

The Consequences of Reduced Funding in the Ugandan Refugee Response

May 2025 | Uganda

KEY MESSAGES

- **Many actors and programmes in Uganda have been impacted** by the shrinking funding landscape, heavily reducing the number and scale of refugee assistance programmes.
- **The most significant impacts are expected in relation to food security**, as the food assistance on which the majority of refugees rely will be cut heavily.
- Further impacts are observed and anticipated across all other sectors, with **reduced staffing and capacity for protection, health, education, livelihoods, WASH, shelter, and environment programming**.
- Several settlements are expected to be especially impacted, based on available information on programme suspensions, for example in **Kyaka II, Kyangwali, Palabek, Bidibidi, Imvepi, and Palorinya**.
- Groups particularly at risk of worsening needs include **new arrivals, persons with disabilities, children at risk, and people struggling with mental health issues**.

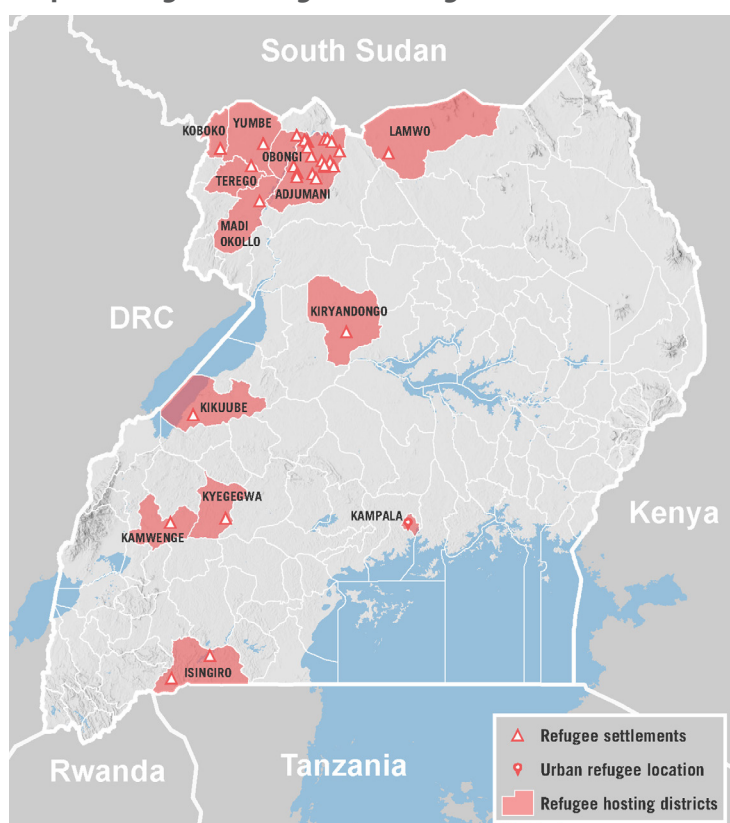
CONTEXT & RATIONALE

Uganda is the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, hosting approximately 1.8 million refugees as of April 2025.¹ The refugee response is facilitated by a progressive open-door policy upheld by the Ugandan Government, and supported by various international and national actors. The response has consistently been underfunded in the previous years,² which is expected to be severely exacerbated by the recent global developments.

Global funding for humanitarian and development assistance has been decreasing sharply since the start of this year, and is expected to decrease further in the coming months and years.^{3,4} The impacts of this will be felt across all aid operations, including Uganda.

This brief explores the anticipated impacts of the shrinking funding environment on refugee populations in Uganda. It does so by jointly analyzing data on needs and vulnerabilities among the refugee population, funding data, and impacts of reduced funding reported by the Sector Working Groups in Uganda. For more details on the methodology, please see page 7.

Map 1: Refugee-hosting areas in Uganda



MOVEMENT TRENDS

The majority of refugees in Uganda have fled from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and more recently, Sudan. **Throughout 2024, the country saw a sharp increase in arrivals, particularly from Sudan**, following the outbreak of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Over 74,000 Sudanese refugees have been registered in Uganda since the start of the emergency, with the pace of arrivals accelerating in the second half of 2024.⁵ In the first three months of 2025, close to 65,000 refugees arrived in Uganda. The majority of these refugees arrived from the DRC. The recent influxes in the Western region have led to **severe overcrowding of most transit and**

reception centers and significant pressures on public services in the areas where new arrivals are settled. Nyakabande Transit Centre, for example, was operating at 612% in March.⁶ Due to political developments in the region, current **influxes are expected to continue throughout 2025**.

