centers Uganda; training on human rights for actors and stakeholders; and the Justice for Children Programme which ensures that children in contact with the law are diverted from the criminal justice system, and supported through referrals and follow-ups for appropriate care and interventions.

The JLOS/GSP focus on communication, cooperation and coordination has proven vital in improving access to justice and protection for refugees and host communities. Ultimately, the project is expected to increase the presence of frontline JLOS actors, enhance their capacities to ensure the delivery of justice and protection and support activities aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of human rights. **JLOS**

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The Strategic Impact of the Supreme Project in Northern Uganda



A Police vehicle procured with support from the SUPREME Project at the Adjumani Police headquarters in Adjumani District.

By Lucy Ladira

The Justice Law and Order sub-programme has been coordinating the three-year EU-SUPREME project on “Access to Justice, Improved Security and Protection of Refugees and Host Communities in Northern Uganda.” This project affirms Uganda’s commitment to the progressive policy on refugees. It feeds into enhancing access to justice delivery which is targeted at both the supply and demand side through four key results: Increased presence and reach of JLOS frontline actors in refugee settlements and host communities; Enhanced capacity of frontline actors to respond to the justice needs of refugees and host communities; Increased knowledge of rights and obligations of refugees and host communities; and

Strengthened coordination of JLOS actors and duty bearers for improved access to justice and protection of refugees and host communities.

The project was cognisant of the challenges that refugees face in accessing justice which takes various forms: the unfamiliar structure of the justice system in Uganda; vulnerabilities due to factors such as poverty, and language barrier; long distance to justice service points; existence of informal justice systems which are not inclusive to refugees; the high cost of legal representation; and inadequate resources across the justice law and order institutions.

The project was implemented through the Judiciary, Uganda Prisons Services, Uganda Police Force, Uganda

Human Rights Commission, Ministry of Internal Affairs (Directorate of Community Services), Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Ministry of Local Government, Justice Centres Uganda, and the JLOS/GSP Secretariat. Interventions under the SUPREME project were designed to address the justice needs and strengthen the protection of refugees and host communities in Northern Uganda by increasing the presence of front-line JLOS actors, enhancing their capacities to ensure the delivery of justice and activities aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of human rights. A human rights-based approach was integrated to enhance the ability of state, non-state, and refugee-focused actors to provide equitable access to justice

to refugees and host communities. The project further supported strengthening the coordination of JLOS actors in the chain of justice and service providers for improved access to justice and protection of refugees.

Strategic Interventions

In terms of the increased presence and reach of JLOS frontline actors in refugee settlements and host communities, investments have been targeted towards deepening physical and functional presence in the refugee and host communities. The geographical location of justice service providers poses a key challenge to the end users. This is not helped by the poor and sometimes non-existent road network in the project location.

This intervention sought to address the fact that the administration of justice is affected by the porous borders where offenders cross without detection which leads to impunity and the increase in crime. Through the Project, new JLOS service points were opened to respond to crime and strengthen protection of refugees and host communities. These include female inmate wards, the opening of a Justice Centre in Yumbe, support to community service volunteers in refugee communities to foster closer service delivery, setting up of mobile complaints handling clinics, strengthening justice for children, conducting special sessions for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and justice for children and support to remand refugees in the criminal justice system.

Operationalisation and equipping of Local Council Courts was a key activity under the project. This is in recognizance of the fact that LCCs remain a court of first instance for most Ugandans and refugees.

It is important to note that throughout the project, consideration was made for gender dimensions, for example, the construction of the Women's Prison which was built according to the internationally accepted standards. The SUPREME Project continues to work on rehabilitation facilities for women since prisons are not only concerned with the

safety of persons but also the social and economic transformation of the inmates. Non-state actors continue to offer skills support for the women prisoners.

Regarding the enhanced capacity of frontline actors to respond to the

timely resolution of cases.

In terms of policing services, a major challenge has been the vast area of operation for the police, coupled with the long distance from the main stations to police posts which affects



Operationalization and equipping of Local Council Courts (LCCs) was a key activity under the project. This is in recognizance of the fact that LCCs remain a court of first instance for most Ugandans including refugees.



justice needs of refugees and host communities, all JLOS frontline actors were equipped with knowledge and skills to better handle disputes and criminal investigations in refugee settlements and host communities. Investments were made to procure tools to ease mobility and monitor project implementation thereby enhancing access to justice for refugees and host communities. The project focused on building the three 3Cs by intentionally bringing together all the state and non-state actors in a whole of community approach to discuss local challenges and craft contextual solutions. The activities were crafted to draw participation from across local government, the Office of the President, legal aid organisations, like FIDA Uganda, Uganda Law Society, Justice Centers Uganda and international organisations that offer support to refugees and the host communities. The mobile courts contributed to enhancing justice hence reducing case backlog and facilitating

the response time of the police. There is also a language barrier between the police and the refugees, creating an urgent need for translation services. Refugees' integration and fluid borders make it challenging to complete cases, as suspects take advantage and either return to their homes of origin when given police bond or re-integrate into the community which often conceals the suspects. Refugee response is also quite dynamic coupled with manpower shortage. There is a high personnel turnover, as refugee settlements are viewed as challenging. This affects soft investments like training on refugee policing when the personnel leave, hence the need for continuous training support. We note that there is a critical need for transportation to respond to crimes and police the vast area of operation.

The district leadership in Adjumani asserts that half of the population in the



Investments have been targeted towards deepening physical and functional presence in the refugee and host communities.



district are refugees, with a total of 20 refugee settlements. Adjumani requires a High Court circuit since it hosts the biggest prison facility. The district leadership across the project sites particularly commended community service as a game changer in the justice chain and recommended a boost in community service. Community service is a success with an increase in the number of refugees accessing the programme.

In terms of the Justice for Children programme, offenders have been supported in the justice chain through community service and have been resettled in their communities. The programme continues to strengthen the capacity of Probation officers to support the administration of justice.

The project sought to increase knowledge of the rights and obligations of refugees and host communities. In terms of rights awareness, the UHRC has been instrumental in training of JLOS actors, stakeholders, and the Refugee Welfare Committees (RWC). The Secretariat undertook routine and joint monitoring and coordination activities with the district authorities for quality delivery of services.

Key Lessons

Key lessons that we have since learned include; the need for more sensitization on justice service delivery; the need to effect Bye-Laws for communities at local levels; the need to promote community service at the local council courts level; the need for reception centers before remand homes are built; increased focus on mental health issues among the refugees; and Police personnel need to be trained in managing family conflicts which are rampant in settlements. The settlements are vast and highly populated and the ODPP has no accommodation units at the offices constructed. There will be a need for a mode of transport for most of the newly built facilities to ensure smooth and fast movement of duty bearers.

The JLOS Secretariat was instrumental in ensuring that the SUPREME Project targets were met



SUPREME Project stakeholders attend a coordination meeting.



