



# COMMUNITY PRIORITIES QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT REPORT

FEBRUARY 2026

# Background



The aim of the Community Priorities Qualitative Assessment, a collective exercise by U-Learn and the Humanitarian INGO Forum (HINGO), was to provide insights into community needs and priorities during a period when little recent research was conducted on needs, and existing data was generally thought to have depreciated, due to the changing context in Uganda's refugee settlements in 2025. **The findings of this assessment can be used to support or complement the contextualisation of the UCRRP 2026-29 objectives and to inform programming.**

This assessment employed key informant interviews (KIIs) with Refugee Welfare Council (RWC) members in each of the 13 settlements to understand the community needs, how community members would prioritise them, and how those priorities should be met.

Furthermore, the interviews discussed what groups within communities may face different or more severe needs. This assessment aimed to provide insights to support and inform programming and targeting processes for HINGO members. The top three priority needs, as reported by KIIs, are food, health services, and education, with livelihoods also cited by many respondents due to its interplay with food security, health, and access to education.

# Methodology

**This assessment employed a qualitative approach to allow refugee representatives to define and prioritise needs in their own terms.** The assessment utilised key informant interviews (KIIs) with refugee welfare council (RWC) members in each settlement to first broadly discuss needs within their settlement, prioritise those needs, discuss how those needs should be fulfilled, and identify population groups within the settlement which may have different or more severe needs than those discussed. In addition to KIIs with RWCs at the settlement level, KIIs with RWC members at the zone level were conducted in those settlements/zones receiving new arrivals to ensure the needs and priorities of these areas are specifically captured. The experience of urban refugees residing in Kampala was beyond the scope of this exercise.



**38  
interviews**



**13  
settlements**



**4 zones receiving  
new arrivals**

A total of 38 interviews were conducted in 13 settlements<sup>1</sup> and 4 zones<sup>2</sup> from 17th November to 5th December 2025. Key informants (KIs) were identified by participating HINGO partners for their contextual knowledge and positions within the RWC. To ensure the assessment included a diversity of perspectives, partners attempted to interview at least one male and one female in each settlement. In addition, partners were asked to interview the RWC Secretary for Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs) to ensure the needs of these groups were captured in the interviews. Transcripts were analysed, and responses regarding priority needs and vulnerable demographics were ranked by response frequency.

## Limitations

This assessment is an ad-hoc collective effort by U-Learn and HINGO. The methodology reflects the level of resources available. The results of the qualitative assessment will be indicative of the refugee population living within the settlements rather than representative. In addition, despite attempts to interview one male and one female RWC member, as well as the Secretary for PSNs in the settlements, this was not always possible due to time constraints. Furthermore, RWC elections were underway in some settlements at the time of data collection, further impeding the ability to meet gender and position targets for KI composition.

It should be noted that reviewers of this document stated that, in their view, conditions across sectors have worsened since the data collection for this assessment, between November and December 2025 and February 2026, particularly in Health, Education, and WASH, and particularly in West Nile, due to funding constraints.

## Priority needs



**Food  
security**



**Education**



**Health  
services**



**Livelihoods**

Based on the needs reported in order (1, 2, 3), the top-priority needs identified by respondents were food security, education, health services, and livelihoods, in that order. A smaller number of respondents also reported needs related to shelter, protection needs - including child marriage and gender-based violence (GBV) - and theft/security. The top-priority needs between the West Nile and Southwest regions were similar, although more respondents in the Southwest region reported WASH and shelter needs.

