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# Information, coordination, and financing: Does the Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities make a difference?

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Research Report

Victoria Brown, Robinah Kyeyune, Richard Kibombo, Nabil Hudda, and  
Nicola Ruddle

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## About Maintains

This five-year (2018–2023) operational research programme is building a strong evidence base on how health, education, nutrition, and social protection systems can respond more quickly, reliably, and effectively to changing needs during and after shocks, whilst also maintaining existing services. Maintains is working in six focal countries—Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Uganda—undertaking research to build evidence and providing technical assistance to support practical implementation. Lessons from this work will be used to inform policy and practice at both national and global levels.

Maintains is funded with UK aid from the UK government; however, the views expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the UK government’s official policies.

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## Contacts



[maintains@opml.co.uk](mailto:maintains@opml.co.uk)



[www.maintainsprogramme.org](http://www.maintainsprogramme.org)



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## Executive summary

### Introduction

Uganda's Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (ERP) aims to establish a realistic and implementable plan to ensure improved learning outcomes for increasing numbers of refugee and host community children and youth across Uganda. The Maintains education research seeks to support the ERP's aim through data collection, analysis and reporting of findings on the implementation of the ERP.

The ERP was launched by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) in 2018, developed by a joint consortium managed by MoES, with funding from Education Cannot Wait (ECW) and support from the Education Development Partner (EDP) Working Group.

The ERP aims to consolidate the efforts of all stakeholders engaged in refugee education, and to shift the paradigm from immediate humanitarian response to integrated education service delivery. The ERP is attempting to reach 567,500 learners per year with improved education services over 3.5 years (January 2018 to June 2021), with an estimated cost of US\$ 389 million for its activities. It is attempting to achieve better learning outcomes under three objectives:

- improved equitable access to inclusive and relevant learning opportunities;
- improved delivery of quality education services and training; and
- strengthened systems for effective delivery.

This report presents the analysis and findings from Phase 1 of the Maintains education research in Uganda. The research focuses on whether the ERP improves the capacity of the Government of Uganda to provide quality education services to refugees and host communities in response to a man-made shock – in this case the refugee influx. Phase 1 was conducted among national level stakeholders in the first half of 2020. Later phases will involve inquiry at the district level.

### Objectives

The Maintains education research focuses on mechanisms and responses arising from the introduction of the ERP. Specifically, the research examines how different parts of the education delivery system have responded to the ERP, how they cooperate, and how information and financial flows are managed. The research focuses on two levels of the system: i) the national institutional and policy system; and ii) the local delivery system in refugee-hosting districts. The primary research question is as follows:

**Does the ERP improve the effectiveness of education service delivery, and thereby education outcomes, for refugees and host communities?**

We unpack the research question by focusing on sub-themes around coordination, financing, information, delivery, and outcomes. Phase 1, the subject of this study, focuses on three specific areas of inputs to the ERP:

- setting up and effectively using **coordination** systems;
- leveraging and channelling adequate **financing**; and
- collecting and using relevant **information** in feedback loops.

Importantly, this phase did not evaluate the ERP's delivery mechanisms or overall outcomes. Rather, it focused explicitly on the infrastructure put in place under the coordination, financing and information management components of the Plan, to determine whether they have been executed successfully.

## Phase 1 methodology

Phase 1 was a heavily qualitative study with collection and analysis of key informant interviews (KIIs) and documentary data on the operations of the ERP to date at the national level. The research team collected data between April and June 2020. Primary data was collected from a range of stakeholders connected to the ERP's design and implementation. Respondents included government officials responsible for the Plan and individuals working closely with MoES to advise on the ERP, EDPs and humanitarian agencies funding and supporting implementation of the ERP, and informants working with civil society organisations (CSOs) helping to deliver education services aligned with the ERP's objectives.

Gathering of relevant documents from MoES started as early as January 2020, supported substantially by the ERP Secretariat and continuing through June, while KIIs were conducted from mid-April to early June 2020. Due to restrictions on meetings and movement during Uganda's lockdown under the COVID-19 pandemic, KIIs were conducted on audio call platforms. The range of respondents allowed us to explore experiences and perspectives related to the implementation of the ERP.

## Key findings

The following findings are organised by the key themes of this report: coordination, financing, information, and a specific look at how COVID-19 has affected implementation of the ERP. The findings are based on interviews with national level stakeholders in government and civil society; often, the opinions of government and development partners differed. The findings expressed in this summary are a compilation and analysis of respondents' views, their examples and evidence provided. The full report contains more detail about the initiatives and various perspectives of respondents.

Uganda is seen as a role model for its open-door policy on refugees and for establishing the ERP as a specific and ambitious plan responding to refugee and host community needs for education. The ERP's ambition includes a large number of activities, associated coordination mechanisms and needed funding, all of which were set out to be in place from the inception phase (Year 0) of the plan, which started in January 2018. Given the level of ambition, it is perhaps not surprising to find that 2.5 years into the ERP's duration, the status of implementation across coordination, financing and information has not kept pace with its original intentions. A major cause of this is the delay involved setting up a dedicated Secretariat in the MoES to drive coordination, which was needed in turn to achieve financing and information objectives. The Secretariat was officially functioning by September 2019 – in

Year 2 of the ERP. Positively, despite this short time frame, several critical activities were implemented by the Secretariat regarding. The achievements are illustrated in the different chapters here. However, just as the Secretariat was gaining momentum in spearheading implementation of the ERP, COVID-19 shut down the country's schools in March 2020, severely affecting all education programming and service delivery nationally – including under the ERP.

Importantly, the ERP is a very ambitious plan requiring a complex set of inputs from multiple actors for it to be successful. A key lesson learnt to date is the need for a realistic timeframe for executing a plan as aspiring as the ERP. While a number of government departments, individuals, civil society stakeholders and development partners are working hard to carry out activities – and achieving identifiable progress in key areas – a number of critical inputs remain to be executed before the ERP ends in mid-2021.

## Coordination

### **C1: National coordinating mechanisms have been successfully established and are functioning, largely by leveraging existing structures to support oversight and management of the ERP.**

Data collected at the national level illustrates that the structure and composition of the ERP's coordination mechanisms are well designed to facilitate effective planning and management of the policy. The coordination bodies contain the right mix of high-profile, appropriate individuals in their membership to access and engage with relevant government ministries, MoES departments, EDPs, and implementing partners to facilitate effective coordination of the ERP. Building the ERP's coordination mechanisms on existing systems and working groups that have the experience and capacity to coordinate refugee response was critical to this process, and has greatly benefited the ERP's coordination and delivery. ERP coordination mechanisms have been particularly successful in providing technical advice to implementing partners, and the presence of a fully dedicated Secretariat with highly qualified staff has been key in facilitating coordination processes and providing different actors with required information and timely technical guidance. However, the progress achieved regarding coordination has been affected by delays in establishing the ERP Secretariat. As part of the MoES, and designated as the technical team responsible for overall coordination of the ERP, the Secretariat is a key element in its operations and must continually expand its function alongside the Steering Committee, which provides strategic leadership.

### **C2: The ERP coordination model successfully engages key stakeholders across a range of institutions, departments, and actors, but its overall effectiveness is diminished by several systemic factors.**

The ERP's coordination structures make a good attempt to oversee and manage the delivery of the response by leveraging the capacities of people, existing departments, and mechanisms without requiring too many additional resources. Reasonable successes have been recorded regarding information-sharing across government departments, as well as provision of technical guidance and support to implementing partners through coordination linkages. However, national level stakeholders report that systemic factors and weaknesses somewhat limit the overall effectiveness of coordination outcomes under the ERP. Sub-quality reporting, under-reporting, challenges aligning project budgets and donor priorities

with ERP priorities, and limited time from overstretched government departments with many responsibilities are some of the key factors seen to be constraining effective coordination of the Plan.

**C3: The MoES is responsible for overall leadership and coordination of the ERP. Partners value this oversight role, but expressed a need to continuously strengthen internal systems and more directly engage a wider range of the MoES senior leadership to facilitate timely decisions related to policy implementation and service delivery.**

While the MoES is technically responsible for providing overall leadership to implement the ERP, development partners acknowledged that they contribute a significant amount of time and investment to its management and delivery. They hope to explore opportunities for more targeted, direct government engagement and ownership of key areas of the Plan, specifically regarding coordination of implementing partners and spearheading policy and practice improvements. Although the Secretariat is housed within the MoES and officially represents the government as the coordinating body for the ERP, it is seen by partners as an external structure supporting coordination; moreover, neither the Secretariat nor Steering Committee are seen by partners as exercising executive powers despite their prescribed roles.

**C4: District ERPs are seen as vital in empowering local governments to take ownership and authority of the Plan, better coordinate ERP resources and activities, and strengthen synergies between the local and national education system.**

A highlight and achievement of the Secretariat's work aligning coordination at local level is the development of district ERPs, although this process was ongoing in most districts at the time of this report. District ERPs are expected to streamline and strengthen coordination activities at district and settlement level, as well as help align district ERP priorities to funding. However, given that districts are already constrained by a lack of personnel, resources and capacity, efforts to improve planning and coordination mechanisms through district ERPs will only be successful if funds are raised and allocated to implement them. The upcoming ERP system strengthening strategy includes a number of other intended activities aimed at improving planning and coordination at both local and national levels.

## **Finance**

**F1: The financing needs of the ERP are not perceived to have been met, even against an already modest view of the needs.**

The ERP costing of US\$ 389 million already reduced the target group to only a portion of host community children, and did not aim to achieve full enrolment rates for refugees or host communities under the Plan. It is also thought that the population of refugees has grown more than anticipated when the ERP was developed, though no analysis has been seen to confirm the extent of this. This US\$ 389 million, though identified against priority activities and considered a realistic expectation, has not been secured to date, two years since the Plan's start date. Furthermore, the actual accurate status of financing is not known due to difficulties in defining and tracking spending on the ERP. There are concerns regarding gaps in the number of classrooms and teachers, as well as inequitable distribution of resources

between settlement sites. However, without accurate data, it is not possible to confirm this. Short-term technical assistance on finance tracking, currently underway and supported by Maintains, will help uncover the actual situation and help identify where the gaps are.

**F2: Government funding towards the ERP will continue to be inadequate, in partners' eyes, until refugees are fully included in the government's mainstream planning and budgeting for the education sector.**

Aligning the planning and budgeting of education service delivery for refugees within existing systems, as well as recognising and coding settlement schools, would improve access to government funds. These funds would go directly to schools as capitation grants, allow for the hiring of additional teachers under the government wage bill, and improve access to resources for operational expenses at the district level, including for coordination and monitoring.

**F3: The presence of the ERP was an enabling factor for securing funds from ECW, and possibly from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), which together account for approximately US\$ 41.6 million – 11% of the ERP's costs. But other than that, the Plan is seen as having had little impact on improving total funding for ERP activities.**

Whilst there are a large number of implementing partners who have been successful in securing funds, the presence of the ERP itself is not viewed by interviewees as having been an enabling factor in securing additional funds to refugee and host communities beyond those that would have come in the absence of the ERP.<sup>1</sup> It is also unclear the extent to which the ERP has contributed to more aligned and efficient financing, with no funders channelling through a pooled fund or through the government as the Plan had intended; resultantly, government officials are left feeling side-lined from spending decisions.

**F4: Stakeholders want to see an increase in fundraising efforts and a shift to multi-year financing commitments from donors to secure required resources and allow flexible responses to emerging needs.**

It is important to recognise that the refugee influx in Uganda is a protracted crisis rather than a short-term emergency – and so there must be a shift from humanitarian to development perspectives, with longer-term financing commitments. This would be in line with global efforts to strengthen the humanitarian–development nexus. However, more flexibility within funding sources (to change priorities) signals the challenge with setting out costed activities, as the ERP does. Emerging needs are likely to change from the original set of activities, and there must be room to allow these changes and still ensure the success of the Plan, which should focus on outcomes rather than pre-set input targets.

**F5: District-level coordination and ownership must improve for financing to be better coordinated, and mobilised, at the local level.**

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<sup>1</sup> It is possible that some efforts and successes were either not known about or considered substantial by the partners interviewed for this research.

There needs to be clarity among all stakeholders on district local government roles and responsibilities for coordination of grants implemented in their location, as well as responsibilities for resource mobilisation. This would help secure more adequate and efficient financing, focusing on needs identified by people on the ground, and should be a priority when developing the ERP2.

## Information

**I1: The system for collecting, managing, sharing, and utilising data on refugee and host community education service delivery under the ERP is still being developed. Several key activities, including finalising the ERP log frame and creating the M&E guide and tools, were implemented; however, user training on these materials has largely not yet been rolled out due to COVID restrictions, limiting their uptake and integration into information management processes under the ERP.**

The Secretariat has provided active leadership to develop and revise the ERP's M&E framework and tools to guide stakeholders' collection and reporting of information under an aligned set of indicators and outcomes. Positively, the process was consultative and ensured the ERP's information management system complied with established government policies and data systems already in place.

However, there is still work to do to make sure that the information system works effectively.<sup>2</sup> This includes further improvement of the tools tested in Term 1 2020, user training on the tools and systems, and additional support to implementing partners to provide adequate, timely information to guide ERP planning and improvements. Capacity building of district officials in the collection, management, analysis, and application of data on refugees and host community children is another critical factor in ensuring the effectiveness of the information system. These activities have understandably been delayed by COVID-19 in 2020, but must resume in earnest in the final phase of the ERP to ensure the production and tracking of critical data and information.