Despite the continued influxes, **the majority of refugees have been in Uganda for over 5 years** (80% as of October 2024).⁷ The protracted refugee situation is reinforced by the return intentions of refugee households. Close to 90% of refugee households reported to have no intention to move from their current location.⁸ The majority of refugees in Uganda are women and children (78%).⁹

NEEDS AND VULNERABILITIES

Multiple data sources consistently depict **widespread and protracted humanitarian needs across Uganda's 1.8 million refugees**. According to the 2024 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), 94% of households have an unmet need in at least 1 sector. Close to 1 in 4 refugee households were found to have an acute unmet need. Settlements in the West Nile and North generally recorded higher levels of need than settlements in the Southwest. For example, the majority of refugee households in Palorinya (63%) and Bidibidi (60%) have needs in at least 3 sectors.¹⁰

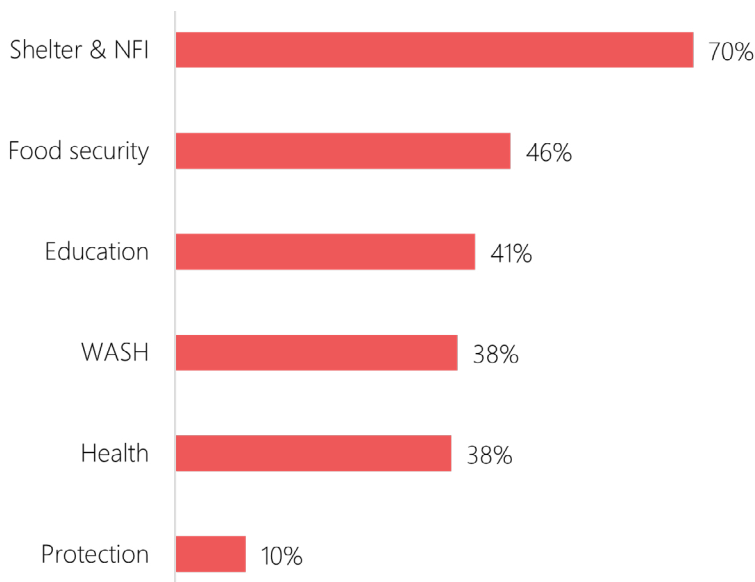
Figure 1 shows the sectoral needs driving overall need. The main driver of need was

Shelter & NFIs, driven by a large proportion of refugee households living in incomplete or defective shelters (68%).¹¹ Another key driver of need was food security. The 2024 Food Security and Nutrition Assessment (FSNA) estimates that **61.5% of refugee households are food insecure**. These results were largely driven by poor Food Expenditure Share (FES) scores, indicating that refugee households are spending a large portion of their income on food.¹²

Other key drivers of need include education, WASH, and health. Needs in these sectors are driven by **non-enrollment of children, insufficient water access, and disability**, respectively.¹³ Based on the MSNA and Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)/UNHCR estimates, approximately 5-7% of refugees have a disability.^{14,15}

Other key vulnerabilities include household demographic factors like female-headed households (FHHs) and households with a high age dependency ratio (ADR). According to the MSNA, **64% of refugee households are female-headed**.¹⁶ FSNA findings indicate that FHHs are more likely to be food insecure.¹⁷ Similarly, MSNA findings indicate that single-female-headed households are more likely to have both food and WASH needs.¹⁸ The average ADR among refugee households is 1.7. Several settlements had especially high average ADRs, such as Palabek, Rhino Camp, Rwamwanja, and Bidibidi, indicating a **high economic and social burden within the household**.¹⁹

Figure 1: % of refugee households in need per sector (MSNA)