The JLOS Secretariat was instrumental in ensuring that the SUPREME Project targets were met through deliberate and frequent monitoring of activities.



through deliberate and frequent monitoring of activities. M&E activities were aimed at measuring the success of the result areas as part of the planned routine interventions under the project to ensure timely and proper implementation. Monitoring was done through a series of activities that included, stakeholder meetings and project site visits with members of the District and Regional staff from the respective entities, members of Chain linked coordination committees, beneficiaries of the project, implementing partners like international organisations, non governmental organisations, District

leaders and officers in the respective offices of Local Government, Gender Labour and Social Development, Office of the Prime Minister, security agencies and well-wishers. Monitoring and Evaluation data is being used to inform future interventions including planning and reporting. **JLOS**

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Leaving Nobody Behind: Improving Access to Justice for Refugees in Uganda.

By Sarah Kekimuri



SUPREME project monitoring and evaluation team in Arua, West Nile.

For the past four years, the SUPREME project has been working to open doors to justice for refugees and host communities in Uganda's Moyo, Obongi, Terego, and Madi-Okollo districts. As the project draws to a close, it leaves behind strengthened pathways to legal support and hopes for a fairer future for the people in these communities.

Uganda stands as a pillar of stability and growth in the East Africa Great Lakes Region, a role shaped by its resilience through decades of post-independence challenges and civil conflicts, especially in the northern region. Today, Uganda has not only

gained stability but also shows great potential for economic growth. Yet, regional instability can still pose risks to its progress.

According to the UNHCR Report, by the end of 2024, Uganda hosted

1,740,000 refugees and asylum seekers, largely driven by ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, and Somalia. Most refugees come from South Sudan (55%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (31%), Somalia (3%), Burundi (2%),



By the end of 2024, Uganda hosted 1,740,000 refugees and asylum seekers, largely driven by ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Sudan, and Somalia



Sudan (3%) and other nationalities (6%). Women and children comprise 80% of these refugees, and around 60% have specific needs, including urgent medical care, legal and physical protection, and support for at-risk children.

In the West Nile region – a specific target area for the SUPREME Project, 259 refugees face legal issues, with 153 convicted and 111 awaiting trial, highlighting the vulnerability and complexity of their circumstances.

Imagine a world where justice is within everyone's reach, where societies are peaceful and inclusive, and no one is left behind. That is the promise of Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a call for equal access to justice and trustworthy institutions for all. At its heart is SDG 16.3, which unites the international community to promote the rule of law and ensure fair treatment for every person by 2030.



In the West Nile region, 259 refugees face legal issues, with 153 convicted and 111 awaiting trial, highlighting the vulnerability and complexity of their circumstances.



In Uganda, this commitment is more than just words. Through the Justice Law and Order Sub-programme (JLOS), the SUPREME project is making justice accessible for refugees, many of whom face complex legal hurdles as they rebuild their lives. Together, these initiatives are helping create pathways to justice, breaking down barriers, and offering a fairer chance at a better future for those who have already endured so

much. For Uganda's refugees, it is a step closer to a life where justice truly serves all.

The Refugees Act 2006 stands as a promise of protection, granting refugees the right to access courts, seek legal assistance, and address grievances, including issues at work. But for many refugees, this promise is not easily realised. Most work within Uganda's vast informal economy, where job roles and responsibilities are loosely defined. This lack of clear structure leaves refugees vulnerable, uncertain of how to defend their rights or hold employers accountable.

Even when refugees attempt to seek justice, the journey can be steep. court fees, bail requirements, and essential documentation often come at a high cost. Adding to this, judicial services and legal aid are frequently located far from refugee settlements, making access nearly impossible for many. Compounded by a lack of understanding about the laws and their rights or the justice process, many refugees face an uphill battle to claim the protections theoretically granted to them. For these individuals, the barriers are not just legal, they are personal, impacting their ability to find security and fairness in their new home.

To better address the justice needs of refugees, JLOS has implemented several supportive strategies. One key initiative connects refugees held in detention centres with key actors in the criminal justice system. These include lawyers, legal aid service providers, and other JLOS stakeholders who ensure the rights of refugees are respected, and that they receive fair treatment in court. Recognising the growing number of refugees, JLOS also focuses on expanding the reach of frontline justice actors, strengthening their skills, and providing essential services to both refugees and the host communities. This approach, grounded in human rights, encourages collaboration among state officials, non-governmental entities, and refugee-focused organisations, all working together to make justice accessible and fair for everyone involved.



Mobile court systems have also been adopted in refugee-hosting districts, such as Adjumani and Lamwo, to mitigate the long distances refugees often travel to formal courts.



Mobile court systems have also been adopted in refugee-hosting districts, such as Adjumani and Lamwo, to mitigate the long distances refugees often travel to formal courts. Mobile courts bring justice closer to refugee communities, utilising human resources more efficiently by proactively serving the population. This initiative ensures that legal services are accessible within refugee settlements, reducing reliance on police and conventional court premises.

Arua prison has implemented transitional justice initiatives for victims of sexual violence and torture from the conflict. These interventions combine legal aid with psychosocial activities, including counseling, as part of trauma recovery. Other skilling activities include music, soap making, brick-making, and briquette production to equip prisoners with income-generating skills for post-release reintegration.

Despite progress, barriers remain in access to justice for refugees. Challenges include limited transport for court attendance, scarce health facilities, and a shortage of language interpreters.

Justice for Children, an initiative within JLOS, highlights the need for greater support in juvenile justice and remand home intervention, noting that inadequate resources contribute

to recidivism. Currently, 30 children in Lamwo await transport to Gulu for remand. Without adequate transportation, children often complete their remand period without ever reaching remand homes.

Increased legal aid services for refugees have improved legal representation and empowered them to assert their rights. Justice Centers Uganda provides interpreters fluent in refugees' native languages, further ensuring a fair hearing. One beneficiary of the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) programme shared, "When I came to prison, I thought it was the end of my life. But through the training, I learned about sexual morality and gained new hope and knowledge."

The SUPREME project involves the systematic delivery of remand refugees to courts in the region to ensure timely access to legal proceedings. At the High Court in Arua, eight (8) refugees were produced in the last quarter, all of whom entered plea bargains and were convicted. In the Arua Chief Magistrate

Court, 33 refugees were presented, with outcomes including four convictions and one release.

For female inmates, Arua Prison facilitated the transfer of four women prisoners to the relevant courts, where they were all committed to trial. Meanwhile, in the Magistrate Court, 22 inmates were presented, with five released on bail, two acquitted, and three enrolled for plea bargains. Each transfer and hearing represent a significant step towards ensuring that refugee prisoners receive fair and timely access to justice.

Beyond Arua, other districts in the Northwestern region have also been active in processing refugee cases. In Yumbe, 23 prisoners were presented, resulting in 4 bails and one acquittal. In Moyo, 13 prisoners were transferred, with two receiving bail and one being acquitted. Similarly, in the Adjumani Chief Magistrate Court, 35 prisoners were delivered, leading to six bail grants and two acquittals. These coordinated efforts across multiple courts illustrate the impact of the remand linking

initiative in reducing the backlog of cases for refugee prisoners and expediting their access to justice.