**I2: The ERP's information system is successfully capturing routine data from refugee settlements, in part by leveraging the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' existing reporting mechanisms. However, the data collection process in host community schools requires substantial improvement. Overall, information management under the ERP must continuously evolve to align with the government's education monitoring system.**

Promoting data accountability and widespread results sharing is key to the successful execution of the ERP's information management system. Positively, partners largely demonstrate compliance with the ERP's reporting requirements and submit data regularly on their activities, particularly in refugee communities. This data is collected and reported via an existing mechanism utilising UNHCR focal point persons and partners, who submit information to a central database that is shared with the Secretariat. Partners also share

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<sup>2</sup> As indicated in the M&E tools roll-out plan, finalised after this research was conducted.



their data with one another, although stakeholders reported that they fail to routinely share it with district education officials.

Ultimately, these two mechanisms for data collection and sharing run parallel to monitoring and reporting under the government education system, resulting in a separate and temporary information management system that currently is not integrated into existing national structures.

**I3: Progress has been made to incorporate indicators on refugees into the national Education Management Information System. However, as the EMIS is still under revision and not operational, it has not yet produced relevant data to support evidence-based decision making under the ERP.**

The ERP specifies that data on refugees must be integrated into the EMIS to ensure alignment with the government's national monitoring system, which has not been updated since 2016. The Secretariat has been engaging with the team working on the revision of EMIS to include indicators on refugees, though it is possible this process will continue beyond the current version of the ERP. Partners hoped that the Secretariat and Steering Committee will utilise their position and authority to ensure that the revision process is underway, and that the new EMIS captures data on refugee and host community children to inform policy and planning regarding education service delivery.

**I4: It is critical for the ERP's information system to track and report on output-level data related to education access, data on the quality of the services provided and evidence on teaching and learning outcomes.**

While understanding the status of outputs such as classroom and school construction, teacher hires and placement, and the provision of teaching and learning materials is key to measuring components of the ERP's implementation, access data is not enough to evaluate the policy's success. Data on the quality of the inputs and services provided under the ERP is critical to assessing the achievement of the policy's outcomes, and must be tracked alongside other indicators. Importantly, the final year of the ERP must focus on ensuring the information system is capable of capturing, analysing, and reporting on both access and quality outcomes to feed into the assessment of the policy's impact.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the assessment planned for in the M&E Guide will be particularly critical to implementation.

## **Implementing the ERP during COVID-19**

**CVD1: The implementation of the ERP was hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many activities unable to continue amidst nationwide school closures and lockdown.**

Whilst construction of school structures has continued, it progressed at a slower pace due to increasing procurement cost and supply chain delays. Other activities related to improving service delivery, teacher capacities and instructional methods were postponed. Despite the

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<sup>3</sup> Some ERP partners are conducting surveys of learning outcomes but these will not comprehensively cover the Plan's target beneficiaries. The ERP Secretariat will conduct a wider baseline, but earlier delays in Secretariat set-up, and COVID-19, mean that this activity will take place in year 3 of the ERP, very late for a baseline.

ERP's function as an emergency response policy for refugee education, it was not inherently designed to be flexible or to respond to a secondary shock such as COVID-19.

**CVD2: The government has been lauded for the swiftness of its response and preparation of distance learning initiatives. However, this response may not be appropriate for refugees, and little is yet known about the effectiveness of distance learning in the face of a global pandemic.**

Positively, the government's nationwide response explicitly mentions coverage for the country's 600,000 refugees; however, there is little effort to tailor the response and materials to their particular needs. Refugees face additional barriers to accessing distance learning initiatives due to limited infrastructure and language issues. A better understanding of how effective distance learning is, and how to improve these systems to respond to the specific challenges faced by refugees, is especially important given that remote learning will continue to play a significant role in the response and recovery phases of the pandemic. In addition, more emphasis and understanding are needed on how distance learning provides for those who are most vulnerable within refugee communities, including children with special needs and children at risk of dropping out from education even when schools reopen – especially girls.

**CVD3: COVID-19 has exacerbated some of the pre-existing constraints of the ERP, testing the still developing mechanisms behind its coordination, as well as communication and information flows between national- and district-level stakeholders.**

In some circumstances at the district level, stakeholders report that it was not funding constraints that were preventing development partners from implementing activities to mitigate school closures but rather a lack of data and coordination among them. Efforts to increase the regularity of engagement of the Education in Emergencies Sector Working Group (EIESWG) do not make up for challenges at the local level, and the unclear mandate of the ERP and its stakeholders in responding to COVID-19 adds to the gaps.

However, ERP partners have taken steps to improve coordination and information in relation to the pandemic. The ERP Secretariat, in collaboration with the EIESWG, immediately refocused its coordinating role to ensure support to the government in developing, implementing and monitoring the COVID-19 response plan to ensure continuity of learning for children. Three task teams and a COVID-19 log frame were created... The ERP M&E team, coordinating with EDPs, developed a set of indicators to track new activities for refugees and host communities to support continuity of learning in response to COVID-19, and thus feed into decisions on further responses.

**CVD4: The ERP was not designed to be a response plan for all shocks, but COVID-19 has highlighted that it is critical to include elements of shock preparedness in future iterations.**

Stakeholders are uncertain of how they should respond to the COVID-19 crisis under the umbrella of the ERP, which does not establish the flexibility of its framework when new issues emerge. This is particularly pertinent to the constraints on funding caused by the re-prioritisation towards the COVID-19 response (and likely other shocks in the future). At the

same time, also including expectations for additional shock responses is unrealistic in light of the several unfunded objectives of the existing Plan.

## Recommendations

### MoES leadership

**Recommendation 1:** The MoES leads national-level coordination of the ERP. In the Plan's final year, implementation arrangements require significantly more high level engagement from senior leaders within the MoES to inform decision-making on critical policy and practice issues. The Steering Committee and Secretariat should articulate a specific set of actions to achieve this in phases throughout the ERP's final year. Ideally, this will involve continuation of external financial support for the Secretariat in the short term, with a transition plan in place to ready MoES systems and departments for assuming full financial responsibility in the medium to long-term, which can also be achieved by integrating the ERP's management and logical functions into relevant departments.

**Recommendation 2:** MoES leadership should be further leveraged as a key resource for promoting the ERP among partners, including EDPs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). ERP coordination can be strengthened by increasing accountability from partners for aligning their activities with the objectives and activities of the ERP at both national and district level. MoES leadership should also promote better coordination of funding to ensure activities are planned to respond to identified priority needs, and that gaps are filled in previously less served areas. In effect this leadership means continual commitment and communication from senior officials across all relevant MoES departments, to showcase a strong message. It also requires that the Steering Committee has the clout to make and execute strategic decisions.

**Recommendation 3:** The MoES should enhance district local government capacity to coordinate and monitor partners working in their catchment area. This capacity-building should include how to collect information on activities, budgets, and spending by non-governmental partners operating education programming for refugee and host communities in the districts. Districts would then be empowered to operationalise their district ERPs, making them a meaningful planning and implementation tool to promote accountability. EDPs should provide resources and technical support for this as a priority, as it is increasingly likely that the best mode of delivery for the ERP is a decentralised mechanism that functions at local level between government officials in districts and NGO partners working on the ground in refugee settlements and host communities.

### Data and financing

**Recommendation 4:** Stakeholders consistently reported that there are more refugees than initially expected, recommending that the Secretariat, on behalf of the Steering Committee, review the refugee population and enrolment figures for the last three years against the projections made in the ERP. This would determine how close to reality the population projections were, and the extent to which the targets in the ERP are still meaningful. This will allow an analysis of the gap to determine whether it was due to the larger-than-expected

influx of refugees, or under-performance against targets. Ideally, a new school census would be carried out by the MoES to capture actual enrolment data.

**Recommendation 5:** The Secretariat, on behalf of the Steering Committee, should revise the ERP costing model on the basis of the original activities and prioritisation but using the updated population data. This would give an updated and more realistic idea of what the cost of meeting the ERP's targets would be, which is likely to be higher than the initial US\$ 389 million estimate. This should also be compared to an update of the costing model using the revised priorities as coming out of the district ERPs, and has already been proposed by the Steering Committee.

**Recommendation 6:** It is commendable that the revision of the EMIS by the MoES has commenced with funding from FCDO and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The MoES must prioritise this process and ensure the inclusion of data on refugees in the new system. The Steering Committee should keep this high on the agenda given its importance for monitoring and evaluation, and leverage their collective strengths and capacities to help resolve bottlenecks in revising the design of the EMIS as needed.

## Future policies

**Recommendation 7:** The Government of Uganda's open-door policy on refugees is rightly lauded. The government now needs to ensure that the principles of its policies are executed, particularly regarding the full inclusion of refugees in the national education system through planning and financing. This means incorporating refugee enrolment figures and needs in the national EMIS monitoring system and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), as well as ensuring that all schools with refugee children receive government resource allocations for teacher salaries and student capitation grants. This will require greater funding to the education sector, and coordinated action from the MoES, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), EDPs, and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

**Recommendation 8:** Some of the critical systems and structures core to the functioning of the ERP, such as the district ERPs, are only just being established over two years into implementation of the Plan. Reflecting on lessons learnt from implementation to date is important for ensuring that critical outcomes are achieved, either by making adjustments to current targets or extending the ERP's timeframe. This is even more relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools for the 2020 academic year, which has further delayed implementation of ERP activities.

**Recommendation 9:** Education planning authorities at both the national and district level should cast holistic plans that include all children of school-going age in the country within existing national strategies and policies wherever possible. The Steering Committee should review and reflect on whether a separate document for refugees – such as an ERP2 – is the most effective way to cater for refugee education in the national policy framework for the education sector. The refugee 'crisis' is no longer a short-term emergency; rather, it is a protracted situation that is now a permanent, long-term development issue. While the ERP can be depended on to prioritise the education needs of vulnerable children in refugee settlements and host communities, the certainty of achievement of its objectives should be catered for by integrating the system strengthening component of the Plan into the ESSP.

**Recommendation 10:** Ideally, future iterations of national plans and policies catering for refugee education should start with a broad national framework, under which a district-level planning process is used to identify and contextualise real needs, associated costs, and financing gaps on the ground to deliver services. These district-level plans should be generated from the onset as part of the core policy development process, and be fed back into the national plan as it is being written so that national and district interventions and costings are consistent and well-integrated throughout the document.

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## List of abbreviations

|           |                                                           |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| AMP       | Aid Management Platform                                   |
| CRRF      | Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework                  |
| CSO       | Civil society organisation                                |
| DEO       | District Education Officer                                |
| DFID      | Department for International Development                  |
| ECHO      | European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations |
| ECW       | Education Cannot Wait                                     |
| EDP       | Education Development Partner                             |
| EiESWG    | Education in Emergencies Sector Working Group             |
| EMIS      | Education Management Information System                   |
| ERP       | Education Response Plan                                   |
| ESSP      | Education Sector Strategic Plan                           |
| EUTF      | European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa            |
| FCDO      | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office              |
| GESI      | Gender Equity and Social Inclusion                        |
| GPE       | Global Partnership for Education                          |
| KII       | Key informant interview                                   |
| M&E       | Monitoring and evaluation                                 |
| Maintains | Maintaining Essential Services After Natural Disasters    |
| MoES      | Ministry of Education and Sports                          |
| MoFPED    | Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development    |
| NCDC      | National Curriculum Development Centre                    |
| NGO       | Non-governmental organisation                             |
| OPM       | Office of the Prime Minister                              |
| PRP       | Preparedness and Response Plan                            |
| ToC       | Theory of change                                          |
| UBOS      | Ugandan Bureau of Statistics                              |

|        |                                                                         |
|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| UgIFT  | Uganda Inter-Governmental Fiscal Transfers Project (World Bank Project) |
| UNHCR  | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                           |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund                                          |
| WASH   | Water, sanitation, and hygiene                                          |

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Maintains global research programme

Maintains is a four-year research programme that aims to develop an improved evidence base on how education, health, social protection, nutrition, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services can adapt and expand in response to shocks such as floods, droughts, cyclones, and disease outbreaks. The project covers six countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Pakistan, and Bangladesh).

Maintains aims to find out why and how essential services may fail in times of shock or disaster, and how they could be prevented from doing so, by answering five research questions:

- How can programmes and systems be designed so that they are not only resilient to disasters but can also expand and adapt their provision of essential services in response to shocks?
- How should decisions be made about targeting shock-responsive essential services?
- What should be in place before a shock strikes so that a scaled response can be implemented efficiently?
- How should risk financing be designed to support a timely, reliable, and cost-effective response?
- How feasible is a shock-responsive approach in different contexts?

Maintains is funded by FCDO and managed by Oxford Policy Management.

This report presents the analysis and findings from the first phase of the Maintains education research in Uganda, focusing on national level stakeholders.

## 1.2 Maintains Uganda education research

The Maintains education research in Uganda focuses on the ERP. It explores how the existence of the ERP has impacted education service delivery for refugee and host communities through new coordinating mechanisms, financing, and information flows.

The primary audience for this report is the ERP Steering Committee and the ERP Secretariat, as well as the Government of Uganda, EDPs, and humanitarian actors working in education in Uganda under the EiESWG. The findings may also be relevant to an international audience of actors working in emergency education programming.