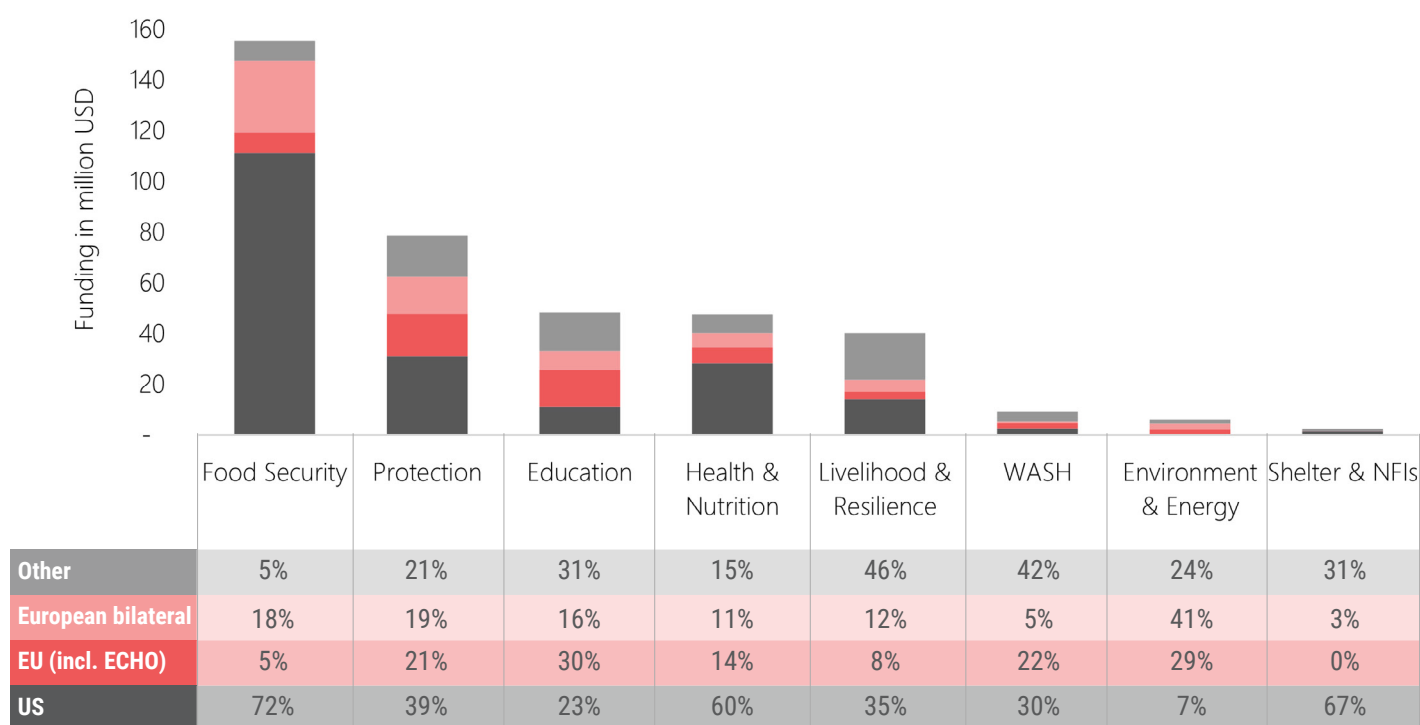


OVERVIEW OF FUNDING IN UGANDA

According to the funding reported under the Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP), the response received 392 million US Dollars (USD) in international funding in 2024. **Of that funding, 51% reportedly came from the United States Government (US)** and an additional 12% came from bilateral European donors who have specifically expressed intentions to reduce global funding.²⁰ It is hard to establish at

this point how much the total 2025 UCRRP funding will be, though it is foreseen to be significantly less. **A few sectors were especially reliant on US funding in 2024**, including Food Security, Shelter & NFIs, and Health & Nutrition.²¹ The figure below illustrates the 2024 funding per sector, as well as the share of each sector's funding that came from various types of donors.

Figure 2: UCRRP funding for 2024 per sector, by % of funding per donor (group)



IMPACTS OF REDUCED FUNDING PER SECTOR

The impacts of the shrinking funding landscape are expected to be comprehensive and cross-cutting. In order to start understanding the potential impacts, UNHCR has conducted a survey

with the partners on the already observed impacts and concerns. Below is a summary of the reported programme cuts compared to the funding information and population vulnerabilities and needs.



FOOD SECURITY

The most significant impacts of the reduced funding are currently experienced for food security. The extent to which food security funding has been or will be reduced in the long term, is unclear at the time of writing.

