UNHCR
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

**Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

**For the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Compilation Report**

**Universal Periodic Review: *Fourth Cycle, 54th Session***

# UGANDA

## I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Uganda acceded to the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* and its *1967 Protocol* in 1976, albeit with reservations. It ratified the *1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa* in 1987. Uganda has been a State Party to the *1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* since 1965 but is not a Party to the *1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*. In February 2010, Uganda ratified the *African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa* (*Kampala Convention*) and, in June 2023, endorsed the Munyonyo Declaration on Durable Solutions for Refugees.

Uganda's progressive refugee regime is underpinned by the Refugees Act, 2006 and the Refugee Regulations, 2010. These instruments provide refugees with freedom of movement, as well as the right to work, to establish businesses upon obtaining permits, to own property, and to access social services such as education and healthcare on an equal footing with nationals. Refugees are also allocated plots of land for housing and cultivation, in line with the country's non-encampment policy, and live alongside host communities with shared access to services.

The country adopted the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), emphasizing development-oriented approaches, inclusion in national systems, and durable solutions, including resettlement and regional peace initiatives.

As of 31 May 2026, Uganda hosted 2,024,416 refugees and asylum-seekers – the largest refugee population in Africa. Approximately 91% reside in 13 refugee settlements, while 9% live in urban areas, primarily Kampala. Women and children constitute 77% of the population, with children alone making up 50%. Refugees originate from 31 countries, with the majority from South Sudan (52%) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (33%), Sudan 5% while others are from Burundi, Somalia, Rwanda, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and additional nationalities account for 10.4%.

Uganda has taken steps to support durable solutions, including voluntary repatriation. Since December 2020, over 16,000 Burundian refugees have returned home; however, reintegration challenges such as land disputes, limited services, and insecurity persist, undermining the sustainability of returns.

In March 2023, Uganda suspended the admission of Somali asylum-seekers, later extending this suspension to Eritrean and Ethiopian nationals in early 2025, citing concerns over fraud and

abuse of the asylum system. Arrests and detentions of undocumented individuals increased during this period. Following stakeholder engagement, the Government lifted the suspension in December 2025.

A draft national refugee policy, initiated in 2022, has undergone consultations and awaits Cabinet approval. It retains core principles of the Refugees Act while strengthening sustainability, environmental management, socio-economic inclusion, and protection. Its adoption would consolidate the policy foundation for refugee inclusion in national development planning.

The Government also enacted the Protection of Sovereignty Act, 2026, affirming national autonomy, non-interference, and alignment of international partnerships with domestic priorities.

Legislatively, the Anti-Homosexuality Act passed in 2023 introduced severe penalties including life imprisonment for consensual same-sex conduct, the death penalty for the offence of "aggravated homosexuality", and up to 20 years' imprisonment for the "promotion of homosexuality". In April 2024, the Constitutional Court upheld the constitutionality of the Act while nullifying four provisions, notably those criminalizing the letting of premises, imposing a duty to report suspected acts, and restricting access to essential health services.[1] The Act continues to have protection implications, including for asylum-seekers and refugees with claims based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and constrains the operating environment for service providers.

The Sexual Offences Bill, 2024 was withdrawn in March 2026 due to overlapping provisions with existing laws and divergent stakeholder views. While this avoided duplication, it leaves gaps in creating a harmonized legal framework for sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Uganda conducted a national census in 2024, which included refugees and persons at risk of statelessness. This marked a significant step in ensuring visibility in planning and resource allocation, strengthening evidence-based policymaking and social cohesion.

## II. ACHIEVEMENTS AND POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

Uganda continues to demonstrate global leadership through its progressive refugee policies and inclusive development approach. Notable achievements include the integration of refugees into national systems, expansion of legal identity services, and strengthened GBV prevention. However, persistent challenges related to funding, legal harmonization, asylum system capacity, child protection, and statelessness require sustained attention.