## 1.3 Structure of the report

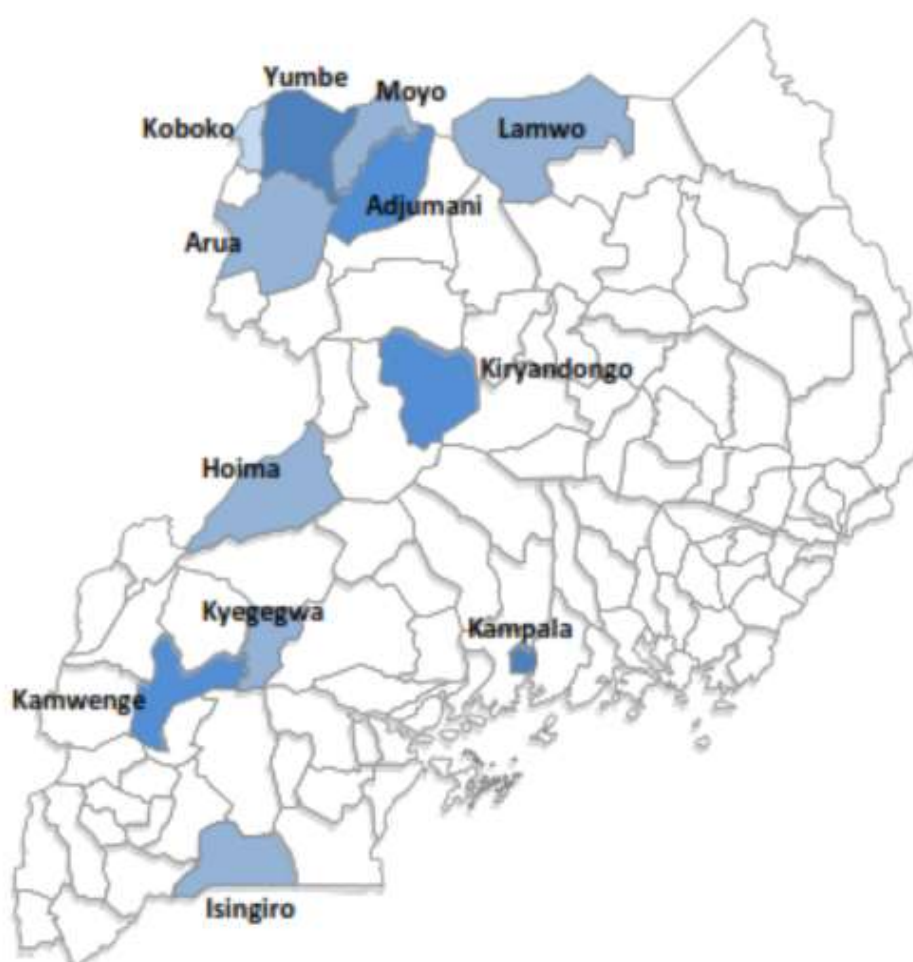
The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 introduces the background context and the origins of the ERP, which is the focus of the research. The methodology is set out in Chapter 3. Chapters 4 to 7 present the findings across the four main themes explored in Phase 1: Coordination, Financing, Information, and the experience of implementing the ERP during the early period of COVID-19. Chapter 8 provides key conclusions and recommendations.

## 2 The ERP and its context

### 2.1 Background context

Since conflict broke out in South Sudan in December 2013 there has been continued violence and a mass influx of refugees into Uganda. Uganda is currently the largest refugee-hosting country in Africa, hosting over 1.4 million refugees and asylum seekers from neighbouring countries in settlements located in 12 districts (UNHCR, 2020), shown in Figure 1. Roughly 66% of the refugees in Uganda are from South Sudan, 26% from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and 3% from Burundi (UNHCR, 2019).<sup>4</sup> The country has a long history of welcoming refugees within its borders, and is known for its pro-refugee policies, allowing refugees to settle amongst the local population, share land, and access basic services.

**Figure 1: Map of refugee-hosting districts in Uganda**



Source: ERP

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<sup>4</sup> The final 5% are refugees from Somalia, Rwanda, Eritrea, Sudan, and Ethiopia who have lived in protracted exile in Uganda for the past three decades.

In northern Uganda, refugees make up roughly half of the population in some districts, placing significant stress on the delivery of basic services to both the Ugandan and refugee populations. In some districts – especially in the West Nile sub-region – the number of refugees even exceeds the host community population. This has contributed to increased tensions, many of them around land, resources, and livelihood opportunities for the youth. Around 62% of the refugee population are children under 18 years old, which includes unaccompanied and separated children and other vulnerable groups (UNHCR, 2019). Children in the host communities are equally affected by this influx.

### **2.1.1 The ERP**

In 2018, MoES launched the ERP (MoES, 2018) as an instrument for implementing the Comprehensive Refugee Response under the Global Compact for Refugees 2016 in which the United Nations Member States, re-affirmed their commitment to comprehensively and predictably support countries affected by large movements of people, among other objectives. The cost of the ERP for the initial 3.5 years from January 2018 to June 2021 was estimated at \$389 million. It was developed by a joint consortium managed by MoES, with funding from ECW and support from the EDP Working Group. The purpose of the ERP is to establish a realistic and implementable plan to ensure improved learning outcomes for increasing numbers of refugee and host community children and youth across Uganda. The plan aims to consolidate the efforts of all stakeholders engaged in refugee education response, and to shift the paradigm from immediate humanitarian response to integrated education service delivery. The ERP is attempting to reach 567,500 learners per year with improved education services over 3.5 years (January 2018 to June 2021). The costs of the ERP's activities were estimated at US\$ 389 million. It is attempting to achieve better learning outcomes through activities under three intended outputs:

- improved equitable access to inclusive and relevant learning opportunities;
- improved delivery of quality education services and training; and
- strengthened systems for effective delivery.

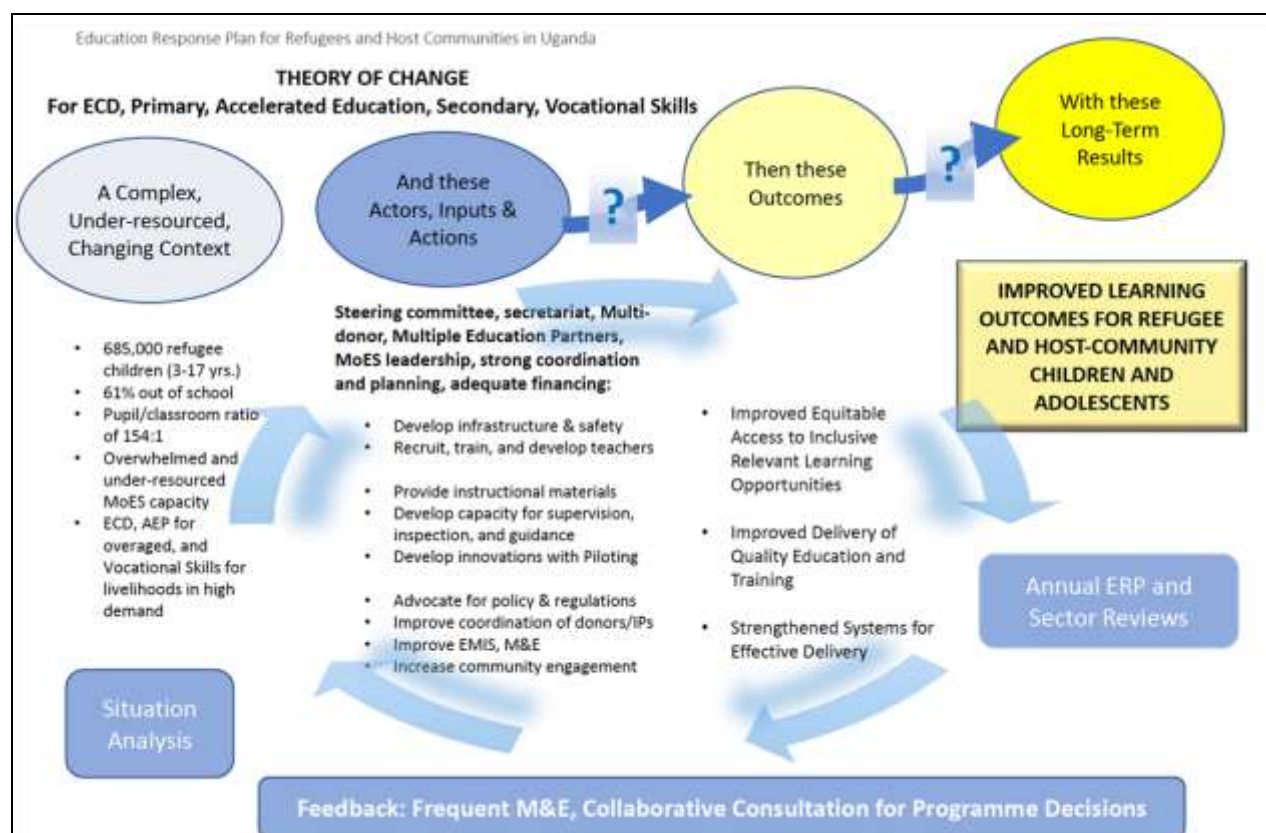
Strategic leadership for the implementation of the ERP is provided by the ERP Steering Committee, whose membership includes MoES officials, representatives of the EDPs, the Ministry of Local Government, MoFPED, the OPM, international NGO implementing partners, refugee-led NGO implementing partners, and the Executive Director of the Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda. The ERP Steering Committee has the responsibility of overseeing the ERP's implementation, including its coordination mechanisms, which build on current existing coordination structures. These structures include the Interagency Group, the EiESWG, and the structures under the Education Sector Consultative Committee – both at national and district/settlement levels. The Steering Committee is supported by a Secretariat, which is funded by EDPs and based in MoES.

The ERP began Year 1 of its implementation in July 2018, concluding in June 2019. Year 2 of the policy covers the period from July 2019 to June 2020.

**This report focuses on the delivery of the ERP from its inception in June 2018 through to June 2020.**

The figure below summarises the main elements and the logic and processes of the theory of change (ToC) underlying the ERP.

**Figure 2: ERP ToC**



Source: ERP

The arrows from the actors, inputs, and actions to the outcomes, and from the outcomes to the results, are marked with question marks to emphasise that these are essentially hypotheses and subject to confirmation and change. The feedback loops within the ToC include frequent M&E and collaborative consultation (although M&E and coordination are themselves activities within the ERP, to allow a feedback loop), and feed into stakeholder consultations which result in programme adaptations to modify, deepen, and strengthen the ToC. This cycle is represented by the light blue arrows from the situational analysis to the inputs and actions, and to the outputs and the results.

### 2.1.2 COVID-19: an additional global shock

The focus of the Maintains Uganda education research is the ongoing shock of an influx of refugees from neighbouring countries. However, in early 2020 the global COVID-19 pandemic created an additional layer of shock for Uganda's education system. Uganda's schools were closed nationwide from 20 March, meaning that more than 15 million children – including 600,000 refugee children – are now out of school. Meanwhile, lockdown measures put severe restrictions on movement and transportation, as well as meetings and work moving to home/online rather than offices and face to face. This inevitably had huge implications for the education sector and the implementation of the ERP.

On a purely practical level, the coordination efforts of the ERP, at national and district level, will have been interrupted and had to adjust to new ways of working. Much more substantially, the whole sector had to work on response arrangements to ensure learning continues.<sup>5</sup> This created a major new task and effort for education stakeholders, including many involved in the ERP. Actors working with refugee communities will have had their own challenges to deal with to ensure learning, security, and nutrition is provided to this already disadvantaged group of children.

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic did not become the core focus of this phase of research, the fact that research was already happening provided an opportunity to ask some questions about how the shock was affecting the implementation of the ERP. The focus of Phase 1 was on the experience of the implementation of the ERP's coordination, financing, and information systems since the launch in 2018, and these themes could still be researched despite the more recent influence of COVID-19. As the study was not focusing on implementation of service delivery 'on the ground', school closures and social distancing measures were not directly relevant to our research.

## 2.2 Scope of the research and research framework

### 2.2.1 Overall research framework

**The Maintains education research assesses whether the ERP improves the capacity of the Government of Uganda to provide quality education services to refugees and host communities in response to a man-made shock – in this case the refugee influx.**

Using a process lens, the research focuses on mechanisms and responses arising from the ERP. Specifically, the research examines how different parts of the education delivery system have responded to the ERP, how they cooperate, and how information and financial flows are managed. The research focuses on two levels of the system: i) the national institutional and policy 'system'; and ii) the district delivery system in the refugee-hosting areas.

The primary research question asks:

**Does the ERP improve the effectiveness of education service delivery, and thereby education outcomes, for refugees and host communities?**

To answer this question, we unpack it to focus on sub-themes around coordination, financing, information, delivery, and outcomes. In particular, the research focuses on three specific areas of inputs to the ERP:

- setting up and effectively using **coordination** systems;

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<sup>5</sup> MoES moved quickly to develop a Preparedness and Response Plan (PRP) that aims to continue learning while schools are closed. Model teachers selected by MoES are preparing and delivering remedial learning on radio and television stations across the country, and the National Curriculum Development Centre has prepared a set of hard copy home learning materials for primary and secondary school students, which are to be distributed to households and communities throughout the country.

- leveraging and channelling adequate **financing**; and
- collecting and using relevant **information** in feedback loops.

The primary research question is further unpacked into secondary research questions that cover five main areas critical to the success of the ERP: coordination, financing, information, delivery, and educational outcomes. These are outlined in Table 1 below. These themes reflect critical aspects of the ERP’s design and delivery that need to be explored in order to assess the plan’s structure, implementation management, delivery mechanisms, and associated outcomes for its intended beneficiaries within the education system.