In the very challenging funding environment, the World Food Programme (WFP) initiated **significant cuts to General Food Assistance (GFA)** in March to avoid

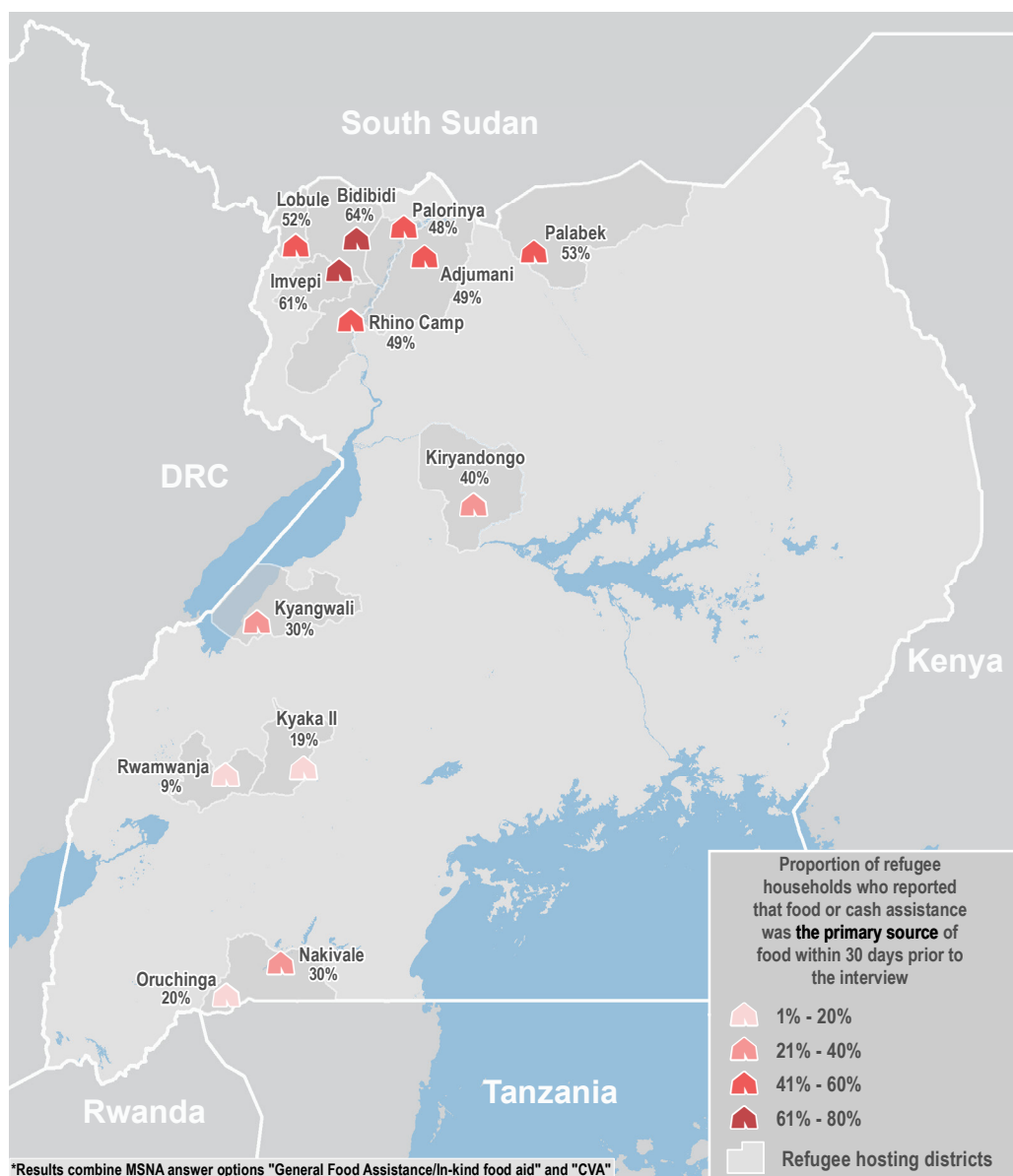
abruptly discontinuing families from assistance. Since the implementation of Phase 3 Prioritization in July 2023, the moderately vulnerable refugees (82% of settlement refugee population) have been receiving 30% of the ration. As of March 2025, the ration for this group was reduced to 22%. The most vulnerable refugees (13% of settlement refugee population) who were receiving 60% rations had these reduced

to 40% in April. New arrivals who were previously receiving 100% rations, started receiving 60% from April. With resources stretched thin, a joint re-categorisation and prioritisation exercise will be conducted in May 2025. The objective is to ensure that limited resources are directed to those most in need. As part of this process, **households assessed to be less vulnerable will no longer receive food assistance.** At the time of writing, the exercise is ongoing, with individual entitlements to be communicated to families as soon as possible.