According to Wandabwa Joseph, the regional rehabilitation and reintegration officer in Arua prison, these programmes have significantly decreased the number of refugees on remand. In the last quarter alone, the remand population dropped from 146 to 111 refugees. This reduction highlights the success of linking remand refugees to criminal justice actors and promoting timely court appearances. Through such targeted efforts, Uganda continues to demonstrate its commitment to improving justice access for refugees in alignment with the principles of SDG 16, ensuring that no one is left behind. **JLOS**

Sarah Kekimuri is a multimedia Journalist based in Kampala and co-founder of NaLaw Foundation.



Lamwo Prison facility constructed with support from the SUPREME Project.



A newly arrived family unpacking their things at a refugee camp (Source: medicalteams.org)

The Refugee Response in Uganda: A Historical Perspective

Uganda is Africa's largest refugee-hosting country with more than 1.7 million refugees residing within its borders. The East African nation deploys one of the most progressive policy responses to cross-border displacement on the continent. But this response faces headwinds—from declines in international support to the rise of climate-related displacement.

This brief provides an overview of Uganda's refugee response. It discusses the history of cross-border displacement in Uganda and the so-called "Uganda model" that emerged from this historical context. It also discusses key challenges and topics for the future success of the model, including the gap in funding, the threat of climate change, and the role of refugee-led organisations.

Historical Context of Cross-Border Displacement into Uganda

Uganda has hosted refugees and asylum seekers since before its independence from the United Kingdom in 1962. In the early 1940s, Uganda hosted several thousand Polish refugees who fled Europe during World War II. After an uprising against Rwanda's Tutsi monarchy in 1959, tens of thousands of Tutsis fled to Uganda.

Violent pogroms in Rwanda forced even more Tutsis to Uganda in the 1960s. Meanwhile, growing numbers of Sudanese fleeing violence in southern Sudan—also newly independent from the British—were confined to camps in northern Uganda.

Displacement trends reversed in the 1970s and early 1980s as Uganda became a refugee-generating country amid internal instability. By 1985, refugees and internally displaced persons made up seven per cent of the

country's population. Beginning in the late 1980s, an insurgency by the non-state armed group, the Lord's Resistance Army, caused further displacement in northern Uganda.

Instability and conflict, much of it interwoven in the broader Great Lakes region, continued to drive displacement in and around Uganda, even as the country became relatively more stable. The 1994 Rwandan genocide once more resulted in mass displacement north into Uganda, from which the Rwandan Patriotic Front had originated. A decades-long civil war between Sudan's government and the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army in southern Sudan resulted in recurring cycles of cross-border displacement south into Uganda. The First and Second Congolese Wars in the late 1990s and early 2000s killed and displaced millions across the Great Lakes region, including to the east of Uganda.

Over the last decade, Uganda has seen large-scale refugee influxes by individuals arriving from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo



Over the last decade, Uganda has seen large-scale refugee influxes by individuals arriving from Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and the newly independent South Sudan



(DRC), and the newly independent South Sudan. In South Sudan, a 2013 civil war and the 2016 collapse of a peace agreement drove hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese into Uganda.

About 57 per cent of refugees in Uganda today are South Sudanese who primarily reside in Uganda's north. Another 32 per cent of refugees are from the DRC, and they mostly live in Uganda's south. Other refugee populations from Somalia, Burundi, Sudan, and Rwanda also live

in Uganda today.

USCRI, founded in 1911, is a non-governmental, not-for-profit international organisation committed to working on behalf of refugees and immigrants and their transition to a dignified life.

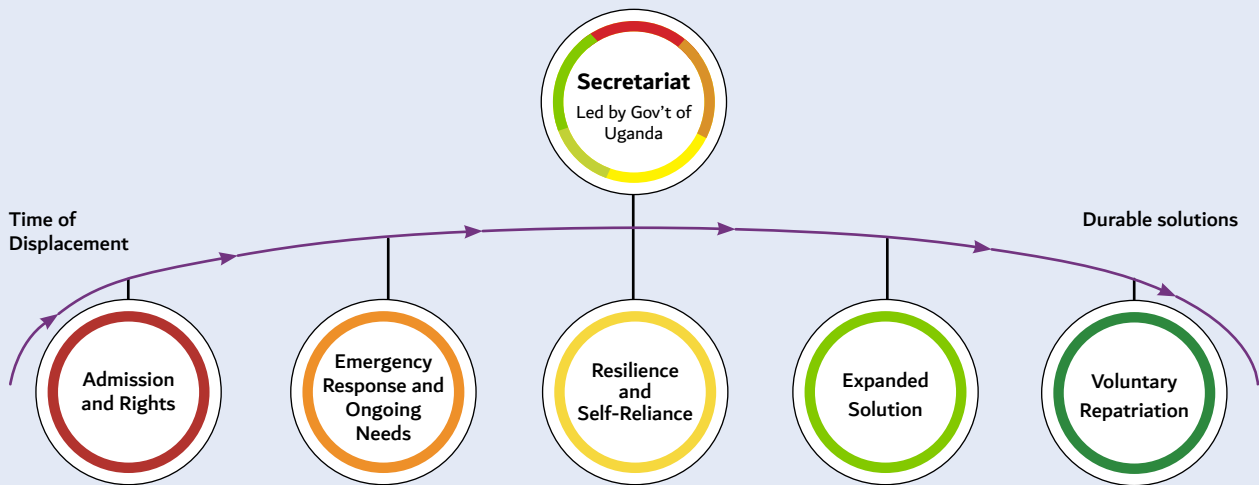
For inquiries, please contact: policy@uscrimail.org

Source: <https://refugees.org/>



**Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (ODPP) in Madi-Okollo District (West Nile)
constructed with support from the SUPREME Project.**

Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) in Uganda



Context and Perspective: The SUPREME Project has been designed to comply with international protocols governing refugee response – specifically the **Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)**. CRRF arose out of the 2016 New York Declaration with three key objectives: ease pressure on refugee host countries; enhance refugee self-reliance; expand access to third-country solutions; and support conditions in countries of origin.

WHAT IS CRRF?

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) officially launched the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) on 24th March 2017, adapting the principles and objectives in Annex 1 of the New York Declaration of Refugees and Migrants to the Ugandan context. The CRRF is a multi-stakeholder coordination model on refugee matters focusing on the humanitarian and development needs of both refugees and host communities.

HOW WILL IT BE ACHIEVED?

To better support refugees and the communities hosting them, the New York Declaration calls on humanitarian and development actors in refugee response to work together in a more cohesive and predictable approach to refugee response. These actors include not just governments, non-

governmental organisations (NGOs), refugees and other UN agencies, but also the private sector, international financial institutions and civil society, including think tanks, academia and faith leaders. Together, they aim to: Ease pressure on countries that welcome and host refugees; Build self-reliance of refugees; Expand access to resettlement in third countries and other complementary

pathways; and foster conditions that enable refugees voluntarily return to their home countries.

This new approach envisions a world where refugees have access to countries where they are safe, where they are better included, where they are no longer living in camps and are not dependent on humanitarian assistance only.



The CRRF in Uganda encompasses five mutually reinforcing pillars as outlined by the global objectives: Admission and Rights; Emergency Response and Ongoing Needs; Resilience and Self-reliance; Expanded Solution and Voluntary Repatriation.



WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CRRF?