**Table 1: Secondary research questions**

| Maintains research theme | Secondary research questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Coordination</b>      | C.1. How have national mechanisms for coordinating the education response (including the Secretariat, Steering Committee, and informal links between MoES, the OPM, the EiESWG, UNHCR, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), ECW, and other development partners) been set up and/or changed as a result of having the ERP? Are they functioning as planned?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                          | C.2. How have district mechanisms for coordinating the education response, (including the district steering committees and informal links between MoES, the OPM, UNHCR, UNICEF, ECW, and other development partners) been set up and/or changed as a result of having the ERP? Are they functioning as planned?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                          | C.3. Do coordination mechanisms resulting from the ERP add something over and above what would have been delivered anyway? What is this value-add?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                          | C.4. How do individual and organisational coordination capacity at national and district levels affect delivery of the response? How empowered are the relevant institutions, and what sort of linkages and decisions exist/are made under the ERP?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                          | C.5. What are the challenges and successes in coordination around the ERP at different levels (national and district) and across geographical locations (different districts)?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Financing</b>         | F.1. To what extent have financing needs for the education of refugees under the ERP’s overall budget been met? This includes exploring: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• refugee financing needs since 2013, including those that are shock-based and non-shock-based;</li> <li>• who finances the responses and in what amount (e.g. government, EDPs, external donors through CSOs, etc.);</li> <li>• the funding instruments applied, and their effectiveness (budget lines, contingency funds, humanitarian shock contingencies of donors, wallet funding mechanisms, etc.);</li> <li>• funding gaps and challenges;</li> <li>• financing by geographical location (across settlements, and to host communities); and</li> <li>• efforts to secure additional funding.</li> </ul> |
|                          | F.2. Has the ERP led to more financing and/or influenced allocations (overall totals                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |



|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    | and the distribution of funds) to support education for refugees? How, and why?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                    | F.3. How does funding for refugee education get distributed and utilised under the ERP at national, regional, and district levels? How are funding decisions made?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                    | F.4. Which standardised disaster risk financing instruments or innovative financing mechanisms for refugee crises could be employed, and how can funding for the ERP be improved going forward?                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Information</b> | I.1. How has the collection, management, sharing, and utilisation of critical information on refugee and host community education needs, as well as information on populations and service delivery, changed/evolved as a result of the ERP?                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                    | I.2. How adequate and responsive are the information systems and feedback loops under the ERP? To what extent do they capture issues of gender equity and social inclusion (GESI)? What areas need improvement?                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Delivery</b>    | D.1. Has the ERP and its associated coordination, financing, and information mechanisms led to or catalysed additional/new education services (schools, non-formal education, alternative teacher recruitment and training approaches, innovative instructional materials, psychosocial support and counselling, water and sanitation, etc.)? How can these be used/improved to overcome challenges and gaps in delivery? |
|                    | D.2. How does the context in which ERP interventions are delivered affect both what is implemented and how outputs and outcomes are achieved?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|                    | D.3. How do these services address the needs of refugee populations and host communities, especially regarding GESI?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                    | D.4. Are there cases/examples of positive deviance in service delivery (at geographical and/or institutional level) for refugees and host communities as a result of the ERP? What are the lessons that can be learnt for others?                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Outcomes</b>    | O.1. In what way has the ERP – and particularly coordination, financing, and information – contributed to outcomes and perceptions related to the educational access, learning, safety, and psychosocial well-being of host and refugee children and youth? Are these outcomes being achieved as planned? This question will look at outcomes using a GESI lens.                                                          |
|                    | O.2. What are some of the unexpected and/or unintended outcomes (positive or negative) resulting from the ERP and its associated mechanisms?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

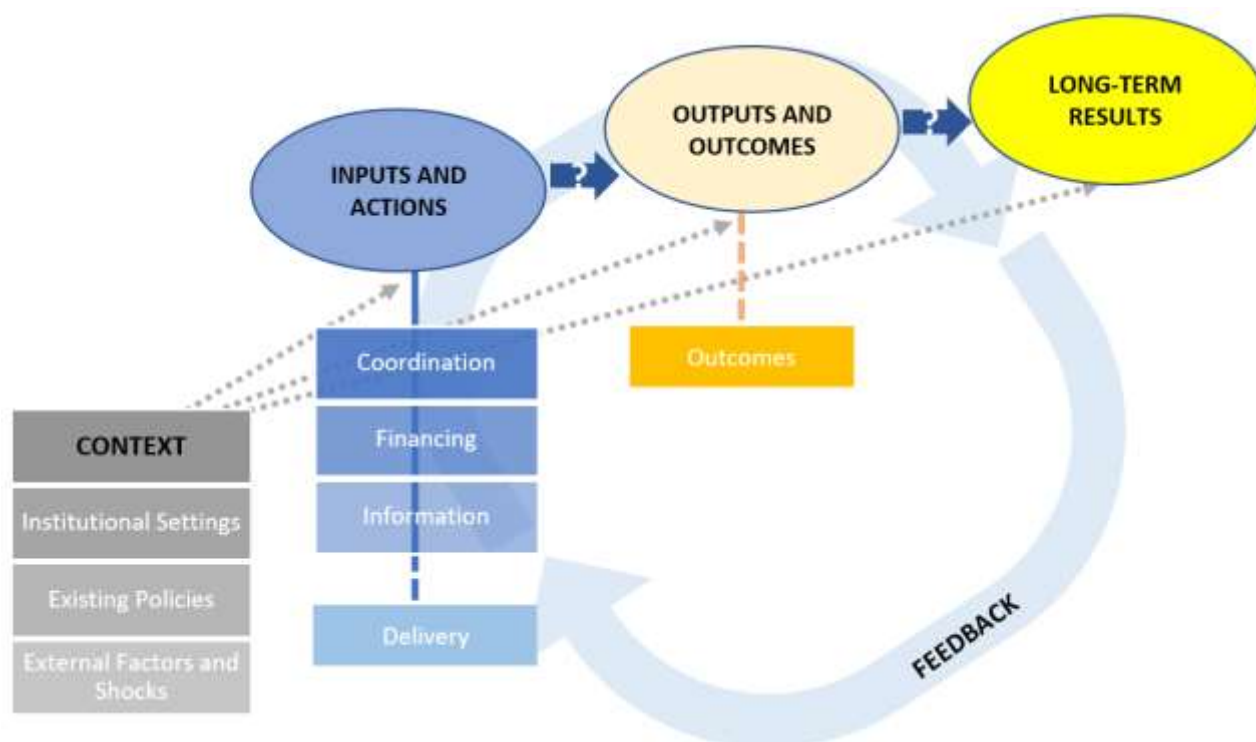
The research will not attempt to directly review and/or monitor the performance of all the activities and inputs intended under the ERP. Rather, it looks at **delivery** and **outcomes** (of activities and actors) only from the perspective of whether the existence of the ERP, and the associated coordination, financing, and information mechanisms, has led to or catalysed additional results that otherwise would not have happened.

The figure below represents a stylised version of the ERP's ToC. We have mapped coordination, financing, and information as necessary inputs (the blue solid line) to implement the Plan. Delivery and outcomes (blue and orange, respectively) are connected with dashed lines to show they will be considered to the extent that coordination, financing, and information mechanisms under the ERP affect them, but we will not include within the scope of the research all the rest of the inputs that potentially can affect delivery. The

outcomes that will be investigated will be those identified by the ERP (and its logframe) as achievable within the 3.5-year implementation period of the plan, not long-term results.

Contextual factors in terms of the institutional, policy, and external influences are also relevant at each stage of the cycle, given the nature of Uganda's refugee crisis. In this case, institutional settings refer to the combination of actors (organisations and individuals) and regulations in place. Furthermore, these aspects of context will differ in each of the different districts, along with environmental and topographic variation. Feedback loops remain in place, as in the ERP ToC.

**Figure 3: Maintains research focus areas mapped to stylised ERP ToC**



### 2.2.2 Phase 1 research scope

Given the cyclical nature of the ERP's implementation design, it is essential that coordination, financing, and information flows are sufficiently implemented and delivered year after year in order to achieve the objectives of the Plan and to continue to expand education services to more learners. The Phase 1 research, which is the subject of this report, focuses on the national-level mechanisms and structures that have been put in place to implement the ERP.

The objectives of the research in Phase 1 are to:

- assess the effectiveness of the coordination mechanisms established for implementing the ERP;
- explore what funding was secured and the adequacy of funding structures for implementing the ERP's objectives; and

- understand the relevancy, collection, sharing, and usage of information by key stakeholders to inform implementation of the ERP.

In addition, given the immediacy of the COVID-19 agenda, Phase 1 was used to explore how the early stages of the pandemic were affecting the coordination, financing, and information structures of the ERP.

The future phases will focus on issues of coordination, financing, and information at the district level, as well as the research questions around delivery and outcomes.

### **2.2.3 Research uptake**

The Maintains Uganda education research programme is the only initiative across the six countries focused explicitly on how an education system responds to a man-made shock. This presents a unique opportunity to collect, disseminate, and learn from operationally relevant research regarding the delivery of essential education services in a humanitarian and development context. Research uptake focuses on engaging:

1. The ERP Secretariat and Steering Committee in regular learning and sharing events during each research phase, stimulating reflection on the ERP's implementation and influencing improvements to the next intervention cycle and design of the ERP2;
2. FCDO Uganda and FCDO UK in learning from implementation of the ERP to better inform their support, engagement with, and financing of education service delivery policies in Uganda and globally;
3. Public and private stakeholders delivering services to refugees and host communities under the policy at regular learning and sharing events, stimulating reflection on the ERP's implementation and influencing improvements to the next intervention cycle; and
4. Humanitarian actors and platforms in Uganda and globally in learning from the ERP's design and implementation, notably around coordination, financing, and delivery mechanisms to inform similar programming.

## 3 Methodology

Using a process lens, this research aims to understand the mechanisms and processes by which inputs into the ERP – particularly coordination, financing, and information – have changed or added value to education delivery and outcomes for refugee and host populations in Uganda.

### 3.1 Research design

The research uses a process lens to examine how the several interacting components of the ERP operate to generate outcomes. The methodology explores how the intervention works and how results are (or are not) achieved due to factors related to:

- **implementation** – the structures, resources, and processes through which delivery is achieved, and the quantity and quality delivery. This includes examining fidelity (was the intervention delivered as planned?), dose (did participants receive the right ‘amount’ of the intervention?), and reach (did the intervention reach its target population?);
- **mechanisms of impact** – how intervention activities, and participants’ interactions with them, trigger change; and
- **context** – how external factors influence the delivery and functioning of interventions.

The ERP’s ToC articulates how the Plan is expected to generate change, specifying cause-and-effect pathways. The ERP is defined as a set of structures and processes intended to improve education service delivery and outcomes for children in refugee and host communities through facilitating changes in the dynamics of the system and its mechanisms at national, district, and settlement levels to deliver an education response.

This research is therefore interested in whether the structures and processes to facilitate these changes are followed with fidelity, and the degree to which they have been effective in delivering quality services. Key steps in understanding the causal chain include identifying whether the activities resulting from these structures and processes remain consistent with their intended functions, although their exact form may vary according to local needs and context.

The research framework, and its link to the research questions, is elaborated in the Uganda education research methodology document (Brown et al, 2020).

### 3.2 Phase 1 methodology

#### 3.2.1 Primary and secondary data

Phase 1 of the research, which is the focus of this report, was a heavily qualitative stage focused on the collection and analysis of KIIs and documentary data to unpack findings on the operations of the ERP to date at the national level.

Primary data was collected from a range of national-level stakeholders connected to the ERP’s design and implementation, including: 1) government officials responsible for the ERP and individuals working closely with MoES to advise on its implementation; 2) informants

from EDPs and humanitarian agencies funding and supporting the ERP's implementation; and 3) informants working with CSOs helping to deliver education services aligned with the ERP's objectives.

KIIs were conducted from mid-April to early June 2020. Due to restrictions on meetings and movement during Uganda's lockdown under the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted all but one of the 25 KIIs on e-platforms, including Teams, Zoom, Skype, and WhatsApp. The KIIs were conducted by two core research team members who are Ugandan education research specialists based in Kampala. Interviews were audio-recorded (with permission) and transcribed verbatim by research assistants.

Documents for secondary data analysis were gathered largely from MoES, at the ERP Secretariat, and included the following: the ERP (MoES, 2018); the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (UNHCR, 2017); district ERPs; the ERP Financing Options Report (Fraser and Minford, 2018); the ERP Monitoring and Evaluation Guide and Logical Framework (ERP Secretariat, 2020b); the Draft ERP Fundraising Strategy (ERP Secretariat, 2019b); planning documents and meeting notes from the Secretariat and Steering Committee. These are documented in the References at the end of this report.

### **3.2.2 Sampling strategy**

Key informants for Phase 1 included government implementers and key 'gatekeepers' (e.g. NGO and development partner organisation staff) participating in the implementation of the ERP, allowing us to explore experiences related to the intervention and implementation of the ERP from multiple perspectives.

Interviewees were selected because they are well positioned to provide insights into the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the ERP's execution, focusing on coordination, financing, and information mechanisms. The emergence of patterns in their responses would help uncover how and why implementation practices may have changed over time, and to what effect. Those at higher levels of the ERP's implementation process (such as members of the Secretariat and ERP Steering Committee) were interviewed to help us identify a broader range of contextual barriers and enablers around the implementation of the policy.

For Phase 1, our sampling approach at the national level was rooted in a stakeholder categorisation exercise conducted in early 2020. This mapped out key stakeholders linked to the design, implementation, and execution of the ERP in the following categories:

- ERP Secretariat and Steering Committee;
- government stakeholders and policymakers at national level<sup>6</sup> (MoES, MoFPED, National Planning Authority);
- EDPs (bi- and multi-lateral donors);
- UN agencies (UNICEF, UNHCR); and

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<sup>6</sup> The district level will be a focus of future phases, and whilst the stakeholders interviewed in Phase 1 were intended to be able to comment on the district level, they are all acting primarily at the national level.

- implementing organisations/NGOs focusing on education service delivery in refugee-hosting districts (members of the EiESWG).

The table below presents our respondent mapping for Phase 1, listing the organisations we interviewed against our expected and actual sample totals. Some respondents were identified prior to data collection, based on their roles and contribution to designing and implementing the ERP. Other stakeholders were identified by the initial informants during their interviews and included in the target respondent group through a snowball sampling approach.