<sup>1</sup> Adjumani, Bidibidi, Imvepi, Kiryandongo, Kyaka II, Kyangwali, Lobule, Nakivale, Oruchinga, Palabek, Palorinya, Rhino Camp, Rwamwanja

<sup>2</sup> Rubondo/Juru (Nakivale settlement), Ranch 37 (Kiryandongo settlement), Zone 8 (Rhino Camp), and Bukinda/Mukunyu (Kyangwali settlement)

**Key informants chose the following simplified priority needs, by the level of priority:**

Need	Priority #1	Priority #2	Priority #3	Total number included within KI's top 3 priorities
Food security	12	4	2	18
Livelihoods	8	8	8	24
Health services	7	10	6	23
Education	5	10	9	24
WASH	2	1	1	4
Protection	2		3	5
Shelter and NFIs		1	3	4
Durable solutions		1		1

Notes on the table above:

- It should be restated that this data collection preceded the manifestation of substantial gaps in service provision (notably in health facilities and schools) as of January 2026. **Hence, the top-priority needs may have shifted (potentially toward health, education, and WASH) between the time of data collection in November-December 2025 and the time of reporting in February 2026.**
- The frequencies displayed in the above table are the result of the opinions of appointed refugee representatives. However, these results do not constitute refugee population-representative findings; this assessment's findings are purely indicative and stated categorically for the sake of providing a legible overview.
- Protection frequently reoccurs in KII transcripts as a cross-cutting issue rather than as a standalone priority need.

**Overall, the priority needs reported by respondents largely align with acute needs identified in IMPACT-REACH's 2025 Uganda Acute Needs Analysis (ANA) Pilot,** particularly in relation to food security, livelihoods, and broader health system strain identified as well as needs in the water system in Nakivale. However, the ANA focused on identifying direct drivers of mortality. As a result, while education-related needs fell outside the scope of the ANA, they are well reflected in the Community Priorities Analysis<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> IMPACT-REACH, *Uganda Acute Needs Analysis*, 2025. [https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/impact/b15a2ed3/IMPACT-REACH-UGA\\_Acute-Needs-Analysis-2025\\_Final-Report\\_toshare.pdf](https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/impact/b15a2ed3/IMPACT-REACH-UGA_Acute-Needs-Analysis-2025_Final-Report_toshare.pdf)



## Education

Education was also among the most frequently cited priority needs for communities, with 24 KIs identifying it as one of the top three needs within their settlements. KIs described the financial inaccessibility of education, including the high cost of school fees and materials, as well as the limited workforce and physical capacity of schools, including high teacher-to-pupil ratios and insufficient classrooms. Several KIs in the West Nile region noted awareness of the reductions in funding for education and its impact on their education system, with one respondent in Imvepi noting, **“There is a big population of learners versus teachers. Initially, there were many teachers but now due to fund reduction, many teachers have been terminated”**.

A few respondents also highlighted the consequences of financial inaccessibility to school, noting increased dropout rates and higher absenteeism. Although an analysis of educational needs was beyond the scope of the ANA, the KIs emphasised the importance of continued investment and support for the education system. It is worth noting that this data collection occurred in November-December 2025, prior to the implementation of yet further substantial cuts to settlement-based teachers. To that end, responses may reflect both the situation at that time and potentially anticipatory concerns regarding this impending development.

### Modalities

To address these challenges and meet educational needs, respondents emphasised the need for direct financial support to households with school-age children, including scholarships or partial payment of school fees.<sup>4</sup> Respondents also highlighted the importance of strengthening existing schools' capacity to serve the student population, including by hiring additional teachers and expanding classroom capacity. These mirror UCRRP priorities: providing scholarships and cash grants to vulnerable and marginalised children, recruiting and deploying teachers and instructors, and constructing or rehabilitating additional classrooms in public schools.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, respondents underscored the linkages between livelihoods and education, noting that improved livelihood support can enable parents to cover education-related costs and ensure that children who leave school can support their families through employment afterwards.

### Population groups

Respondents emphasised the education needs and vulnerabilities of **young girls, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), including children with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, child-headed households, and single mothers**. For persons with disabilities and single mothers, this was particularly related to their ability to pay for school fees because of limited access to livelihood opportunities. Respondents stressed that children with disabilities can face stigma in schools and noted the need for more inclusive educational opportunities.

Respondents also noted the particular needs of unaccompanied minors and child-headed households, highlighting the protection risks associated with these groups as well as the unique barriers they face in accessing educational opportunities.