In line with the 'whole of society' approach, outlined in the New York Declaration, the rollout of the CRRF is Government-led, spearheaded by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in Uganda, facilitated by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and guided by the participation of a wide range of stakeholders. To promote coordination between, and help strengthen, existing government and partner institutions, a Steering Group and a Secretariat have been set up to support the application of the CRRF locally.

THE CRRF STEERING GROUP

The CRRF Steering Group (SG) which is the decision-making body of the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework is co-chaired by the Minister for Disaster Preparedness, Relief and Refugees and the Minister of Local Government.

The Steering Group consists of some 35 members, with 20 seats being held by the Government (MDAs and Local Governments) engaged in the refugee response and 15 seats by non-government of Uganda agencies. These include the representatives of UN agencies, development, and humanitarian donors, 2 elected refugee representatives, 1 representative for each of the International and National non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Private Sector and International Financial Institutions. Representation is decided through nominations from within existing structures and coordination mechanisms.

THE CRRF SECRETARIAT

The CRRF Secretariat was constituted and capacitated in February 2018. The Secretariat supports coordinated planning, programming and resourcing of the CRRF roll-out in Uganda and ensures cross-pillar information flow and linkages. In terms of the operational response, it relies on existing coordination structures and pursues coherence across the various structures.

The Secretariat is headed by Director CRRF, the Under-Secretary for Disaster & Refugees in the Office of the Prime Minister. In line with the spirit of the CRRF, the Secretariat has benefited from both National and International secondments to create a multi-skilled team with the right mix to implement and follow up the decisions of the Steering Group.

WHAT ARE THE KEY MESSAGES?

The broad key messages for all the defined target audiences under the CRRF framework are.

1. Uganda's refugee response model, of welcoming our brothers and sisters in the hour of need remains intact. It is not only the humane thing to do but it is the right thing to do.
2. Uganda has a progressive refugee model: Open borders, non-camp policies, free integration of refugees, equal access to government-provided social services, a chance to work and land allocation for farming and shelter. This model is lauded as the most generous in the world.
3. The task is too big for one country, one community or one sector. All hands together, everyone has a role to play. Immense support has been received from the partners towards Uganda's refugee response. However, Uganda's refugee response remains chronically underfunded.

representatives from the refugee community.

2. Uganda's CRRF Road Map was adopted at the 2nd CRRF Steering Group meeting on 31st January 2018. This key document guides CRRF implementation until 2020 by clearly defining common milestones and deliverables to advance key expected results.
3. A fully functioning CRRF Secretariat under the Office of the Prime Minister with staffing secondments from Government, The UN, NGOs and other development partners is now in place.
4. The Refugee Engagement Forum (REF) was established to ensure refugees are effectively represented at the CRRF Steering Group.
5. The Education Response Plan was launched on 14th September 2018 by the Ministry of Education and Sports.
6. The Health Integrated Refugee Response Plan was launched by the Ministry of Health on 25th January 2019.
7. The Communications and Outreach Strategy 2018-2020 was adopted by the Steering Group on 18th October 2018 to build a common understanding and vision of the CRRF at all levels.

An integrated information portal has been developed: www.ugandarefugees.org

Verification of refugees in Uganda: 1.2 + million refugees and asylum seekers have been biometrically verified with support from UNHCR and the Government of Uganda. **JLOS**

Source: Office of the Prime Minister, Government of the Republic of Uganda
www.opm.go.ug

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED SO FAR?

1. Establishment of the CRRF Steering Group which is co-chaired by the Office of the Prime Minister and Ministry of Local Government. The Steering Group comprises 35 members representing key stakeholders in Uganda's refugee response including two

Transforming Justice delivery in Uganda: A New Model for Refugee Rehabilitation and Re-integration



Liquid Soap making by offenders on community service orders.

By Margaret Makune

In the remote refugee settlements of Uganda's West Nile region, justice is being redefined under the Directorate of Community Service with support from the European Union under the SUPREME project. Under the shade of a mango tree, a group of former offenders—many of them refugees—stir soap mixtures in large containers, practising a skill that may determine their future. A year ago,

some of them were serving prison time for minor offences. Today, they are free, working, and reintegrating into society, thanks to a bold initiative supported by the European Union.

Uganda, home to over 1.7 million refugees, hosts the largest refugee population in Africa and the sixth largest in the world. The majority have fled conflicts in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. But

escaping war does not exempt them from the challenges of everyday life. Many struggle with unemployment, peer pressure, and lack of access to basic needs, pushing some into petty crime. Theft, drug abuse, and minor assaults land them in a justice system that, until recently, offered them little hope beyond prison walls.

For years, sentencing refugees to community service—a non-custodial

punishment—was rarely considered. Courts, located more than 50 kilometres away from refugee settlements, hesitated to issue such sentences due to concerns about compliance, low public awareness, and fears of mob violence against offenders. Instead, these individuals were sent to overcrowded prisons, where rehabilitation was nearly impossible.

A Game-Changer in Justice Reform

In response, the EU-SUPREME Project stepped in, partnering with Uganda's Directorate of Community Service (DCS) to revolutionise the system. The project focused on seven (7) key refugee settlements—Rhinocamp, Imvepi, Lobule, Bidibidi, Palorinya, Pagirinya, and Palabek—introducing innovative approaches to make community service an effective, respected, and widely used sentencing option.

With EU support, the program launched mobile courts, bringing justice closer to the settlements and significantly increasing the number of community service orders. In just two years, 2,106 sentences were issued, including 1,117 for refugees (973 men and 144 women). Instead of being locked away, these individuals were given the chance to repay their communities by clearing roads, constructing homes for vulnerable people, and maintaining clean water points.

Beyond Punishment: Rehabilitation and Skills Training

But the impact went beyond sentencing. Understanding that rehabilitation requires more than just labour, the project introduced vocational training programs, equipping offenders with skills that could lead to economic independence. Before EU intervention, such opportunities were rare. Today, former offenders can learn: Soap-making (bar soap, liquid soap); Sewing reusable sanitary pads, Tree nursery projects; Briquette production (to reduce reliance on charcoal and protect the



A total of 393 refugee offenders (294 men and 99 women) have already benefited from these skill-based programs, turning their sentences into opportunities for a better future.



environment); and Vegetable gardening (kitchen gardens for food security)

From Offenders to Success Stories

Some of the most compelling outcomes of the project are the stories of individuals whose lives were transformed.

Take Opinira Liberty, for example. After being sentenced to community service, he spent months teaching at Rhino Camp High School as part of his service. Recognising his dedication and skills, the school hired him as a full-time teacher after he completed his sentence.

Then there is Adui Umar, a refugee who served his sentence at Koboko Court. One day, while cleaning the court premises, he saw a job advertisement for a Procurement Officer at the Danish Refugee Council. After applying, he secured the position, turning a moment of punishment into a life-changing opportunity.

For younger offenders, the project has been a second chance at education. Through partnerships with War Child Canada and the Lutheran World Federation, 11 refugee offenders have

re-enrolled in formal schooling (from Senior 1 to Senior 5), while four others have pursued vocational training in mechanics, carpentry, welding, and driving at Arua Technical Institute.