Cuts in food assistance can be detrimental to the food security of a large portion of refugees. The MSNA and FSNA respectively estimate that 46% and 61.5% of refugee households have a food security need.^{22,23} During the MSNA,

62% of refugee households reported that GFA or other forms of cash and voucher assistance (CVA) represented one of their three main sources of food. **For 38% of refugee households, GFA or CVA was their primary source of food at the time of the survey.**²⁴ This was considerably higher in several settlements in the West Nile and Northern regions, as illustrated in Map 2. Settlements that stand out include Bidibidi (64%) and Imvepi (61%).²⁵ In these locations, the reduction in food rations and food beneficiaries could have especially dire consequences. MSNA data indicates that over half of refugee households in these settlements already have food security needs.²⁶ Impacts of cuts in food assistance may be further exacerbated by cuts in nutrition, livelihoods, health, and other sectoral programs.

Map 2: Proportion of refugee households who reported that food or cash assistance was the primary source of food within 30 days prior to the interview (MSNA)





HEALTH & NUTRITION

Many and diverse impacts on health and nutrition programmes have been reported by the sector. Community outreach activities have been significantly reduced, and staffing support to referral sites has been withdrawn to fill staffing gaps within the settlements. **In Kyaka II and Kyangwali, staffing support has been pulled from at least four health centres, while in Palorinya, two health outposts have closed due to staffing shortages.**

Disruptions and suspensions have been reported for Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) programmes, disability-related programmes, and HIV/AIDS programmes, amongst others. Specialized services such as orthopaedics, dental care, and sonography have also been deprioritized. The number of Village Health Teams (VHTs) is also expected to decrease, with the average ratio of VHT to community member expected to increase

from 1:600 to 1:1000.

In terms of malnutrition programmes, two key programmes have been suspended. Firstly, the Maternal Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) programme was active in all settlements, and has now been closed. Secondly, the Targeted Supplementary Feeding Programme (TSFP) has also been suspended, which used to be implemented in all Southwest settlements and three settlements in the West Nile. Note that the latter may be reinstated in some capacity. Malnutrition indicators had been improving over the last years, which partially motivated the prioritization decisions.²⁷ However, **the suspension of nutrition programmes in combination with the changes in GFA have raised serious concerns** over how malnutrition indicators may develop over the next months and years.

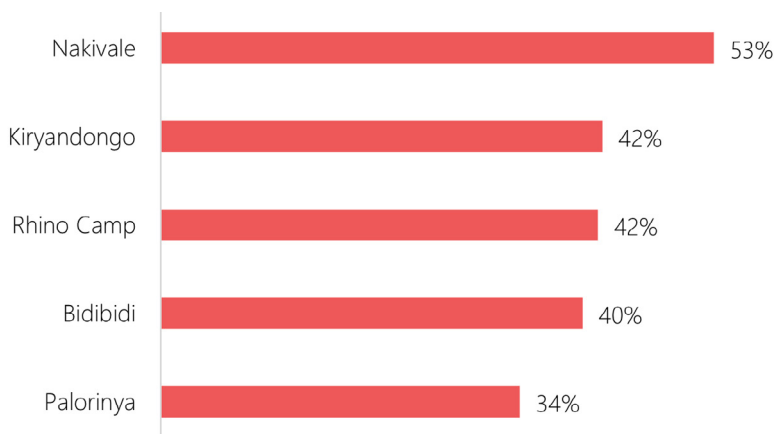


WASH

According to the MSNA, WASH issues are a major driver of need in Kampala and several other settlements.²⁸ Figure 4 illustrates in which settlements WASH needs appear to be most severe, as per the indicator

on access to drinking water. According to the WASH Sector Working Group, the **water supply will be reduced across all settlements.** On average, the water supply level will be reduced from an average of 17 Liters Per Day (LPD) to 12 LPD. The two settlements who currently have the lowest water supply level, **Nakivale (6-7 LPD) and Kiryandongo (10 LPD)**, are also the settlements with the highest need, as reflected in Figure 3. The water supply will be reduced in these locations as well, with potentially disastrous consequences. In Nakivale, for example, the budget will be reduced by 34%. The water levels in **areas where new arrivals are being settled in Nakivale have especially low water levels (5 LPD).**

Figure 3: Top 5 settlements by % of refugee households who did not have access to sufficient quantities of drinking water (MSNA)



At the time of writing, funding for emergency communal **sanitation facilities** has been prioritized, but is expected to run out in three months.