Addressing these gaps through increased domestic investment, legislative reform, and strengthened institutional capacity will be critical to ensuring protection, inclusion, and durable solutions for refugees and host communities alike.

**UPR Recommendation 125.47[2]:** The Government, supported by UNHCR and partners, strengthened GBV prevention and response systems in refugee-hosting districts. Progress made includes improved data systems, rollout of GBV dashboards, enhanced service delivery, and expanded access to sexual and reproductive health education.

[1] Constitutional Court of Uganda, Consolidated Constitutional Petitions Nos. 14, 15, 16 and 85 of 2023, judgment of 3 April 2024, nullifying sections 3(2)(c), 9, 11(2)(d) and 14 of the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023.
[2] Take measures to give priority to the allocation of financial resources to programmes to combat gender-based violence, as well as to increase national budget allocations and investments for early childhood development.

**UPR Recommendation 125.71[3]:** The Government advanced inclusive protection through collaboration with cultural institutions. Initiatives such as SASA! strengthened community prevention of violence against women and girls. Targeted interventions among marginalized groups improved access to services. Refugee-hosting districts benefited from programmes such as SASA Together and Girl Shine, enhancing referral systems, reducing harmful norms, and improving protection outcomes.

**UPR Recommendation 125.251[4] :** Uganda expanded Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems to 117 districts, introduced digital innovations, and waived fees for early birth registration. Refugee inclusion improved significantly, with over 200,000 refugee children receiving birth certificates and mobile registration services deployed in settlements. Efforts to address statelessness also advanced through the inclusion of at-risk populations in the national census.

## III. KEY PROTECTION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Issue 1: Birth Registration

The Registration of Persons Act, 2015 establishes a robust legal framework for universal and compulsory birth registration under the mandate of the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA). In practice, however the Registration of Persons (Fees) (Amendment) Regulations, 2024 waived fees for the registration of births of children of refugees. To register a birth, a parent or declarant must provide a birth notification record issued by a health facility or, in the case of community births, by the relevant sub-county chief or town clerk; and the refugee identification documents of the parents. Acquiring such documents from sub-county chief or town clerk may sometime require payment of unspecified amounts by refugees.

This requirement enables NIRA to verify and link the child to the appropriate parents, who are also identified on the birth notification issued by the health facility at the time of birth. Beyond ensuring the integrity and accuracy of civil registration records, this process helps prevent the issuance of birth certificates to individuals who are not registered refugees or asylum-seekers in Uganda and serves as an important safeguard against identity fraud, including risks associated with child trafficking.

**Recommendations:**

- Waive all fees associated with the issuance of birth certificates for children whose births are registered within the legally prescribed period after birth; and waive fees and penalties for late registration for vulnerable children to ensure equitable access to legal identity and essential services such as education, healthcare, and child protection.
- Increase funding to expand decentralized and accessible registration services ensuring all children born on the territory are registered and issued with birth certificates.
- Remove documentation-related barriers so that a child's right to birth registration is not conditioned on the legal status or identity documentation of the parents.

### Issue 2: Integration and Localization

Uganda has committed to localization under the Global Compact on Refugees, and its 2023 Global Refugee Forum pledges. While progress is evident in integrating access to refugees' rights and services such as health and education into national systems, gaps remain in the

[3] Enhance measures to prevent discrimination against all vulnerable groups, including women, children and persons living with HIV.
[4] Strengthen funding mechanisms to support the registration of all children and support registration structures at the local government level.

systematic mainstreaming of refugee protection across government structures. District local governments and the Department of Refugees require predictable financing, staffing and technical support to sustain refugee protection functions. Embedding refugee protection more systematically in national and district development plans would help ensure that refugee-hosting areas are supported through regular government planning and budgeting processes, rather than relying primarily on humanitarian funding.

**Recommendation:**
UNHCR recognizes the significant fiscal pressures faced by the Government and the scale of needs in refugee-hosting districts. Progress can therefore be pursued progressively, with priority given to:

- measures that strengthen existing government systems and district social services, improve coordination and ensure that refugee protection is more thoroughly reflected in national and district-level planning and budgeting.