Building a Sustainable Justice System

The SUPREME Project also recognised that lasting change requires a systemic shift in mindset. To ensure long-term sustainability, the project trained 1,980 key stakeholders, including Judicial officers (to increase confidence in issuing Community Service Orders); Police and prison officials (to ensure fair treatment of offenders); Civil society organisations (to provide support and advocacy); and Local leaders and cultural figures (to help communities accept rehabilitated offenders).

Through frequent District community service committee meetings, progress was tracked, challenges were addressed, and solutions were implemented. This multi-stakeholder approach ensured better supervision, increased compliance, and greater acceptance of community service sentences.

Lessons Learned

These initiatives highlight several key strategies that can be applied to refugee support programs:

- **Community Empowerment:** Training refugees to serve as para-counsellors or community leaders leverages their unique insights and fosters trust within the community.
- **Economic Integration:** Providing job support and livelihood development programs for both refugees and host communities promotes economic self-reliance and social cohesion.
- **Policy Support:** Implementing progressive policies that integrate refugees into national systems, such as education and employment, facilitates long-term solutions and reduces dependency on aid.



A Community Service Officer monitoring trees and vegetables planted by community service offenders at a placement institution in Arua District.

A New Future for Justice

Uganda has shown that justice can be rehabilitative, not just punitive. By offering second chances instead of prison sentences, the country has proven that non-custodial sentencing works—not just for offenders, but for entire communities. With continued investment and expansion, Uganda’s model could reshape justice systems across Africa, offering millions of people a pathway out of crime and total rehabilitation.

For the thousands of refugees seeking a second chance, continued investment is not just an option—it is a necessity. The SUPREME Project has proven that justice does not have to be about punishment alone. When done right, it can be a powerful tool for rehabilitation, empowerment, and community transformation.

The message from former offenders, community leaders, and judicial officers is clear: Giving chances makes changes. The question now is whether the world is willing to invest in those changes for the long run.



By investing in non-custodial sentences, skill-building, and community engagement, the SUPREME Project has helped create a system that not only reduces prison overcrowding but also empowers refugees to become contributing members of society.



For the European Union (EU), this project is more than just an aid initiative—it is a model for justice reform that could be replicated across other refugee-hosting nations. By investing in non-custodial sentences, skill-building, and community engagement, the EU has helped create a system that not only reduces prison overcrowding but also empowers refugees to become contributing members of society.

As policymakers consider the next phase of funding, one thing is evident: this is not just an access to justice project—it is a human transformation initiative with real, measurable impact. If scaled up, it could redefine how justice is delivered in refugee communities worldwide. **JLOS**

Margaret Makune is a Senior Probation and Welfare Officer at the Ministry of Internal Affairs

Justice Beyond Bars: How Community Service is Rebuilding Refugee Lives in Uganda

By Rehema Muluya



Community service work in West Nile.

By investing in non-custodial sentences, skill-building, and community engagement, the SUPREME Project has helped create a system that not only reduces prison overcrowding but also empowers refugees to become contributing members of society.

A quiet but powerful transformation is underway in the heart of Uganda's West Nile region, where sprawling refugee settlements stretch across the landscape. In place of prison sentences, minor offenders—many of them refugees fleeing war, trauma, and displacement—are being allowed to rehabilitate, make peace with the host communities, and acquire skills through community service.

Backed by funding from the European Union and implemented under the SUPREME project, the Directorate of Community Service has introduced an alternative sentencing model that is changing how justice is

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The Directorate of Community Service has introduced an alternative sentencing model that is changing how justice is delivered in refugee settlements.

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delivered in refugee settlements. Instead of being locked away in overcrowded prisons, offenders contribute to society through unpaid work—building roads, making bricks, planting trees, and acquiring new skills that empower them long after their sentences end. There is also a belief that once their home countries get peace they will make use of the newly acquired skills.

But community service is more than just an alternative to imprisonment as it is a chance for offenders to rebuild their lives, for communities to heal,

and for a justice system to prove that rehabilitation can be more powerful than punishment.

A Justice System That Heals, Not Just Punishes

Uganda, one of Africa's largest refugee-hosting nations, faces a delicate balance between maintaining law and order and fostering social cohesion among its displaced populations. Traditional incarceration often worsens the plight of petty offenders, pushing them further into crime, economic despair, and social exclusion.

To counter this, the community service initiative has diverted nearly 1,000 refugees—from prison into meaningful, productive work. “Rather than being punished, I was given a chance to contribute to my community,”

said a former offender in the Rhino Camp settlement. “Now, I make reusable sanitary pads, and I earn a living from it.”

Instead of merely serving out a sentence, participants are actively engaged in projects that benefit both themselves and their communities. From soap-making to tree nurseries, the initiative offers a second chance—one that is desperately needed in a region where poverty and displacement often drive people to petty crime.



The community service initiative has diverted nearly 1,000 refugees—from prison into meaningful, productive work.



From Punishment to Opportunity

At the heart of the programme is vocational or what others call skills-based training. Instead of simply working off their sentences, offenders are equipped with skills they can use long after their community service ends. In the past year alone, 393 refugee offenders—including 99 women—have completed training in trades like soap-making, briquette production, and tree nursery management. Many have gone on to start small businesses, breaking the cycle of crime and poverty within the refugee settlements.

Beyond skills training, counselling and therapy are an integral part of the programme. Many refugees have experienced deep trauma—from war, sexual violence, or forced displacement. Addressing these psychological wounds is crucial to ensuring that they do not re-offend.

“This is not just about keeping people out of prison,” said a Community Service Officer in Yumbe District. “It’s about giving them the tools to live a better life.”

A Greener Future for Refugee Settlements

One of the most unexpected benefits of the EU support to the Community Service programme has been its impact on the environment. With deforestation a growing crisis in Uganda’s refugee settlements, offenders sentenced to community service have helped plant over 47,000 tree seedlings—many of them fruit-bearing trees—to provide food and fuel for struggling families.

Environmental organisations such as the National Forestry Authority (NFA) have since partnered with the initiative, distributing seedlings to schools, government institutions, and farmer groups. The result is a justice program that not only rehabilitates individuals but also helps heal the land.

Challenges and the Path Forward

Despite its successes, the Community Service Programme is not without its challenges. I have witnessed first-hand the roadblocks that must be addressed for this initiative to reach its full potential.

1. Legal and Policy Challenges

Problem: The legal framework governing community service is still evolving, and ensuring fair treatment for refugees remains a challenge. Without clear guidelines, there is a risk of inconsistent sentencing and potential discrimination.

Solution: Strengthen legal protections by refining sentencing guidelines and ensuring fair application across all refugee settlements. Legal aid for refugees must also be expanded to protect their rights.

2. Social Stigma and Community Perception

Problem: Many refugees sentenced to community service face stigma from their peers and host communities, making reintegration difficult.

Solution: Public awareness campaigns, local radio programs, and partnerships with community leaders can help shift public perception. Incentives such as certification for completed training can help reframe community service as a step toward empowerment, not just a punishment.

3. Limited Resources and Vocational Training

Problem: While offenders learn skills like soap-making and brickmaking, many lack access to high-demand industries that could provide sustainable employment.

Solution: Expand vocational training to include skills such as mobile phone repair, digital marketing, tailoring, and agriculture. Public-private partnerships could help connect graduates with real job opportunities.