**Table 2: Phase 1 sample of respondents**

| Organisation                    | Target sample | Actual respondents | Actual organisations represented |
|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Secretariat <sup>1</sup>        | 3             | 4                  | 1                                |
| Steering Committee <sup>2</sup> | 8             | 6                  | 3                                |
| Government officials            | 5             | 6                  | 2                                |
| EDPs                            | 7             | 3                  | 3                                |
| UN agencies                     | 3             | 5                  | 3                                |
| EiESWG NGOs                     | 11            | 7                  | 6                                |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>29</b>     | <b>25</b>          | <b>16</b>                        |

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Secretariat members attend the Steering Committee meetings, but are not included here as Steering Committee members. <sup>2</sup> Steering Committee members are themselves members of government, EDPs, UN agencies, or EiESWG NGOs. Members are therefore counted in the table twice: under Steering Committee and under the relevant employer group.

### 3.2.3 Analytical approach

The analysis began with qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts. A coding structure was informed by the research questions along themes and sub-themes; it also accounted for coding emerging themes that arose in the interviews. The transcripts were coded using the structure in NVivo qualitative software. NVivo allows outputs to be extracted against each of the codes, and for an analytical process to take place to extract points of convergence (triangulation) and divergence, as well as weighing the strengths of different answers based on stakeholder analysis and social desirability bias (i.e. the possibility of giving answers the respondent expects the interviewer will ‘want’ to hear).

Secondary qualitative data, including programme documents and reports, was used to contextualise and triangulate responses from the interviews. Content analysis of the documents focused on the ideas being communicated in the material to assess salient elements of the programme against the information provided by informants.

The analysis was conducted by the five core team members, and each chapter was reviewed by one of the interviewers as well as the team’s Country Lead. Along with iterations of quality assurance between the core team, the report went through internal quality assurance at Oxford Policy Management and external quality assurance, and comments were addressed after each round.

### 3.2.4 Ethical oversight and study approval

Qualitative primary data collection followed a set of ethical principles in conducting fieldwork based on Oxford Policy Management's best practice standards (more detail is given in Brown et al, 2020). Three basic ethical principles of research with human subjects, as set out in the UK Government's Belmont Report (1979), were applied:

1. **Respect for persons:** Prospective participants were given the information they needed to decide whether or not they wanted to participate, and they were given the freedom to decide not to participate or to stop at any point.
2. **Beneficence:** No harm was caused by the research.
3. **Justice:** Individuals and groups were treated fairly and equitably.

Ethics oversight for Phase 1 of the study came from the ERP Secretariat and MoES. Given that study respondents focused on national-level government officials, EDPs, and implementing partner stakeholders who are publicly, formally engaged in the ERP and assigned to support its design and implementation, no ethical issues arose with this respondent group. Each respondent provided verbal consent at the start of the interview to be interviewed and for the interview to be recorded.

### 3.2.5 Limitations and mitigation measures

Four key limitations arose during Phase 1 – three relating to content and one to context. They are documented below, along with the mitigation measures applied to address each one. We also note that this phase only conducted research with national-level stakeholders, and thus presents their views on implementation at national and sometimes district level. District-level stakeholders will be the focus of a future phase, in order to verify and further investigate the situations out in districts.

#### Limitation 1: Unavailable respondents

We tried to include a wide range of well-connected and informed experts in this research phase and made multiple attempts to contact them and schedule interviews. However, some key informants in government departments and partner organisations remained unavailable to participate due to scheduling conflicts, emphasised particularly by the fact that this phase of data collection coincided with the lockdown when we could conduct interview only by remote means. Additionally, three targeted key informants directed us to other individuals and offices for data, explaining that all the information we required was held either at the ERP Secretariat or with another colleague. The research data presented in this report therefore lacks their knowledge and perspectives, and in some cases meant a specific stakeholder group did not participate in this phase of the research.

In the next research phase, we will identify and reach out to respondents like this early on to confirm their participation. They will also receive the findings from this research phase in order to interest them in the study and provide a basis for demonstrating why their inputs are critical to the data collection process.

### **Limitation 2: Inadequate knowledge and experience with the ERP**

Though experienced in the provision of education to refugees, some key informants had no real knowledge of the ERP as a Plan, not having seen or read the document, nor participated in any dialogue on it. Their lack of engagement with the Plan is of course a finding in itself. The information they provided was therefore their critique on the delivery of ERP activities at a national and district level, and their assessment of the quality of service provision based on their participation in field visits to refugee settlements and schools serving refugee and host children, or based on their roles implementing large education programmes. Although in many cases these informants were very articulate about the quantity and quality of ERP activity provision, their critique was based on a comparison of the inputs they had seen delivered in other refugee contexts, and not necessarily related to the design of the Plan itself.

We mitigated this in the data by ensuring the responses of these individuals were corroborated by other respondents by triangulating the data across multiple respondents. In the next research phase, we will ensure that the respondents we engage are closely linked to the ERP, and continue triangulating findings across multiple actors.

### **Limitation 3: Brief engagement on ERP activities**

Some of the respondents interviewed reported that they have engaged with the ERP for a relatively short period of time. Although these individuals had sound knowledge of the ERP and discussed it in depth during their interview, they were always mindful of the short amount of time they had spent in their role. This awareness may have affected the quality of their contribution as expert respondents.

As with the limitation above, we mitigated this in the data by ensuring the responses of these individuals were corroborated by other respondents by triangulating the data across multiple people. In the next research phase, we will ensure that the respondents we interview are directly engaged with the ERP's current implementation and activities, and continue triangulating findings across multiple actors.

### **Limitation 4: Data collection during COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic, and the attendant safety measures and lockdown imposed by the Ugandan government, meant that all interviews in this phase were conducted remotely. This caused delays in scheduling interviews, as well as a need to conduct more than one round of discussions with some respondents due to timing conflicts. Technological hitches interrupted some interviews, leading to poor audio quality, especially for interviews conducted using WhatsApp; this was managed during the transcription process. Finally, remote engagement with respondents limited our ability to engage in a deeper dialogue with them in their professional environment, as the structure of the interviews only relied on verbal rather than face-to-face interaction.

In the future, we hope to conduct data collection using face-to-face interviews with respondents, following social distancing rules. We will also try to leverage video calls, where possible, to better connect with our respondents.



## 4 Coordination

Robust coordination mechanisms are critical to the successful implementation of the ERP given its multi-sectoral nature and the wide range of state and non-state actors involved in supporting its delivery at different levels. This chapter presents findings on the type, status, and effectiveness of the coordination mechanisms that exist at different levels to facilitate successful implementation of the ERP and deliver on its objectives.

The research questions under coordination relate to:

- The status and evolution of the ERP's coordination mechanisms at national and district levels;
- The effectiveness of these mechanisms;
- Successes and challenges in the coordination of the ERP; and
- What needs to be improved regarding coordination structures to achieve the ERP's objectives.

The sources for this chapter come from interviews carried out in this phase of research and documents shared by the ERP Secretariat (such as the ERP annual reports, meeting minutes, and strategy documents related to financing and M&E, see ERP Secretariat 2019c, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e).

This chapter is structured as follows. The first section sets out the design and status of national and district ERP coordination mechanisms, including their establishment and current level of functionality. The second section explores what is working well regarding coordination at national and district levels, as well as the challenges faced by stakeholders. The third section identifies the changes and improvements needed, according to stakeholders, to further strengthen coordination mechanisms to implement the ERP. The final section provides conclusions.

### 4.1 National-level coordination

#### 4.1.1 Status of national coordination mechanisms

**All relevant ERP coordinating mechanisms at the national level are in place and functioning, thanks in part to successfully leveraging existing structures to support oversight and management of the Plan.**

There are several mechanisms identified in the ERP to coordinate implementation of the Plan at the national level. According to the ERP:

- MoES is responsible for the overall coordination and implementation of the response under the leadership of the Minister of Education and Sports.
- The Plan mandates the creation of a Steering Committee under MoES, which is responsible for providing guidance and oversight for the ERP's implementation, as well as ensuring transparency and accountability for the Plan to the Government of Uganda, MoES and EDPs (i.e. the bi- and multi-lateral donors supporting and partially funding the response).

### **Box 1: ERP Steering Committee composition**

Following the guidelines set out in the ERP, the Steering Committee is composed of:

- Two co-chairs – one from MoES and one from an EDP;
- From MoES, the MoES Under Secretary, and Directors or Commissioners from key MoES departments – Basic and Secondary Education, Higher Education, and Education Standards and Planning; and
- One representative each from the: MoFPED, Ministry of Local Government, the OPM, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) Secretariat, UNHCR, UNICEF, World Bank, an international NGO implementing partner, a refugee-led NGO implementing partner, and the Forum for Education NGOs in Uganda.

The current EDP representative and co-chair of the Steering Committee is Enabel (formerly the Belgium Development Agency). The Co-chair organisation is nominated to the role and serves on a rotational two year basis. Save the Children represents the international NGO implementing partners, and ECHO represents the humanitarian donor partners.

Source: ERP

The substantive Chair of the Steering Committee is the Permanent Secretary of MoES. However, given the nature of this high-level position within the government, the Permanent Secretary would not be able to formally attend and chair every meeting of the Steering Committee. Currently, the Permanent Secretary has delegated that responsibility to the Commissioner of Basic Education, who now sits as the Chair, with Enabel as Co-chair. While it is not uncommon in Uganda for senior government officials to delegate certain tasks to other leaders in their ministries, some respondents expressed disquiet about the absence of the Permanent Secretary as the substantive chairperson. Furthermore, they see the Committee as an advisory body with the executive powers lying with the Minister. Together, these factors appear to have deprived the Steering Committee of its executive powers as a coordinating body. As a result, the Steering Committee has limited capacity to drive policy-related actions, which continues to constrain delivery of the ERP. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

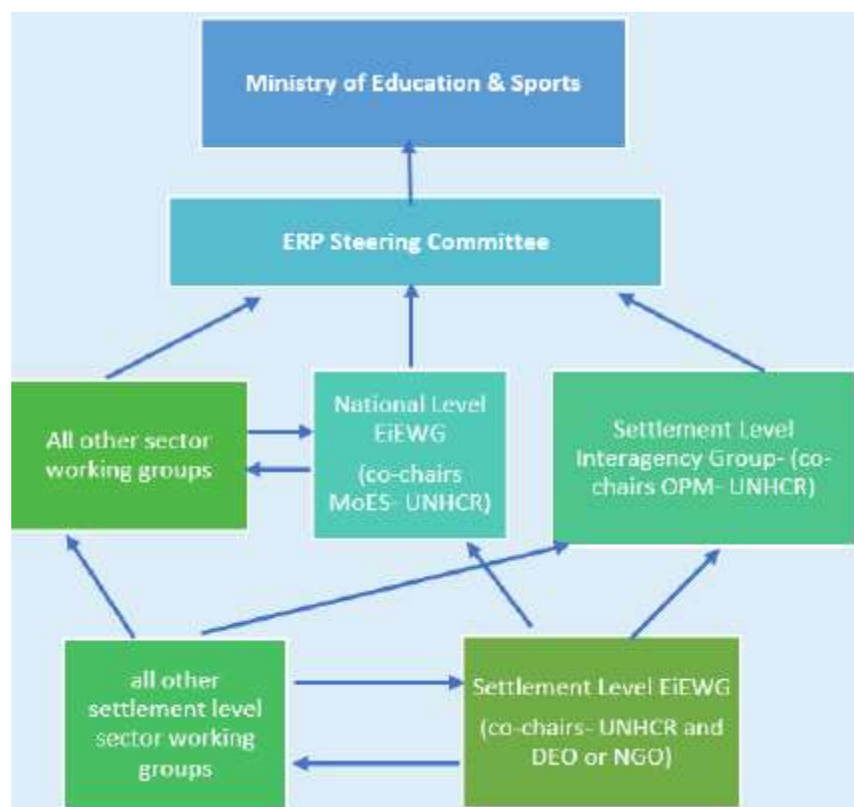
The Steering Committee meets quarterly but also holds extraordinary meetings when there are urgent issues to address. According to research findings, the Steering Committee has been holding meetings on a regular basis and attendance is high– over 90% according to minutes from the 2020 Steering Committee meetings – indicating positively that the national coordinating body has consistent and regular attendance as well as engagement, although some individual members have been very inconsistent in their attendance.

The Steering Committee is supported by a fully dedicated Secretariat, which carries out the day-to-day activities of the Steering Committee as outlined in the ERP. The Secretariat, established as a part of the MoES, has five full-time staff, including a coordinator, a deputy coordinator/administrator, an M&E officer, an information officer, and a driver. The Secretariat is strategically located within the MoES offices to facilitate better coordination of the ERP's processes and activities. Although the ERP began with Year 0 in January 2018, starting with the planning process, the Secretariat was not fully established until September 2019, a whole year after the launch in September 2018.

The Secretariat is responsible for establishing and managing the ERP's coordination systems and for building linkages with existing planning and coordination mechanisms at

district and national level for standard education service delivery. This involves being in continuous touch with refugee settlement leaders, local government offices, various government coordination committees and technical working groups, and MoES itself to support its overall leadership of the Plan.

**Figure 4: ERP coordination structure**



Source: ERP p.43

Findings from this first research phase show that the Steering Committee, with the support of the Secretariat, has successfully engaged several existing coordinating bodies in implementation of the ERP, with representatives from these bodies all sitting on the Steering Committee. These coordinating bodies, which are described in the table below, have well-established operational structures and mechanisms that the Steering Committee and Secretariat use to monitor progress on the Plan, provide technical guidance, and share information.