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR, *Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2026 Prioritization*, 2025. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/120312>

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, *Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2026 Prioritization*, 2025



*“Some school feeding programs have closed that have contributed to absenteeism.”*

**KI, Rwamwanja**



## Food security

Food security was among the top three priority needs reported by 18 key informants (KIs), who discussed the negative impacts of cuts to general food assistance (GFA) and recategorisations. The most frequently cited challenge to achieving food security was limited access to land for cultivation, with KIs noting that improved access to land helps build self-reliance among refugee communities.



*Refugees are able to utilize the land and have a living without the partners present.”*

**KI, Bidibidi**



A couple of respondents also cited challenges with weather conditions (e.g., drought) and their negative impact on harvests, as well as unfavourable livelihood conditions, including the inadequacy of small-scale agriculture to provide both food for consumption and income, low market prices for produce, and poor returns on businesses. These challenges echo findings from the ANA, which highlighted limited access to land and to stable livelihood opportunities as exacerbating food insecurity following reductions in GFA. In justifying their selection of food security as a top priority, several respondents also described the negative consequences of food insecurity in their communities, including theft, migration from the settlement, and malnutrition.

<sup>6</sup> IMPACT-REACH, *Uganda Acute Needs Analysis*, 2025

## Modalities

To support food security and address food access challenges, KIs emphasised the need to enable access to land, including a request that the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) negotiate with host communities to improve land access. These recommendations align closely with priorities outlined in the Inter-Agency Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) Prioritisation document, particularly those related to facilitating refugee access to land and increasing production among refugees in the settlements.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, KIs highlighted the need to expand livelihood support by engaging households and individuals in livelihood opportunities, providing start-up capital, creating farming groups, and providing skills training. These proposed actions also strongly align with UCRRP priorities, including increasing productivity, providing market-based technical skills training and employment linkages, providing cash grants for productive assets, facilitating job placements, and building the capacity of farmer groups.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, KIs emphasised the need to strengthen self-reliance and resilience among refugee communities amid ongoing reductions in GFA. A few respondents also suggested reconsidering the recategorisation and prioritisation processes to reinstate some households to cash or in-kind food assistance.

## Population groups

Respondents noted several population groups as being particularly vulnerable or facing more severe food security needs, including PwDs, single mothers, and the elderly. Respondents noted that these groups face challenges in engaging in income-generating activities and farming. Respondents also pointed out single mothers' heavy caregiving burden, which simultaneously strains resources and constrains their ability to pursue livelihoods or cultivate opportunities.



## Health services

Among the most frequently reported top priority needs of settlements across the Southwest and West Nile regions were health services, reported as a top three priority need by 23 KIs. The most frequently cited health services challenge was the unavailability of medicines in facilities and refugees' inability to pay for medicines outside health facilities. KIs also described key health system capacity issues, including an insufficient health workforce and insufficient space in existing facilities to accommodate patient volumes. As one respondent from Kiryandongo noted, **“Access to health services is a priority need because, with high number of new arrivals, the population has increased making it hard to have all their patients served by few health workers and wards for inpatients”**. Further perceived community priorities, as reported by Health Sector colleagues, include referral support meals, transportation (due to the significant reduction in Village Health Teams [VHTs]), and renewed funding for VHTs.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, *Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2026 Prioritization, 2025*

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR, *Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2026 Prioritization, 2025*

*“Women deliver at home, which is risky. There are insufficient drugs at the health facility, few numbers of health workers, and children are malnourished children. When people referred to Arua Regional Referral Hospital, most of the services require money, they face language barrier, and the bad road network hinders access to the health facility, which sometimes causes delays and we lose mothers and babies”*

**KI, Rhino Camp**

A few respondents attributed these drug and workforce challenges to the funding cuts earlier in 2025, noting how conditions have deteriorated. Other challenges mentioned include limited access to referral services; shortages of fuel for ambulances that support transport to larger facilities; low-quality services provided in facilities, including being asked to pay for free services or the unavailability of interpretation services at the point of care; and long distances to facilities. The findings align with the ANA, which found that health systems across both regions were severely strained but still functioning, with pockets of severity in Palabek, Kiryandongo, and Nakivale driven by a limited health workforce, high population-to-facility ratios, and limited inpatient bed capacity.<sup>9</sup>