4. Mental Health and Trauma Recovery

Problem: Many refugees sentenced to community service struggle with past trauma. Without proper mental health support, they risk reoffending.

Solution: Integrate therapy and peer counselling into all community service programmes. Training local health workers in trauma-informed care can help provide accessible mental health support.

5. Scaling Up the Program

Problem: The initiative currently operates in select settlements, but thousands more could benefit.

Solution: Increase international funding and government support to expand the programme nationwide. Digital tools—such as mobile-based training—could also help make rehabilitation programs more accessible.

A Blueprint for Global Justice Reform

Uganda’s approach to community service is more than a local success story—it is a potential blueprint for how nations worldwide can rethink justice, rehabilitation, and refugee integration. Instead of relying solely on incarceration, governments can invest in programmes that restore lives, build skills, and heal communities.

I see a story of resilience and hope among refugees. I see an investment that yields exponential social returns. If scaled effectively, Uganda’s model could reshape the global conversation on alternative sentencing—proving that, sometimes, justice is best served outside the prison walls. **JLOS**

Rehema Muluya is a probation officer at the Directorate of Community Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs

Protection of Refugees and Host Communities in Uganda through Legal Aid

By Andrew Mwayi



Mr Aaron Besigye (left), the National Coordinator Justice Centres Uganda during the official handover of equipment procured with support from the SUPREME Project.

Justice Centres Uganda (JCU) is a Justice Law and Order Sub-programme project focusing on delivering legal aid services to vulnerable communities across Uganda. A key initiative within this effort was the SUPREME project, which played a crucial role in advancing JCU's vision. This vision centres on providing high-quality legal aid services, particularly aimed at supporting refugees and the communities that host them. The areas of focus for the project included the districts of Adjumani, Arua Koboko, Moyo, Madi Okollo, Obongi, Terego and Yumbe

Objectives of the project

The SUPREME project was designed with four major objectives in mind. First, it sought to increase the presence and effectiveness of JLOS frontline actors in refugee settlements and surrounding host communities. Secondly, the project aimed to boost the capacity of these actors in addressing the justice needs of both refugees and host communities. Third, it focused on enhancing awareness among refugees

and host communities regarding their rights and obligations. Lastly, the project strived to improve coordination among JLOS actors and other relevant stakeholders to facilitate better access to justice and protection for the affected populations.

Office space in Yumbe

To address the significant challenges that refugees, and host communities encounter in accessing justice, JCU implemented a series of targeted interventions designed to improve legal support. A key initiative in this effort was the establishment of the JCU Office in Yumbe. Initially, operations began in a courtroom, but with time, the facilities were upgraded through the acquisition of prefabricated containers. This enhancement not only provided a more reliable and accessible location for legal services but also allowed for better outreach.

The presence of the JCU Office in Yumbe has substantially improved the visibility and effectiveness of JLOS frontline actors who operate within the refugee settlements and the surrounding

host communities. The new office setup enables legal aid providers to engage more directly with those in need of assistance. This development aligns perfectly with the project's primary objective, which is to enhance the availability and accessibility of legal aid services to those affected by displacement.

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As a result of the project interventions by Justice Centres Uganda, refugees and local communities are better informed about their legal rights and the support available to them.

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As a result of these changes, refugees and local communities are better informed about their legal rights and the support available to them. The office serves as a critical hub where individuals can seek advice, receive guidance on navigating legal processes, and ultimately find the justice they deserve. This initiative marks a significant step forward in bridging the gap between vulnerable populations and the legal system, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their rights are protected.

Transport

The project also successfully enabled the acquisition of a motor vehicle along with two motorcycles for JCU. These essential resources play a vital role in enhancing the outreach of JCU's legal aid services. With these vehicles, JCU can continue to effectively reach refugees and

local communities in various regions, including Yumbe, Terego, Rhino camp Madi Okollo, Lobule Koboko, Moyo, and Adjumani. The ability to transport legal aid teams directly to these areas ensures that support is available where it is most needed. This direct engagement allows JCU to better address the legal needs of individuals who might otherwise struggle to access essential services. The added transport options significantly improve the ability of JLOS frontline actors to maintain a strong presence in these communities. This enhanced presence is critical to achieving the primary goal of the project, which is to provide accessible and timely legal assistance to those in need. By bridging the gap between legal services and the communities they serve, the project reinforces its commitment to supporting vulnerable populations.

Outreaches

JCU's outreach initiatives have significantly raised awareness of human rights and access to justice among both refugees and host communities. This is particularly true for marginalized groups such as youth, women, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Through these efforts, JCU has contributed meaningfully to the project's third objective, which aims to enhance knowledge about rights and responsibilities among these communities.

Dispute resolution

Through JCU, the project played a crucial role in helping communities to effectively manage and resolve their disputes through mediation and litigation. By offering these alternatives, it supported the movement of conflicts away from the court system. This shift contributed to a more peaceful coexistence within the communities, as individuals were able to settle their differences without engaging in lengthy legal battles.

As a result, the initiative significantly reduced the backlog of court cases, freeing up valuable resources for the legal system. The reduction in court cases also eased the overcrowding in police cells and prisons. With fewer individuals awaiting trial or serving time for minor disputes,

law enforcement could focus on more serious issues. Overall, this project not only improved the lives of those directly involved but also benefited the wider society by promoting harmony and efficiency within the judicial system.



Overall, this project not only improved the lives of those directly involved but also benefited the wider society by promoting harmony and efficiency within the judicial system.



Training of Community-Based Volunteers

To improve the effectiveness of frontline actors, JCU initiated comprehensive training sessions for community-based volunteers. These training programmes covered fundamental elements of the law, essential mediation techniques, and the various processes involved in litigation. By engaging in this training, volunteers gained important skills needed to navigate complex legal situations. This initiative also aligns with the second objective of the project, which focused on enhancing the capabilities of individuals who work closely with both refugees and host communities.

By equipping these volunteers with knowledge and practical tools, JCU ensured they could provide better support and services, ultimately fostering a more integrated and understanding environment for all parties involved. The training not only empowered the volunteers themselves but also strengthened the overall community fabric, enabling those who work directly with vulnerable populations to respond more effectively

to their needs and challenges.

Coordination with other Administration of Justice actors

The project placed a significant emphasis on fostering effective coordination among various justice actors. This focus has notably enhanced JCU's ability to deliver legal aid services. Improved coordination also facilitated better collaboration between the JCU, and other key entities involved in the justice system. By working together more effectively, the actors shared resources, knowledge, and strategies, which ultimately strengthened the overall justice system. This collective effort supported the project's fourth objective, which aimed to enhance collaboration among JLOS stakeholders and duty-bearers.

Strengthening these partnerships was crucial for improving access to justice for both refugees and host communities. When justice actors unite their efforts, they create a more robust support network that addresses the unique needs of these groups. This collaboration helps to ensure that vulnerable populations receive the protection and legal assistance they require, making the justice system more responsive and equitable for everyone involved.

Sustainability beyond the SUPREME project

The emphasis on sustainability within the project ensures that JCU's interventions will yield long-lasting benefits. Training community-based volunteers and establishing a permanent office in Yumbe serve as strong indicators of the project's commitment to creating enduring change in the community.