The Steering Committee establishes task teams as needed, to execute specific functions related to the ERP's management and implementation, and these are dissolved once their assigned mandate is completed. At the time of this research, there was an information management task team and a resource mobilisation task team. The information management task team is providing technical support in relation to the setting up of an M&E system for the ERP. The team reviews and provides input on the frameworks, tools, and documents produced by the Secretariat related to M&E. It consists of representatives, mostly M&E officers, from key implementing partners on the EiESWG. The resource mobilisation task team provides support regarding fundraising for the ERP. As subsequent chapters will show, while both teams have been established, their tasks are far from

complete and they will require a significant amount of time and investment to achieve their outputs.

**Table 3: Mechanisms for coordinating the ERP**

| Coordination structure     | Support provided to ERP coordination                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Interagency Group</b>   | A national- and settlement-level mechanism for cross-sectoral coordination among actors who provide services such as health and nutrition, water and sanitation, child protection, nutrition, and livelihood programming in refugee settlements and host communities. Members meet monthly at national and settlement level to share information and plan. It is co-led by the OPM and UNHCR.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>EiESWG</b>              | A national- and settlement-level mechanism for sharing information, coordinating implementation to minimise duplication of effort, identifying service gaps, and harmonising practices among providers of education services in refugee and host communities. They implement all their activities guided by the ERP, though the group was formed prior to the inception of the Plan. It consists mainly of UN agencies and NGOs; MoES and the ERP Secretariat are also represented. The EiESWG is expected to report to the Interagency Group, and members meet monthly. The EiESWG is co-chaired by UNHCR, an NGO representative (currently Finn Church Aid), and MoES at the national level, and by Finn Church Aid and district education officers (DEOs) at the district level. Every refugee settlement has its own technical working group. |
| <b>CRRF Steering Group</b> | The CRRF is a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder refugee response group that seeks to protect and promote the rights of refugees as enshrined in international law. It was launched in Uganda by the OPM in 2017. The committee acts as the decision-making body of the CRRF and brings together humanitarian and development actors, local governments and authorities, refugees, and the private sector to engage, provide guidance, and mobilise support for refugees. Members meet on a quarterly basis. The group is co-chaired by the Minister of Disaster Preparedness and the Minister of Local Government.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>EDPs Group</b>          | The EDPs Group includes multi-lateral and bi-lateral donors working in partnership with the Government of Uganda on education programming. It also includes UN agencies. The EDPs support Uganda's education sector via funding, strategic guidance, policy coordination, and bi-lateral government technical support.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

Internally, some of the above mechanisms also function as task teams to oversee specific inputs or actions. These task teams work out the details of a particular issue, generate consensus, and then share findings and recommendations with the wider group. The most robust example of this is within the EiESWG, which has 11 task teams. Examples include:

1. The inclusive education task team working to streamline inclusiveness into education programme delivery;
2. The language task team exploring how learners from different contexts who speak different languages can be integrated into Uganda's education system and languages of instruction;
3. The accelerated education task team providing guidance on the provision of consolidated, shortened primary learning models for catch-up and remedial instruction; and

4. The secondary education task team focusing on delivery, funding and advocacy for access to secondary school for learners in refugee and host communities.

Membership on a task team is voluntary and ranges from five to 10 people. These task teams directly or indirectly support the coordination efforts of the Steering Committee and Secretariat by working with implementing partners to clarify, refine, develop, and implement aspects of the ERP related to service delivery and education outcomes that lack clear implementation guidelines and strategies.

#### **4.1.2 Effectiveness of national coordination mechanisms**

**While the ERP coordination model successfully engages key stakeholders across a range of institutions, departments, and actors, its overall effectiveness is diminished by several systemic factors.**

The ERP's coordination structures are conducive to overseeing and managing the delivery of the response by leveraging existing mechanisms without requiring too many additional resources (both human and financial). Most respondents across all categories of research participants were of the opinion that reasonable success has been made regarding information-sharing across government departments and in the provision of technical guidance and support to implementing partners through coordination linkages. However, systemic weaknesses within the different coordination mechanisms and structures are seriously undermining the overall effectiveness of coordination outcomes under the ERP. Poor reporting or under-reporting, undesirable competition among some implementing partners at settlement level, challenges aligning project budgets and donor priorities with ERP priorities, and poor communication and follow-up within government departments are some of the key factors cited in interviews that are constraining effective coordination and weakening existing coordination mechanisms.

A number of respondents from the Steering Committee and EIESWG reported that some of the implementing partners do not report to district authorities when they are starting to implement new programmes in the districts, some do not submit routine required reports or data in its fullness. The reality of implementing partners being expected to report to different bodies, using different templates, causes reporting fatigue. Some implementing partners also face IT-related challenges (either due to poor internet connectivity or because they find the application difficult to navigate) when they try to use the Activity Info computer application where they are expected to input their activities and report progress. Another issue reported which was constraining effective coordination is unnecessary competition among some of the implementing partners. Some partners were said to be hesitant to collaborate with others even when they are offering related services and this frustrates efforts to build synergies and ensure that beneficiaries get the best service within the resources available.

'The challenge is you'll find our organization talking about training teachers and another organisation is also talking about training teachers, but what are you training them on? For us, our interest is gender; we are for girls' rights, the rights of the child and gender. So, our teacher training will prioritize gender related issues much as pedagogy will be embedded under the agenda. The other organization's focus may be Child Protection. So, you see that fragmentation. There is need to harmonize.'

(EIESWG Member)

Since the Steering Committee's role is primarily to offer guidance in the execution of the ERP, its ability to enforce compliance in these kinds of situations was said to be limited. Furthermore, the government's high profile presence on the Steering Committee has not yet given rise to improvements in policy and practice to benefit the ERP's implementation and effectively oversee the work of implementing partners. Although government, with its extended decentralised structures and associated executive powers, is most suited to take on the role of coordination and is overall responsible for this task, its current level of engagement and commitment casts doubt on its readiness to fully assume this responsibility in the absence of development partner inputs.

### **Strengths and successes**

The ERP's coordination structures are distributed across the broader education system, with various institutions, departments, and organisations responsible for managing, executing, and monitoring ERP activities.

As a result, the overall effectiveness of the ERP's coordination strategy is dependent on the ability of these different mechanisms to function efficiently both internally and externally to deliver on the ERP's objectives. The Steering Committee and Secretariat are ultimately responsible for overseeing these coordination mechanisms and ensuring that they are effective. This necessitates that they not only possess the technical capacity and resources to deliver on these functions but also have the executive authority to influence relevant technical, political, and financial systems and processes to ensure this happens. However, the long delay in setting up the Secretariat has meant that this influence has not been fully realised.

Most respondents across all the categories of research participants believe that the structure and composition of the ERP's coordination mechanisms are well designed to facilitate effective coordination, and that they contain the right mix of high-profile, appropriate individuals in their membership to access and engage with relevant government ministries, MoES departments, EDPs, and implementing partners to facilitate effective coordination of the ERP. They stated that building the ERP's coordination mechanisms on existing systems and working groups that have the experience and capacity to coordinate refugee response was critical to this process and has greatly benefited the ERP's coordination and delivery. One member of the Steering Committee noted that:

'When you look at the composition of the Steering Committee, it is possible to have a discussion across the different ministries; across different sectors; and across the different spectrum of people who interact to deliver the education response. For example, having [the] CRRF on the Steering Committee gives us an opening to be able to have certain issues addressed, especially policy-related issues, where we need attention from the Office of the Prime Minister.'

(Steering Committee member)

In general, there was consensus among respondents that ERP coordination mechanisms have been particularly successful in providing technical advice to implementing partners because there is always a department, agency, or institution within the structure who can be easily identified to provide the required technical support or intervention oversight.

The presence of a fully dedicated Secretariat with highly qualified staff is seen as key in facilitating coordination processes and providing different actors with required information and timely technical guidance, especially regarding the ERP and other government policies related to education and refugees. A member of the Steering Committee also mentioned that the Secretariat is able to play a central conflict resolution role across different actors, helping to address challenges that arise in the implementation process. The Secretariat was also applauded for spearheading the setting up of the various coordination and M&E systems. A highlight and achievement of the Secretariat's work aligning coordination at local levels is the development of district ERPs; importantly, though, this process is still ongoing in most districts. The district ERPs are expected to streamline and strengthen coordination activities at district and settlement level, as well as help align district ERP priorities to funding. This is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Respondents also reported that the coordination functions of the Steering Committee and Secretariat are complemented by the existence of partner consortiums, particularly that triggered by the ECW funding. The Uganda Education Consortium is managed by a Consortium Management Unit (hosted by Save the Children) and includes 15 EiE implementing partners who deliver on the grant's activities. The same Consortium Management Unit implements ECHO funds (with five implementing partners). The consortium directly supports the Steering Committee's efforts to align funding to ERP priorities. The choice of donors such as ECW and ECHO to channel funds through a consortium improves the efficiency and coordination of education programming in refugee communities through grants to CSOs. As one member of the EiESWG said:

'[The implementing partners under the Education Consortium are] a very large number of main education partners that are, members of the EiE working group. So, it's not the whole group, but it's a big enough group that it is a driving force to, for example, all those harmonization issues.'

(EiESWG member)

The consortium is also said to have the benefit of having direct access to ECW and ECHO, who are important donors.

## **Challenges**

The coordination functions provided by the Steering Committee and Secretariat are largely seen as successful in terms of bringing important stakeholders together for planning, discussion, and information-sharing regarding the ERP, as well as for establishing basic management systems and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders. However, most respondents felt that there was still a lot to be done to make these coordination efforts truly effective.

Coordination among government departments and ministries was reported not to be very efficient, despite the high level of representation from key government departments and

influential individuals who are members of the Steering Committee. In particular, vertical (from national to district and vice versa) and horizontal (across sectors and departments) information flows and follow-up on directives between the levels are poor. This was partly attributed to the delay in rolling out the district ERPs which would clearly spell out the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders at the district level in the implementation of the ERP. For example, double-shifting was planned for in the ERP and some of the implementing partners argued that it was agreed at the national level to introduce it in some schools in order to reduce class size but some DEOs have continued to resist this change.

‘In [*anonymised*] settlement, there's been a lot of pushback [to double-shifting] from the district and a real battle to get the ministry [...] at Kampala level to issue actual guidance.’(EIESWG member)

However, further discussions with some officials of the Steering Committee revealed that the double shift system was only piloted but is yet to be passed as policy.

At the national level, interviewees who are key MoES staff responsible for education service delivery across Uganda, but who do not sit on the Steering Committee, revealed that they knew very little about the ERP itself, the implementation to date of the Plan, or the activities of the Steering Committee. A similar point was made by a top government official who is a member of an inter-ministerial task force on education services:

‘We are highly connected to the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Local Government, Ministry of Public Service. We have actually what we call an inter-ministerial task force which brings representatives of these key MDAs together. We meet every month. Unfortunately, we have not had a chance to have the refugee team that is delivering education services in those emergency areas with us. We have not had chance to interact.’

(Government official)

This situation casts doubt on Government's preparedness for ownership of the ERP, and its readiness to gradually assume full responsibility for coordinating the response if the Steering Committee's coordination function gets integrated directly into MoES departments as proposed by some respondents (EIESWG members) They argued that the current coordination approach involves keeping MoES informed of progress, with departments only providing support and engagement when specifically called upon by the Secretariat or Steering Committee. This view is perhaps due to the fact that some of the respondents consider the Secretariat as external and not an integral unit of the MoES. Considering that the Secretariat is externally funded, some are perhaps also concerned about the sustainability of this approach hence the urge to see that the Secretariat's functions are gradually integrated within the various administrative units of the Ministry.

A related concern raised by several interviewees regards the lack of progress made by the government, via the Steering Committee and Secretariat, to address key national policies constraining delivery of the ERP – including policies identified as problematic during the development of the ERP document itself. One such policy relates to school capitation grants, which are termly grants given to schools by the government to meet non-wage recurrent costs based on their student enrolment. Currently, enrolment counts exclude refugee children, even if they attend government schools. Similarly, the government formula for



allocating teachers to a district is based on the number of Ugandan children enrolled in the district and does not take into consideration the number of refugee children attending school.

These two policies place a huge burden on schools in refugee settlements and those in nearby communities hosting refugee children, effectively mandating that they provide education services to the refugee student population without any additional resources from the government. This is clearly contradictory to the government's open-door policy towards refugees, the CRRF and the Refugee Act (2006) which state that refugees will be given the same treatment as nationals with regard to provision of social services including education services. This position is further emphasised in the ERP (2018, pg 7).

Additionally, the government's policy on teacher recruitment to increase numbers in schools with large populations of refugee children, has not been addressed, according to respondents. Furthermore, Uganda government policy of teaching lower primary learners in their mother tongue requires recruitment of refugee teachers yet, as per MoES standards, refugee teachers do not meet the requisite academic qualifications for becoming a teacher in Uganda, and therefore cannot be recruited as teachers on the government payroll. As a stopgap measure, refugee teachers are recruited as assistant teachers and paid by development partners implementing projects under the ERP. These approaches are clearly unsustainable and do not support the long-term needs or best interests of refugee children attending schools in Uganda.

Finally, respondents indicated that many schools hosting refugee children have not yet been coded, and are therefore not recognised by the government or eligible to receive any capitation grants or allocations of teachers. It was also reported by respondents that some of the schools do not yet have centre numbers assigned by the Uganda National Examination Board, implying learners in candidate classes cannot sit their examinations at those schools as they are not recognised as examination centres. This restricts learners' opportunities for continuing their education, as the financial implications of sitting an examination at other schools – which have centre numbers – will be out of reach for most refugee children.