SHELTER & NFI

According to the MSNA, shelter is the primary driver of need among refugee households.²⁹ Refugee households receive materials to construct a shelter when they arrive in a settlement. These **materials may not always be sufficient to construct sound and fully enclosed shelters.** According to UNHCR's Participatory Assessment (PA), the lack of available

materials as well as the costs of materials to construct shelters are the key issues that refugee households face in this regard.³⁰ The shelter sector receives a relatively small budget under the UCRPP, yet the shrinking funding environment could have detrimental implications for this core service provided to refugees.³¹



PROTECTION

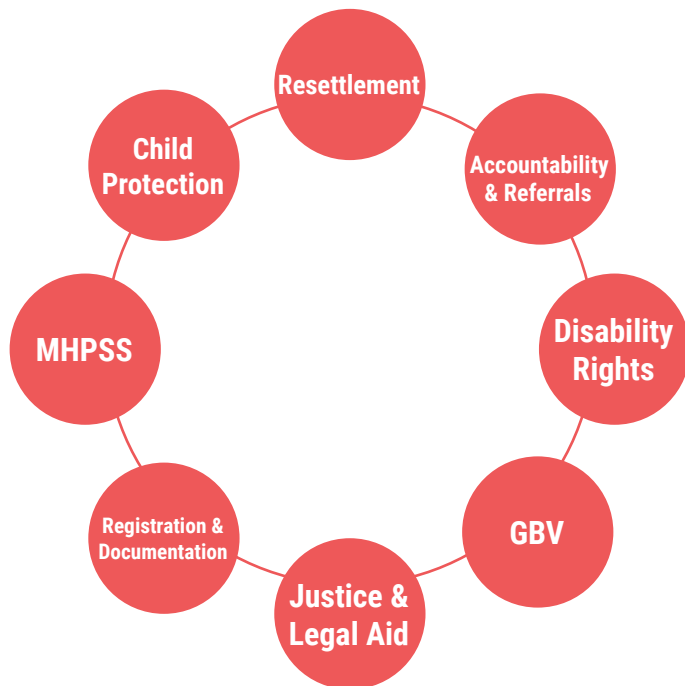
According to UCRRP data, protection is the second largest sector.³² The sector partners for protection reported on a wide range of programmes which have been and will be impacted by the diminishing funding. Figure 3 illustrates the various areas impacted. Across the areas that

concern case management, such as GBV, Child Protection, and MHPSS, both affected and unaffected partners reported concern over the increased workload on remaining staff, which may not be tenable. For child protection, for example, the current caseworker-to-children at risk ratio is 1:143, compared to the global standard of 1:25. **Several child protection partners have already been forced to significantly reduce their staffing and downscale operations.** The reduction in staffing is also impacting referral mechanisms.

The funding challenges have also impacted OPM, who will have **reduced capacity and resources to assess asylum applications and provide refugee documentation.** At the time of writing, there are approximately 38,274 asylum application pending adjudication. The current funding supports only 4 Refugee Eligibility Committee (REC) sessions in 2025, which will leave 34,000 asylum seekers without documentation, **reducing access to protection, social services, and livelihoods.**

The impacts of programme suspensions and reductions are reported across all settlements and Kampala. **In Kyangwali, Palabek, Palorinya, and Rhino Camp, at least 5 protection programmes have been impacted.**

Figure 4: Areas of protection programming impacted by funding cuts



EDUCATION

Education programmes have been impacted by reduced funding in various ways. **Education programmes funding teachers across all settlements have been impacted,** which is likely to lead to a deterioration of the Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR). As of April 2025, the PTR is estimated to be 79:1. The Pupil-Classroom Ratio (PCR) is also expected to deteriorate. The current PCR is 117:1, compared to the 53:1 standard.

Additional programmes that have been impacted include the provision of scholastic

materials and direct financial and other forms of support to the most vulnerable children. This is happening concurrently with the cuts in child protection programmes noted earlier. Similarly, the reduction of MHPSS programming has the potential to further impact education outcomes.

Education sector partners estimate that close to 400,000 refugee learners will be directly impacted by the cuts, as per figure 5 below.