**Issue 3: <u>Asylum System Backlog</u>**

In February 2026, Uganda ended the *prima facie* approach to recognition of refugee status of nationals of South Sudan, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, provided for under sections 19 and 25(4) of the Refugees Act, 2006,[5] transitioning to individual refugee status determination procedures -- which has contributed to a growing backlog of pending cases.

Individual adjudication of large-scale arrivals from situations of generalized violence significantly exceeds the current capacity of the Refugee Eligibility Committee and has contributed to a growing backlog of undetermined claims, notwithstanding accelerated adjudication sessions convened in 2025 that had reduced the number of pending cases. Asylum-seeker certificates are valid for only three months, requiring frequent and costly renewals; asylum-seekers whose documents lapse pending determination face heightened risks of arrest, detention and *refoulement*, and constrained access to services. In response, UNHCR is working closely with the Government to develop alternative case-processing modalities, including simplified and accelerated procedures, aimed at enhancing efficiency and reducing delays in status determination.

**Recommendations:**

- Ensure fair and efficient asylum procedures in line with international standards by strengthening the national asylum system – through reinforced institutional capacity, adjudication, and case management processes, introducing expedited and simplified asylum procedures, where appropriate, while maintaining procedural fairness and due process guarantees and reinstating *prima facie* recognition where conditions in countries of origin support such an approach.
- Extend the validity of asylum-seeker certificates from three months to one year to ensure increasing numbers of asylum-seekers have access to valid legal ID and access to services pending their refugee status determination.
- Ensure that no asylum-seeker is arrested, detained or removed on account of lapsed documentation arising from status-determination delays.

**Issue 4: <u>Child Protection</u>**

Uganda hosts over one million refugee children, with more than 84,000 facing protection risks. Policies such as Uganda's National Child Policy and Alternative Care Framework demonstrate commitment to working toward protection of children. However, challenges persist. These

[5] Refugees Act, 2006 (Cap. 213), sections 19 and 25(4); declarations made thereunder.

include limited access of refugee children to education (especially secondary), healthcare, nutrition, birth registration, and specialized services for children with disabilities. Many refugee children experience trauma due to displacement, violence, and family separation, thus exacerbating their vulnerability when unable to access essential rights and services.

Constraints to full enjoyment of these rights by refugee children include insufficient funding, weak institutional capacity, limited social workforce, and inadequate coordination.

**Recommendations:**

- Increase financial and technical investment in child protection systems, including establishing dedicated funding mechanisms.
- Expand the social service workforce in refugee-hosting districts and strengthen case management, referral pathways and coordination between government and humanitarian child protection actors.

**Issue 5: <u>Statelessness</u>**

Uganda has made commitments under the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness, but progress remains slow. Legal gaps persist, particularly regarding safeguards for children born stateless and recognition of long-standing minority communities who are at risk of statelessness; progress in implementation, however, remains slow.

Under Article 10 and the Third Schedule of the 1995 Constitution, citizenship by birth is limited to persons with a parent or grandparent belonging to one of the 65 listed indigenous communities present within Uganda's borders as of 1 February 1926. Long-settled communities not included in the Third Schedule – such as the Maragoli and others – are thereby excluded from citizenship by birth. The enumeration of these communities in the 2024 census provides an evidence base for reform.

**Recommendations:**

- Accede to the *1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness* and incorporate safeguards into national law.
- Reform Uganda's nationality laws to grant citizenship to long-term unrecognized communities present before 1926.
- Promote statelessness education in higher institutions and strengthen public awareness, recognizing that knowledge and understanding of statelessness remain limited among stakeholders, academia, and affected communities. Increased awareness can help advance the protection of nationality rights and the prevention of statelessness.
- Introduce and implement legal safeguards to grant nationality to children born on the territory who would otherwise be stateless.
- Ratify and domesticate the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Specific Aspects of the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa.*

**UNHCR**
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