In summary, the SUPREME Project has played a vital role in enhancing JCU's capacity to deliver essential legal aid services to refugees and host communities in Northern Uganda. The various achievements of JCU contribute significantly to the project's overall objectives, ultimately improving access to justice for these vulnerable populations. **JLOS**

Andrew Mwayi is the Manager (Programmes) at Justice Centres Uganda

Enhancing Criminal Justice in Refugee Host Communities

By ACP Eriphaz Mulondo



Mr James Ocaya the Deputy Inspector General of Police (standing) giving remarks at a SUPREME project stakeholder meeting.

The Uganda Police Force (UPF) would like to thank the European Union (EU) for the support rendered under the Security, Protection & Economic Empowerment (SUPREME) Project. Under the SUPREME Project, UPF received a total allocation of UGX. 4,852,658,661. Through this support, the Uganda Police Force has scored numerous achievements specifically in the reduction and management of crime in refugee settlement areas of Northern Uganda since 2022.

Below are the key achievements registered:

1. Procurement of transport equipment (1 Motor vehicle and 5 Motorcycles) and construction of Five (05) refugee Police stations and accommodation blocks at Imvepi, Ofua IV, Lobule, Palorinya and Palabek. Through this intervention, the refugee protection Police officers are housed within their jurisdictions and can respond to incidents of crime within the recommended time.
2. We have been able to develop a training module for refugee policing which has been incorporated into the initial Police training curriculum.
3. We trained 86 officers (34 male and 52 female) from the Child and Family Protection Department (CFPD) and Community Liaison Offices (CLO) on how to effectively respond to and manage cases related to family conflicts and domestic violence.

4. We trained 43 (27 Males and 16 Females) police detectives/investigators in case file management methods, preservation of evidence and response to cases of Violence Against Women (VAW) and Violence Against Children (VAC).
5. We recruited and trained 30 (25 male and 5 female) language assistants to ease communication in delivery of policing services in refugee settlement areas. These help the police officers in managing cases where the victims or offenders are not able to express themselves in English but rather in their languages,
6. We conducted Police officers in community outreach activities within refugee settlements and host communities. This exercise which benefited 4,801 (2,027 Female, 2,774 Male) was aimed at empowering the refugees, host communities and local leaders on the prevention and effective handling of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and other crimes within the settlements.

Interventions under this project have greatly impacted lives of refugees and the host communities, guaranteed peaceful co-existence, and ensured the rule of law in these communities prevails.

Total amount of funding received by the Police under the SUPREME Project:

UGX. 4,852,658,661

7. Police was equally able to review, translate and print community policing materials into refugee local languages of Swahili, Arabic, Dinka, and Nuer. These were distributed to individuals, among communities in trading centres in all the refugee settlements as well as host communities of Northwestern Uganda (West Nile).

In conclusion, the Uganda Police Force (UPF) is greatly indebted to the

European Union (EU) for the support rendered through the SUPREME Project. Interventions under this project have greatly impacted lives of refugees and the host communities, guaranteed peaceful co-existence, and ensured the rule of law in these communities prevails. [JLOS](#)

ACP Eriphaz Mulondo is the Assistant Commissioner of Police and the UPF SUPREME Project coordinator.



A Police officer interacting with refugees during a community sensitisation campaign conducted by the Uganda Police at a refugee settlement camp.



Participants, Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) staff and Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) staff during a community baraza at Palorinya Refugee settlement in Obongi District.

Empowering Refugees and Host Communities on Rights, Responsibilities and Duties

By Charles Mukasa

Through the SUPREME Project, the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC) created awareness among refugees and host communities on the concept of human rights, responsibilities, duties and obligations, Sexual Gender Based Violence (implications of forced and early child marriages, defilement, and rape) and common offences such as theft, drug abuse, and alcoholism. This intervention was implemented through twenty-eight (28) barazas attended by a total of 2,872 community members of whom 1,475 were male and

1,397 female in the following refugee settlement areas: Bidibidi, Lobule, Rhino camp, Imvempi, Palorinya Maaaji Settlement camp, Pagirinya, Apyetta,, Akworo, Palabek, Ayilo, Agojo, Alere and Nyumanzi. Furthermore, through the baraza meetings and community engagements, there was an increase in the knowledge of the human rights of both refugees and host communities for peaceful co-existence.

JLOS Actors

UHRC trained 170 JLOS actors (124 male and 46 female) from Adjumani,

Yumbe, Koboko, Madi Okollo, Terego, Ogongi and Lamwo districts on the integration of the Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) to service delivery. Through these training sessions, stakeholders' knowledge, skills, and understanding were enhanced to appreciate the concept of human rights and protection mechanisms in Uganda. Further, UHRC trained 89 police officers (70 male, 19 female) from Koboko district on human rights and refugee protection laws.

As a result, there were observed changes in the attitudes and perceptions

of the JLOS actors evidenced by the commitment to observe human rights in the course of service delivery in refugee communities.

Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs)

Under the SUPREME Project, UHRC Trained 112 (75 male, 37 female) Refugees Welfare Council members to enhance their skills and knowledge on the concept of human rights, child protection and case management. Knowledge and skills were acquired on the concept of human rights, rights of women and children, sexual gender-based violence, and the role of RWCs in the protection and promotion of human rights. The training eventually enabled

“Through the SUPREME Project, UHRC created awareness among refugees and host communities on the concept of human rights, responsibilities, duties and obligations, Sexual Gender Based Violence and common offences such as theft, drug abuse, and alcoholism

the leaders to change their attitude and perception about human rights and generated commitment to expose negative cultural practices that violate human rights such as conducting arranged marriages involving teenagers among the Dinka community.

Monitoring the human rights situation in the refugee settlements

To assess the human rights situation of refugees, for instance right to food, right to health services, right to education, security of person, freedom of worship, and freedom to their cultural practices among others, UHRC monitored seven (7) refugee settlements including Bidibidi, Lobule, Palorinya, Rhino camp, Imvepi, Adjumani and Lamwo refugee settlements.

Construction of Moyo Field Office

To increase UHRC's presence and reach in refugee settlements and host communities, the Commission constructed the Moyo field office under the UHRC's Arua regional office. The land, owned by UHRC was donated by Moyo district Local Government. The project is at the completion stage.

Visibility Materials and Transport Equipment

The Commission acquired various materials and equipment that strengthened UHRC's capacity to effectively coordinate key interventions aimed at enhancing access to justice and protection of refugees and host

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UHRC trained 112 (75 male, 37 female) Refugees Welfare Council members to enhance their skills and knowledge on the concept of human rights, child protection and case management.

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communities. These included: 568 visibility Jackets/ Reflectors, 10,504 Posters in 6 different local languages; and 1,025 branded T-shirts. Further, the project provided one (1) Motorcycle for the Arua region, four (4) High-Power Public-Address Megaphones; four (4) Still Cameras and Video recorders; and six (6) desktop computers. **JLOS**

Charles Mukasa is the Head of Policy and Planning at the Uganda Human Rights Commission



JLOS stakeholders at the Uganda Human Rights Commission office in Moyo district being constructed with support from the SUPREME Project.