*“Since there is no more food assistance, the people do not also have money to buy drugs at the hospital which has become another greatest challenge.”*

**KI, Kyaka II**

## Modalities

Respondents identified several modalities to strengthen health service delivery, including ensuring consistent availability of medicines at health facilities. KIs also recommended expanding the health workforce, strengthening referral systems, and building the capacity of village health teams (VHTs). These recommendations align closely with UCRRP priorities, including procuring medicines and supplies, recruiting and deploying health care workers, facilitating VHTs' implementation of community interventions, and providing ambulance services to support essential referral health services.<sup>10</sup>

## Population groups

Many respondents discussed the health needs of the elderly, PwDs, children, pregnant and lactating mothers, and persons with chronic illness. Respondents highlighted the unique health and support needs these groups require. In addition, respondents noted that these groups may be economically disadvantaged relative to other members of the community. For the elderly, PwDs, and persons with chronic illnesses, respondents highlighted their high need for medical services and medications, which could be particularly challenging considering drug shortages, health workforce shortages, and limited access to income-generating opportunities.

<sup>9</sup> IMPACT-REACH, *Uganda Acute Needs Analysis*, 2025

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR, *Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2026 Prioritization*, 2025



## Livelihoods

Many respondents identified livelihoods as a top priority, with 24 KIs reporting that livelihood support was among the top three priority needs in their settlements. As with food security, several respondents discussed livelihoods (as well as education) in relation to the 2025 increase in crime, noting that improving livelihood opportunities can contribute to crime reduction by offering alternative income-generating opportunities.

*“Food is required for one to survive and unfortunately, accessing it by oneself without external support in the settlement is a little difficult. Give life skills training to refugees and startup capital to start or boost our businesses.”*  
**KI, Bidibidi**



### Modalities

To address livelihood needs in the settlements, respondents suggested providing start-up capital and training and skills development opportunities across various income-generating activities. Respondents also suggested providing livelihood inputs, such as start-up kits and agricultural inputs, and forming livelihood groups, including farming groups. These recommendations are reflected in the UCRRP priority activities, including market-based technical skills training and employment linkages; cash grants for productive assets; entrepreneurship training; agricultural inputs; business start-up kits; and the formation and capacity-building of farmer groups.<sup>11</sup>

### Population groups

When asked about the population groups that are experiencing more severe needs related to livelihoods, respondents highlighted the experiences of youth, persons with disabilities, and women, specifically single mothers. For youth, respondents emphasised the importance of providing skills training to expand access to employment.

For PwDs, respondents reported difficulty participating in and accessing income-generating activities, as well as limited access to other services. In addition, respondents highlighted that PwDs may face discrimination and exclusion from livelihood opportunities. According to respondents, single mothers face challenges in accessing livelihood opportunities due to a heavy caregiving burden, which leaves them with less time to participate in income-generating activities.

*“Single parents, some of them they have big families, they have also these little children. For them sometimes they go begging from neighbours which is very painful. They struggle alone.”*  
**KI, Palabek**

<sup>11</sup>UNHCR, *Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2026 Prioritization, 2025*

New arrivals in Kyangwali were also reported to face issues in terms of starting up small-scale subsistence agriculture and accessing market dynamics.

*“Most of the people in Bukinda are new arrivals with small plots of land that cannot produce enough for food and market. Usually, they only produce for consumption. And for those who wish to sell, the low price for the produce denies them the opportunity.”*

**Ki, Bukinda Zone, Kyangwali**



## WASH

Four KIs reported WASH as one of the top three priority needs in their settlements, with the majority of KIs located in the Southwest region. Respondents described limited water supply, inaccessible water points, and a lack of sanitary products for girls as critical WASH challenges. This regional difference aligns somewhat with trends observed in previous years, in which WASH issues were slightly more visible in the Southwest than in West Nile, coupled with other sectoral needs (food security, education, health, socio-economic vulnerability), indicating higher yet comparatively lower needs in the Southwest than in West Nile.<sup>12</sup>

### Modalities

To address these challenges, respondents suggested improving and constructing key water infrastructure, including piped water systems and reservoirs, as well as providing sanitary materials and dignity kits, and conducting health promotion activities related to menstrual hygiene in schools, aligning with UCRRP priority activities to support menstrual hygiene management for girls in school.