Along with coordination challenges within government departments, respondents reported that it has been equally difficult for the Steering Committee and Secretariat to coordinate donor funding and to ensure equity in service delivery by implementing partners. As a result, some ERP activities are not being addressed and some refugee settlements remain underserved. Challenges with identifying and coordinating donor funding are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

The lack of output and outcome results of implementing the ERP to date adds an additional level of complexity to coordination, restricting evidence-based planning by the Steering Committee and Secretariat and their ability to demonstrate progress to donors. Lack of such data is mainly due to poor or inaccurate reporting by some of the implementing partners, and Uganda's inadequate EMIS, which does not capture data on refugee children. These challenges are further explored in Chapter 6 on information.

When asked about the competency and capacity of the Secretariat to fulfil its coordination role under the ERP, most respondents expressed strong belief that the staff have the qualifications and competencies to perform this function, but that their capacity is too stretched for them to execute coordination on their own. As such, they must overly rely on

pre-ERP coordination mechanisms to organise, manage, and monitor ERP activities, rather than ensure the implementation and success of these activities through their own programming. This allows for the possibility of inaccurate data or under-reporting on ERP activities from other sources, which could threaten the achievement of set targets. One of the Steering Committee members interviewed was of the view that the CMU is more like a parallel structure to the Secretariat yet it is better resourced (in terms of funding and staffing). This member strongly felt that a merger of the two would significantly strengthen the coordination and monitoring function of the Secretariat.

‘There is a lot of capacity there ...the consortium has the structure that the secretariat would be having. The M&E team, the financing team...if all that could come into the secretariat, maybe that would give the Secretariat the capacity. In terms of resourcing, getting by with just one coordinator and I think two full time staff, how can they be able to support all the 12-13 refugee districts to ensure that whatever needs to be done is done? So, there is need to review this to see whether that capacity is adequate.’

(Steering Committee member)

#### **4.1.3 Improving government ownership of national coordination mechanisms**

**While MoES is technically responsible for overall leadership and coordination of the ERP, development partners invest a significant amount of time and resources to its management and delivery, contributing to limited government engagement and ownership. Development partners and the government are equally accountable for improving this situation, and must take joint action to effectively realign coordination responsibilities.**

Respondents provided some important views on the need for adjusting existing coordination mechanisms to ensure the government is well positioned to take a central role in managing and overseeing implementation of the ERP. Their key recommendation was that the Steering Committee and Secretariat put more effort into ensuring that MoES and local government officials in refugee-hosting districts take on increasing responsibility for coordinating implementation of the Plan to ensure full government ownership by June 2021, when the current ERP expires.

Numerous respondents pointed out that one of the key reasons why the government has not taken charge, despite co-chairing the Steering Committee and maintaining a significant presence on ERP coordinating bodies, is because the overall process has been directed by NGOs and UNHCR. According to them, the fact that most government departments are under-resourced makes it even more difficult for NGOs and UNHCR to gradually step back and release coordination responsibilities to the government. Yet, although there is a strong desire for the government to take on more responsibility for coordination, respondents expressed belief that MoES will need both technical and financial support, at least in the short to medium term, to play this role effectively, and a change in mind-set across all stakeholders is critical to this process to ensure the shifting of roles and responsibilities is successful and oversight of the ERP is embedded in MoES’s existing management structures. The general consensus among respondents is that integration of the ERP within

the ESSP, a requirement articulated in the ERP, may help in this regard, as the ESSP is the guiding strategy of the government that MoES is directly accountable for implementing.

Respondents also expressed the need for MoES and implementing partners to strengthen coordination and communication between the national level, districts, and refugee settlements. This would help ensure that MoES keeps districts informed about decisions taken at the national level, supporting local officials to take necessary actions aligned with MoES directives and policies. Implementing partners must also promote better coordination among CSOs at the district and settlement level in order to reduce competition amongst themselves, build synergies, and cooperate to implement programming as well as report data regularly and accurately. Under the current ERP collaboration model, MoES management, implementing partners, EDPs, and donors are in a much better position than the Steering Committee and ERP Secretariat to promote improved cooperation and engagement within their spheres of influence. The latter two are perceived as separate parties, especially since the Secretariat benefits from external support.

Many respondents also expressed the need to urgently address some of the restrictive government policies limiting achievement of the ERP's objectives for education service delivery, particularly regarding school capitation grants and teacher recruitment. Given the financial and political implications involved in changing such policies, this effort would most certainly require the leadership of the Permanent Secretary and buy-in from the Minister of Education, engagements which require the support and direction of MoES to execute.

Finally, some respondents felt that it would be best to extend the implementation period of the current ERP instead of developing a second ERP (i.e. ERP2) because many of the objectives of the current ERP – such as developing district ERPs, building the capacity of government to take charge of coordination, and meeting fundraising targets – are yet to be accomplished.

COVID-19 has also made the achievement of ERP targets more difficult, as schools have been closed since the end of March 2020 and, at the time of writing, are not yet scheduled to reopen. Chapter 7 on COVID-19 provides additional analysis of these effects.

## 4.2 District-level coordination

Although the primary focus of research in Phase 1 is the national response to the ERP, the interviews conducted provided insights into coordination mechanisms in refugee-hosting districts. Given the central role that districts play in coordinating implementation of the ERP locally, understanding the management and implementation processes executed between central and local authorities and structures will help us further unpack findings on the Plan. We will more deeply explore district-level execution of the ERP in the second research phase. In this report, we briefly explore the effectiveness and challenges of current district coordination mechanisms and how they affect implementation of the ERP.

### 4.2.1 Effectiveness of district coordination mechanisms

**Coordination mechanisms at the district and refugee settlement level exist and are routinely executed. There is increasingly greater emphasis on the role districts play in overseeing the activities taking place in their localities, especially through the**

**oversight provided by DEOs. However, significant gaps in capacity, personnel, and resources make it extremely difficult for districts to capture and process the data needed to better inform and coordinate their efforts, and to coordinate with other districts and national stakeholders on implementation.**

According to the ERP, district education offices are expected to coordinate the activities of all education partners implementing projects in their area. At present, coordination at the district level is spearheaded by a district ERP task force. A Steering Committee member explained that this task force is comprised of:

1. All EiESWG partners operating in the district to implement projects aligned with the ERP's objectives;
2. Representation from the OPM (which provides a link to the national level);
3. The DEO and District Inspector of Schools; and
4. The District Planner.

Districts also co-lead settlement-level EiESWGs, which are expected to report regularly to the national EiESWG on their activities. All partners operating in a particular settlement meet once a month, focusing on 'avoiding duplication and developing synergies.'

Each month, the DEO, in conjunction with UNHCR, chairs a district coordination meeting to discuss progress executing ERP activities. It was noted by a Steering Committee member, however, that in some cases it is difficult to ascertain in-depth knowledge of development partner activities through these meetings, which affects the ability of the district to track interventions, harmonise efforts, and avoid duplication across projects. Although all stakeholders implementing activities in a district are required to report their actions to MoES through the DEO, many do not follow this request and fail to update the district regularly on their work. A few NGO respondents indicated that there is a lack of incentives for implementing partners to report their activities, stating that 'a donor gives you money to implement activities and then, of course, you report directly to them'. Holding implementing partners accountable for routine reporting of their activities through recognised district management structures is thus a key challenge facing coordinated implementation of the ERP in districts.

Interviewees also made it clear that strengthening district coordination was considered a priority in being able to realise the objectives of the ERP, and more broadly to better meet the educational needs of refugees and host communities. In discussing the effectiveness of coordination mechanisms, an EDP member was keen to distinguish that, whilst there are significant challenges:

'... prior to the ERP, OPM and humanitarian actors often operated entirely separately from local governments, leading to duplication and inefficiency of efforts. With the onset of the ERP, there has been a gradual shift towards districts playing a greater role in the activities, with local governments at a minimum involved, and in advanced cases now taking more of a leadership in coordination efforts.'

(EDP member)

EDPs that have been funding interventions in refugee settlements for many years reported that the Steering Committee is starting to better engage the districts in coordinating efforts

and learning about their specific concerns and constraints, which has helped put a greater emphasis on being more adaptive in programming and sharing progress and findings. However, several EDP and Steering Committee members acknowledged that there are still significant gaps, especially in terms of coordination and sharing mechanisms between national and district stakeholders. One informant commented:

'I think there is good coordination horizontally at Kampala level, and really good coordination horizontally at district level. We're missing that link between Kampala and the field.'

(Steering Committee member)

Informants also identified regional disparities in capacity between the regions where refugee-hosting districts are located. An EDP with experience in multiple regions explained that, in West Nile, the district local government played a more prominent role in coordination than districts in the South and West, primarily because there had been:

'... more years of heavy investment in the humanitarian response in West Nile, with more stakeholders talking about CRRF, more resources being provided, and districts having funding to hire education and emergency staff in a way that the Southwest response hasn't allowed for. The Southwest is massively underfunded.'

(EDP member)

This has led to diverging mechanisms for coordination, as the response in the South and West is led by the OPM, in the face of, as one Steering Committee member put it, 'less presence and less investment from governments, foreign actors, and UN agencies.' Whilst the OPM, as a national government entity, is a recognised member of the ERP's coordination structures, its presence in the South and West is an indication that MoES is potentially not playing a leading role in those districts, and that district coordination structures may not be functioning as efficiently as they could be. More broadly, this may lead to dependency and reliance by district authorities on national-level actors, in turn potentially having a negative impact on the sustainability of ERP interventions and coordination if national-level actors face constraints and disengage suddenly with a district. This current approach to coordination, especially in the South and West, may not be doing enough to create local-level buy-in or to empower local entities to take the lead in activities affecting their communities, which ultimately goes against the intentions of the ERP.<sup>7</sup>

Respondents also pointed to challenges around district coordination related to the availability, collection, analysis, and use of data by local authorities. It was acknowledged by many stakeholders that district officials must be further empowered and capacitated to gather data from implementing partners on programmes in their area to use for planning and reporting at a district level.

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<sup>7</sup> Output 3 of the ERP states 'strengthened system for effective delivery' and specifically that the activities under Output 3 are to cover national- and district-level support in the area of institutional development, coordination and planning, data and information management, and enhanced community engagement (MoES, 2018, p. 30). It goes on to say that, together with the national-level system strengthening, the Plan prioritises system strengthening at the settlement and district level, through support in coordination, planning, and management.

Whilst our findings indicate that the ERP has led to an increase in meetings and information-sharing aimed at improving coordination on both a national and district level, on several occasions it was stated that data was 'non-existent at district level because they don't have the right people to analyse' it (Steering Committee member). This situation has led to information gaps and inefficiencies in implementing ERP activities, and made it more difficult to track activities in districts and settlements. A Steering Committee member explains further:

'Stakeholders [often] package information, send it to [their] head office in Kampala and move on. They are not bothered about the implication of that work to the district education department or to other partners... The head offices of all agencies need to realise that there is a need to engage at the district level.'

(Steering Committee member)

Many respondents highlighted the need to build the capacity of local government officials if they are to capture and share reliable and rigorous data. They highlighted that engagement with data must be a *meaningful* process, with officials not just requesting information from partners but also investing the time and resources required to process, use, and accurately report the information. Nearly all respondents pointed out that districts in particular are struggling with data, which they closely linked to challenges around the EMIS:

'We do not have real-time, regular, or reliable data because of the challenges with the EMIS... So, even before we can evaluate the districts' capacity [for data collection and use] we need to resolve [problems with] and [further] develop the EMIS.'

(Steering Committee member)

However, a fully functioning EMIS is not enough if, as a Steering Committee member argues, it is not coupled with coordination efforts being 'led and owned by the DEO', who is technically responsible for all the education activities within their district. Importantly, education activities taking place in refugee settlements are often not considered part of district-led activities – even if these activities take place in schools that serve both host communities and refugees. Consequently, data regarding refugee children and the education services being provided to them is largely not being formally captured through the district education system, and there is currently no provision to disaggregate and report on it through the national statistics database. A Steering Committee member explains:

'We have to fix EMIS to make it inclusive of refugee children. We need to be in a position where EMIS is up and running for the country as a whole, and that data is entered into a district-level database that is then entered into a central level database. I think if we can fix the data, then many other things will be easier. At the moment, coordination is difficult because we don't know where the gaps are.'

(Steering Committee member)

As to why there has been a reluctance to include refugees in the EMIS system starting from the district level, an EDP member stated that it had to do with the overwhelmingly large number of refugees seeking services. Many informants stated that the Ugandan government was not prepared for the number of refugees that are now in the country, and that it does not truly have the financial resources to address their needs. Whilst Uganda's open-door policy

towards refugees should be lauded, it was stated that the government was ill prepared at both local and national levels to provide services to so many people. Indeed, the districts that are hosting refugees were already significantly constrained by a lack of resources and capacity before the influx, resulting today in even more pressure on a weak education system and detrimentally affecting the ability of districts to coordinate services effectively.

In addition, coordination between national, district, and settlement officials was highlighted as a large gap at present by many Steering Committee members. This tension may be rooted in the design of the ERP – which was developed for MoES but fundamentally lacks ownership from the government at present. Indeed, the ERP is funded by development partners, leading to a situation where ‘more allegiance is paid to where the money is coming from’ (MoES official) than to ensuring the Ministry takes ownership of the ERP and its objectives. That said, the ERP was designed with the clear objective of strengthening the ability of districts to respond to the educational needs of both refugees and host communities, and to ensure synergies between government and development partners at all levels. Indeed, it should be acknowledged that the ERP is still a relatively new structure, being only in its third year of operations, with many key coordination structures and functions, such as a having a fully staffed Secretariat, only coming on stream in 2019. Many of these challenges are being discussed and addressed by the Steering Committee, which suggests there is an intention for the ERP and its coordinating functions to be adaptive and demand driven as the policy evolves.