Figure 5: Number of learners directly impacted by the funding cuts, as reported by education partners

70,017 Pre-primary learners	300,719 Primary level learners	22,668 Secondary school learners
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LIVELIHOODS & RESILIENCE

Members of the Livelihoods & Resilience Sector Working Group have reported that **at least 13 livelihood programmes have been impacted by reduced funding**. As a result, 416,811 refugees and 95,000 host community members will no longer receive the intended assistance. Impacted

livelihood programmes include multi-year and multi-faceted programs, such as graduation programmes. In light of reduced food assistance, and the protracted refugee population, the **reduced livelihood support threatens the longer term integration of refugees**.



ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

Several programmes related to energy and environment have been impacted by the funding changes. These programmes include woodlot maintenance, household tree-growing, and environmental conservation. Several cooking programmes are also impacted, including constructions and distribution of energy-efficient cookstoves. Considering the heavy use of

bio fuel for cooking and the deforestation trends in large parts of the country, this could have significant long-term impacts. Sector partners have expressed further concerns about how **reduced availability of cooking fuels and materials may impact food security and health outcomes**.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

The information presented in this brief are based on a few key data sources. Methodological details of the key sources will be provided here. Additional sources were consulted to provide context and triangulation, which can be found in the end notes below.

REACH, 2024 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA)

The objective of the 2024 MSNA was to estimate the prevalence and severity of need among refugees and host communities in Uganda. The data was collected in July-October 2024. The data is representative for each population group in each location with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The data and analysis is available [here](#).

Uganda Ministry of Health (MoH), Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), OPM, Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industries and Fisheries (MAAIF), Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), and UNHCR, Food Security and Nutrition Assessment (FSNA) 2024.

The FSNA is a yearly assessment conducted jointly by WFP, UNICEF, and UNHCR. The data for the 2024 FSNA was collected in August-September 2024 and covered both refugees and host communities.

UNHCR, Participatory Assessment (PA), 2024.

Participatory assessments aim to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the situation and promote meaningful participation of refugees and affected communities in shaping UNHCR and partners' interventions. The data was collected in September-December 2024 in all settlements with a 90% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

OPM and UNHCR, Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) Funding Tracking Data, 2024.

UCRRP funding data is collected on a quarterly basis to track the amount of funding that is received by UCRRP partners.

Partner survey conducted by UNHCR

UNHCR has circulated a rapid survey through all sector working groups to obtain initial information regarding the experienced and expected impacts of the reduced funding. The survey was circulated at the end of March/early April 2025. Further surveys and information-gathering exercises are ongoing.

The brief is based on the information that was available at the time of writing. As the situation continues to develop, some of the reported impacts of the reduced funding may also change.

ENDNOTES

1. OPM and UNHCR, "[Uganda Population Dashboard: Overview of Refugees and Asylum-seekers in Uganda](#)," 31 March 2025.
2. OPM and UNHCR, "[Underfunded: Report 2024](#)," Uganda Country Refugee Response (UCRRP), 21 November 2024.
3. Elissa Miolene, Sara Jerving, and Adva Saldinger, "[The USAID awards the Trump administration killed - and kept](#)," Devex, 27 March 2025.
4. Jesse Chase-Lubitz, "[Europe is cutting development spending, and it's not because of Trump](#)," Devex, 25 March 2025.
5. OPM and UNHCR, "[Refugee Arrival Monitoring Dashboard 2022-2025](#)," filtered for January-March 2025.
6. Ibid.
7. REACH, "[2024 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment \(MSNA\)](#)," data published on 9 December 2024.
8. Ibid.
9. See note 3.
10. See note 7.
11. Ibid.
12. Ministry of Health (MoH), Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Ministry of Agriculture Animal Industries and Fisheries (MAAIF), Ministry of Local Government (MoLG), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) © 2024. Food Security and Nutrition Assessment in Refugee Settlements, Refugee Host districts, and Kampala, 2024.
13. See note 7.
14. Ibid.
15. See note 3.
16. See note 7.
17. See note 12.
18. See note 7.
19. See note 12.
20. OPM and UNHCR, "UCRRP Funding Tracking Data, 2024," retrieved April 2025.
21. See note 7.
22. Ibid.
23. See note 12.
24. See note 7.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. See note 12.
28. See note 7.
29. Ibid.
30. UNHCR, "Participatory Assessment (PA), 2024," data collected September-December 2024.
31. See note 20.
32. Ibid.

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

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