Empowering Local Council Courts to improve access to justice



Training of Local Council Court Stakeholders at Lobule sub-county in Koboko district.

By Stella Aguti

The law provides for the election of local councils every five (5) years. According to the Local Council Courts Act, the executive members at the Village and Parish constitute Local Council Courts I and II, while Local Council Courts III are comprised of members identified from the communities approved by the respective councils. In that regard, therefore, the local council courts I and II exercise the judicial, political and executive functions. Whereas the law provides for elections every five (5) years, this is not the case with Local Councils I and II. However, the Government has always been able to maintain the legal structure for purposes of ensuring that service delivery at the lower administrative levels is sustained.

Despite having the structure legally functioning, Local Council Courts are usually faced with numerous operational challenges including among others, limited capacity to handle cases and maintenance of records. And just

like any new office bearer, orientation into the newly appointed role and responsibility is a necessity.

SUPREME Project Interventions

It is important to note that before the intervention by the SUPREME Project in the refugee hosting districts

in northern Uganda, the local council courts in the region had never received any form of capacity building since their assumption of their duty in 2018. Therefore, interventions by the SUPREME Project through the Ministry of Local Government have increased the presence and reach of JLOS frontline actors in refugee settlements and host communities.



Despite having the structure legally functioning, Local Council Courts are usually faced with numerous operational challenges including among others limited capacity to handle cases and maintenance of records.



Local council courts are lower-level community justice structures based in Villages/Cells, Parishes/wards and Sub counties/Town Councils/ Municipal Divisions and they are the frontline actors not only in the refugee hosting communities but countrywide and work 24 hours a day.

The programme targeted both the national level and refugee leadership structures in host communities. Being the first engagement ever since their assumption of duty, Local Council Court stakeholders greatly embraced the SUPREME Project with high participation in capacity-building interventions.

The sub-counties identified were entirely trained because it should be noted that given Uganda's refugee policy, refugees are not limited to their settlements and as such, most of them melt into the communities in search of work and others choose to settle within. LCC structures at the sub-county level therefore play a critical role in addressing access to justice issues and challenges.

Benefits of the Programme

The SUPREME Project has facilitated harmonious working relations between the national structure, the local council courts and the refugee leadership structure thereby facilitating an expeditious process of resolving conflicts within the communities.

Beneficiary districts and sub-counties

No.	District	Beneficiary Sub-County	Trainees
1	Madi-Okollo	Rigbo & Rhino	1283
2	Terego	Odupi & Uriama	1816
3	Adjumani	Ukusijoni and Itirikwa	630
4	Yumbe	Romogi	1032
5	Obongi	Palorinya	315
6	Lamwo	Palabek Ogili	293
7	Koboko	Lobule	1161
Totals			7530

There is no doubt that the intervention made by the project has to some extent bridged a justice gap that has been experienced within the communities engaged. Most communities experience access to justice challenges because the nearest justice institutions, i.e. the Magistrates' courts are about 40+ kilometers away from reach. However, Local Council Courts are embedded within the communities providing a quick avenue for the administration of justice.



Being the first engagement ever since their assumption of duty, Local Council Court stakeholders in Northern Uganda greatly embraced the SUPREME Project with high participation in capacity-building interventions.



It is also equally of no doubt that the region will to some extent experience a case backlog reduction because the petty offences that have been flooding the magistrate's courts will ably be addressed by the Local Council Courts together with the refugee leadership structures.

Challenges

Whereas the Court members have been oriented on how to address matters presented before them, a major outstanding challenge is the awareness of the community, and the bias placed in some of the members of the leadership structures over the obvious allegations of corruption.

The other challenge is that just a fraction of the Local Council Court members and the Refugee Welfare committees (RWCs) have been trained therefore leaving a bigger fraction desiring the same intervention.

Resources allowing, it would be important that the programme continues to intervene within the region and beyond because the refugee situation in Uganda is an ongoing concern. The country continues to receive refugees daily, and with its liberal policy, integration into the communities is inevitable. [JLOS](#)

Stella Aguti is the Principal Research Officer (Legal) at the Ministry of Local Government.



Justice for Children Programme Stakeholders interacting with children at a remand home

Administration of Justice for Children in Refugee Hosting Communities

By Auma Monica

The SUPREME project has significantly strengthened coordination among Justice, Law, and Order Sub-programme (JLOS) actors and duty bearers in Uganda, by facilitating collaboration between different agencies to improve access to justice and protection for both refugees and host communities, particularly in Northern Uganda. This is being done through information sharing, joint training initiatives, and establishing mechanisms for addressing specific concerns facing the administration of Justice for children.

The Justice for Children (J4C) programme with support from the European Union through the SUPREME Project focuses on child justice interventions targeting children in conflict with the law, and children in contact with the law. Its main objective is to promote the coordination of stakeholders in the administration of justice for children within the refugee settlement and host communities through the District Chain Link Committee (DCC) and Regional Chain Link Committee (RCC) structures.

The program advocates for the implementation of child-friendly procedures that include legal representation, psychosocial support, case management, fast tracking of children cases, support for resettlement and rehabilitation of juvenile offenders, capacity building initiatives for stakeholders in child-friendly practices and institutionalisation of diversion of petty offenders from the formal justice system.

Multi-stakeholder engagement

Through platforms such as the DCC and RCC meetings, J4C programme actively engages various JLOS actors including the Judiciary, Police, Prisons, Justice Centers Uganda (JCU), Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), local government officials, and non-state actors - notably UNHCR, World Lutheran Federation (LWF), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Windle International, World Vision, World Food Program (WFP) and Refugee Law Project (RLP). The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and the refugee community representatives are often engaged and involved in planning and implementation, fostering better communication, and understanding of the needs of refugees across different sectors.



J4C stakeholders at a coordination meeting

The Justice for Children (J4C) programme with support from the SUPREME Project focuses on child justice interventions targeting children in conflict with the law, and children in contact with the law.

Capacity building

The project provides training for JLOS actors on issues related to justice for children for instance diversion, child-friendly procedures, child-friendly languages, victim impact assessment, refugee protection, human rights, gender-based violence, and legal procedures, equipping them to better serve the needs of refugees and host communities.

Improved access to justice

By coordinating JLOS actors, the SUPREME project enables refugees and host communities to navigate the legal system more easily and access appropriate legal aid and representation remedies when facing issues like land disputes, domestic violence, or discrimination. This is done through special interventions such as mobile courts being implemented by the Judiciary.

DCC inspection and community outreach

By engaging with refugee and host communities, the project identifies specific justice needs and challenges, allowing for targeted interventions and tailored solutions. The programme facilitates inspection of detention facilities such as police, prisons, and remand homes to ensure children are not incarcerated with adults.

Enhanced protection

Through awareness campaigns and collaborative efforts, the SUPREME project promotes a better

The objective of the J4C is to promote the coordination of justice for children stakeholders within the refugee settlement and host communities through the District Chain Link Committee (DCC) and Regional Chain Link Committee (RCC) platform.

understanding of refugee rights and strengthens mechanisms for reporting and addressing violations. **JLOS**

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