### Population groups

Respondents reported that new arrivals faced more severe needs with respect to access to water and shelter, citing long distances and sometimes dangerous terrain. Sanitary materials for women and girls were repeatedly mentioned as concrete needs.

*“Bukinda has majority of the new arrivals that still need services. New arrivals settled in distant areas with many members e.g.. block 2 and 3 in Bukinda zone have hilly terrain. There is no water supply in areas where newly resettled refugees are settled.”*

**Ki, Bukinda Zone, Kyangwali**

<sup>12</sup> IMPACT-REACH, *Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA): Multi-Sector Needs Index (MSNI); Vulnerability & Essential Needs, Socio-Economic Vulnerability Analysis, 2024*  
UNHCR/UNICEF/WFP, *Food Security & Nutrition Assessment, 2024, 2025*



## Protection

Five KIs noted protection concerns as one of the top three priority needs within their settlement, including concerns surrounding child marriages and gender-based violence (GBV). To address these protection challenges, respondents suggested providing livelihood support, underscoring how poor livelihoods affect protection. Respondents highlighted the particular needs faced by the elderly, children, and PwDs.



*"[Children, including those with disabilities, face] extremely high risk of trafficking, sexual exploitation, forced labor, lack of safe guardianship and decision-making support, difficulty accessing shelter, food, healthcare, and education, trauma, fear, separation anxiety, and developmental impacts."*  
Ki, Imvepi



A few needs described by respondents did not align with any of the previously identified priority needs. One respondent cited theft/security, independent of livelihoods or food security, as a priority issue or need. Another respondent identified durable solutions as a priority need, while another cited the need to reconsider recategorisation to target individuals rather than households.



## Shelter

Two KIs cited shelter as a priority need within their communities. Challenges cited by respondents included the poor condition of shelters and the financial barriers to accessing construction materials. The modalities suggested by respondents included providing construction materials and supporting the construction of shelters, activities not reflected in the list of UCRRP prioritised activities.<sup>13</sup>

KIs mentioned elderly, PwDs, unaccompanied children, and new arrivals face more severe needs related to shelter. Shelter Sector stakeholders, upon review of this assessment's findings, noted that while constructing shelters for PSNs was initially classified as a Tier 2 (core sector interventions) activity in the Inter-Agency's Q4 2025 Prioritisation Exercise, PSN shelter support was subsequently elevated to a Tier 1 (lifesaving) activity.



<sup>13</sup> UNHCR, *Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (UCRRP) 2026 Prioritization, 2025*

# Priority groups for assistance



## Persons with disabilities

PwDs were prioritised by many respondents because of their limited access to livelihood opportunities, limited access to services, discrimination and stigma. PwDs with children are still responsible for caregiving but face limited access to livelihood opportunities.



## The elderly

The elderly were selected as a priority group for assistance because of the discrimination they face, as well as their limited access to livelihood opportunities and services. Some respondents noted that elderly may face physical limitations that can prevent them from engaging in certain income generation activities, including farming. Furthermore, respondents described the social isolation and high risk of neglect and abuse experienced by the elderly.



## Single mothers

Many respondents prioritised single mothers for assistance, as they carry a high burden of responsibility for caregiving without a spouse's support. Respondents also linked this to limited access to livelihood opportunities, noting that single mothers have less time and energy to devote to income-generating activities.



## Children

Many KIs prioritised children for assistance due to concerns about dropouts and absenteeism, as well as a belief in the importance of children to the future of families and settlements.



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U-Learn is an NGO consortium working in collaboration with the government and a wide range of stakeholders. U-Learn focuses on facilitating learning, conducting assessments, and amplifying refugee voice and choice.



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