#### **4.2.2 Ownership of district coordination mechanisms**

**District ERPs are being created to help local officials identify context-specific approaches and priorities for executing the ERP in their area based on the needs of the refugee and host community populations in their district, considering the unique constraints and challenges they face. District ERPs are seen as vital in empowering districts to take ownership and authority to better coordinate resources and activities under the ERP, and to strengthen synergies between local and national education systems. However, given that districts are already constrained by a lack of personnel, resources, and capacity, efforts to improve planning and coordination mechanisms through district ERPs will only be successful if funds are raised and allocated to implement them.**

Findings indicate that districts must be better prepared and equipped to implement the ERP in their localities. District ERPs, which are currently being finalised for approval, were identified as critical to, as one Steering Committee member explained, ‘contextualise the [ERP to the] unique needs of every district’. District ERPs are specific to each district and outline the district’s aspirations, the number of refugee and host community children they have in their schools, and how many out-of-school refugee and host community children they want to reach with education services. It contains specific priorities pertinent to each locality and outlines funding gaps in relation to the objectives the district intends to achieve.

The district ERPs were created by a task team established in every district to contextualise the ERP for their population of refugees and host communities. The task team is chaired by the DEO or District Inspector of Schools, and includes implementing partners. The teams have been given a clear mandate to provide oversight and monitoring at the district level, in addition to fundraising to meet their ERP objectives.

A Steering Committee member emphasised that, through the district ERPs, ‘districts can innovatively and creatively raise funds and resources’ to meet their needs, and by definition the objectives of the ERP. It is concerning, however, that the onus of fundraising seems to be shifting to the districts, which are already constrained at coordinating activities in their localities and engaging with partners implementing programmes to leverage resources. Given that national stakeholders have been unable to raise the funds required to date to fully implement the ERP, fundraising is likely to be even more difficult, if not impossible, for districts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further delayed the finalisation and implementation of the district ERPs, which were only developed in late 2019 and early 2020. Importantly, the ERP Secretariat, which spearheads these processes, was only set up in mid-2019, even though the ERP started in June 2018. Findings from this research phase indicate that the district ERPs are eagerly anticipated, and expectations are high that they will help address the coordination challenges at district level. A Steering Committee member emphasised the importance of the plans:

‘Good will should come from the stakeholders at the national level to ensure that district plans are effectively implemented, and to also give the districts the capacity and authority to implement the plans.’

(Steering Committee member)

## 4.3 Conclusions

**Finding 1: National coordinating mechanisms have been successfully established and are functioning, largely by leveraging existing structures to support oversight and management of the ERP.**

The structure and composition of the ERP’s coordination mechanisms are well designed to facilitate effective planning and management of the policy. The coordination bodies contain the right mix of high-profile, appropriate individuals in their membership to access and engage with relevant government ministries, MoES departments, EDPs, and implementing partners to facilitate effective coordination of the ERP. Building the ERP’s coordination mechanisms on existing systems and working groups with the experience and capacity to coordinate refugee response was critical to this process, and has greatly benefited the ERP’s coordination and delivery. ERP coordination mechanisms have been particularly successful in providing technical advice to implementing partners, and the presence of a fully dedicated Secretariat with highly qualified staff has been key in facilitating coordination processes and providing different actors with required information and timely technical guidance.

However, the progress achieved regarding coordination mechanisms has been affected by delays in establishing the ERP Secretariat. As part of the MoES, and as the technical team responsible for overall coordination of the ERP, the Secretariat is a key element in its operations, and must continually expand its function alongside the Steering Committee, which provides strategic leadership.



**Finding 2: The ERP coordination model successfully engages key stakeholders across a range of institutions, departments, and actors, but its overall effectiveness is diminished by several systemic factors.**

The ERP's coordination structures make a good attempt to oversee and manage the delivery of the response by leveraging the capacities of people, existing departments, and mechanisms without requiring too many additional resources. Reasonable successes have been recorded regarding information-sharing across government departments, and in the provision of technical guidance and support to implementing partners through coordination linkages. However, national level stakeholders report that systemic factors and weaknesses somewhat limit the overall effectiveness of coordination outcomes under the ERP. Sub-quality reporting, under-reporting, challenges aligning project budgets and donor priorities with ERP priorities, and poor communication and limited time from overstretched government departments with many responsibilities are some of the key factors seen to be constraining effective coordination of the Plan.

**Finding 3: The MoES is responsible for overall leadership and coordination of the ERP. Partners value this oversight role, but expressed a need to continuously strengthen internal systems and more directly engage a wider range of the MoES senior leadership to facilitate timely decisions related to policy implementation and service delivery.**

While the MoES is technically responsible for providing overall leadership to implement the ERP, EDPs acknowledged that they contribute a significant amount of time and investment to its management and delivery. They hope to explore opportunities for more targeted, direct government engagement and ownership of key areas of the Plan, specifically regarding coordination of implementing partners and spearheading policy and practice improvements. Although the Secretariat is housed within the MoES and officially represents the government as the coordinating body for the ERP, it is seen by partners as an external structure supporting coordination. Moreover, neither the Secretariat nor the Steering Committee is seen by partners as exercising executive powers despite their prescribed roles.

**Finding 4: District ERPs are seen as vital in empowering local governments to take ownership and authority of the Plan, better coordinate ERP resources and activities, and strengthen synergies between the local and national education system.**

A highlight and achievement of the Secretariat's work aligning coordination at local level is the development of district ERPs; importantly, though, this process was still ongoing in most districts at the time of this report. District ERPs are expected to streamline and strengthen coordination activities at district and settlement level, as well as help align district ERP priorities to funding. However, given that districts are already constrained by a lack of personnel, resources, and capacity, efforts to improve planning and coordination mechanisms through district ERPs will only be successful if funds are raised and allocated to implement them. The upcoming ERP system strengthening strategy includes a number of other intended activities aimed at improving planning and coordination at both local and national levels.

## 5 Financing

The ERP is a plan that prioritises the activities and actions required to ensure improved learning outcomes for refugees and host community children across Uganda. These activities inevitably have a cost, and one of the aims of the ERP is to coordinate and mobilise financing for delivery of the activities, which together contribute to the objectives of improving access, quality, and system strengthening.

Financing is thus a core underlying component of the Plan; it is both an assumption for the Plan – i.e. financing will be forthcoming in order to deliver the activities – and an objective of the Plan – i.e. that the Plan and its established coordination mechanisms contribute to raising the needed financing. A brief introduction to what the ERP says about financing is given in Box 2, while these concepts are elaborated on in the following sections. Due to its integral role in the Plan's success, financing was identified as a key area of enquiry for this research.

### Box 2: What does the ERP say about financing?

- The ERP sets out the costs of implementing the activities intended together to lead to the three objectives of access, quality, and system strengthening. The costs are presented as national totals.
- It states that adequate financing to deliver those activities (to cover those costs) is both an assumption necessary to meet the ERP's objectives and an intention.
- The Steering Committee has responsibilities that include ensuring transparency and accountability on funding towards the Plan, and promoting and supporting resource mobilisation.
- The ERP intends to align donor financing to promote efficiency and enhance the effectiveness of coordination and delivery.
- There is no indication of the level of funding expected to come from different sources, or what the gap might be.

Source: ERP

This chapter focuses on the issue of financing the ERP. The research questions under financing are as follows:

- What are the funding needs?
- To what extent have the needs been met and where are the gaps?
- What financing modalities are used?
- What are the decision-making processes around financing?
- To what extent has the Plan itself led to changes in financing (either total amounts or the relative allocations – to activities and locations)?

The sources for this chapter come from interviews carried out in this phase of research, supplemented by interviews as part of technical assistance to support financial tracking of funds to the ERP, as well as documents shared by the ERP Secretariat (such as the ERP costing, a 2019 finance tracking exercise (ERP Secretariat, 2019a), the ERP fundraising strategy (ERP Secretariat, 2019b), and minutes from ERP fundraising task team meetings (ERP Secretariat, 2020a)).

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section sets out the financing needs of the ERP, how they were estimated and the limitations of this method, the extent to which they are felt to be met, and the gaps. It also includes a review of the mechanisms used to fund activities in the ERP. The second section looks into how the ERP has influenced financing of education for refugees and host communities, including what the intended role of the ERP is in financing (the ERP as a document and a coordinating mechanism) and to what extent these activities have been undertaken and contributed to changes in financing. The specific role of districts in coordinating the financing of the ERP is the focus of the third section. The fourth section looks briefly at implications for developing the ERP2 from the lessons learned from the financing of the current ERP, while the final section provides conclusions. A separate discussion of how COVID-19 has impacted ERP financing is included in Chapter 6.

## 5.1 Financing needs and remaining gaps

### 5.1.1 Financing the ERP

**The ERP estimates the costs of delivering its activities at US\$ 389 million, but the activities represent a sub-set of the potential needs for providing all refugees and host communities with quality education, and the underlying data is out of date.**

A key underlying assumption in the ERP's ToC, necessary for meeting the outcome objectives, is that 'the financing required to incrementally improve both access and quality for the refugee and host-community children will be forthcoming' (MoES, 2018, p. 25). In order to understand the level of financing need associated with the activities in the Plan, a detailed costing exercise was conducted as part of the Plan's development. The total cost of the ERP comes out at US\$ 389 million; the breakdown by objective and year is given in Table 4. Box 3 briefly introduces how the cost model works and how the costs can be presented.

**Table 4: Estimated costs of the ERP by objective and year**

| Objective                   | Year 0<br>(Jan–June<br>2018) | Year 1<br>(July 18–<br>June 19) | Year 2<br>(July 19–June<br>20) | Year 3<br>(July 20–June<br>21) | Total         |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Access</b>               | \$40,134,329                 | \$51,329,773                    | \$51,709,665                   | \$59,596,755                   | \$202,770,522 |
| <b>Quality</b>              | \$26,051,511                 | \$39,802,028                    | \$46,080,434                   | \$55,581,654                   | \$167,515,627 |
| <b>System strengthening</b> | \$2,577,357                  | \$3,915,850                     | \$5,284,321                    | \$7,043,941                    | \$18,821,469  |
| <b>Total</b>                | \$68,763,197                 | \$95,047,650                    | \$103,074,421                  | \$122,222,350                  | \$389,107,619 |

Source: ERP costing model

### **Box 3: How are costs estimated and presented in the ERP?**

The costs are estimated based on population projections for refugees and host communities (defined as Ugandan nationals in the 34 sub-counties hosting refugee settlements), enrolment targets, and key targets such as pupil–teacher ratios. Enrolment targets are in line with the ESSP so do not target 100% enrolment within the Plan’s timeframe. Activities are built up line by line, such as classroom construction for primary and secondary schools separately, or teacher training for each level of education. As a result, the costs can be presented according to the following categories:

- By objective (access, quality, system strengthening)
- By activity type (infrastructure, materials, teacher salary, teacher training, classes for children, strengthening school/parent/community structures, system strengthening (district), system strengthening (national), piloting/innovations/material development).
- By programme area (pre-primary, primary school, secondary school, vocational skills and adolescent development, system strengthening).
- By school type (settlement – those hosting refugees and Ugandan children; or non-settlement – those only enrolling Ugandan children). The definition of school type later changed to focus on school location. School type does not differentiate according to school ownership – settlement and non-settlement schools can both be government or community schools.
- By priority level of the activity (A, B and C, where A is the highest priority and C the lowest).

The costs do not differentiate provision in government versus non-government (i.e. private, community, and faith-based) schools. They are also not presented by geography (district or sub-county), but the underlying data may make this calculation possible with access to accurate population records for all sub-counties. Importantly, the costing is neutral on the sources of funding: the costing model represents needs rather than identified funding sources and budgets. Funding could come from government, public and private donors, communities, or households.

Source: Authors’ analysis of the ERP and the ERP costing model

The cost of US\$ 389 million represents a sub-set of the potential needs of refugee and host community children. The activities were prioritised in order to come up with a total cost that was felt by the original ERP Task Team<sup>8</sup> to be realistic – as one member of the Steering Committee explained, there was an informal ceiling of US\$ 400 million; so, when the complete costing came out at US\$ 900 million, prioritisation was needed. Thus, strategic decisions had to be made at the time about what to prioritise, and one major area of discussion was the extent to which Ugandan nationals should be included in addition to refugees. Ultimately, the ceiling was met largely by weighting the activities towards refugees and so-called ‘settlement schools,’ with activities only included in 20% of the non-settlement schools in the 34 refugee-hosting sub-counties.<sup>9</sup> Figure 5 below shows how heavily the costs are weighted to settlement schools, with only 14% of costs for non-settlement schools.

In addition, activities were given a prioritisation category, with category A assumed to be implemented in 100% of settlement schools, B in 80%, and C only in 20%. A final way in which the activities were prioritised was a decision to restrict coverage of early childhood

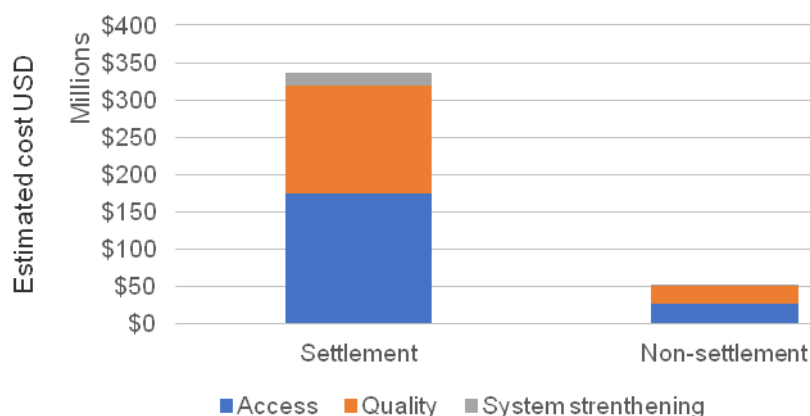
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<sup>8</sup> A task team was convened to develop the ERP consisting of representation from government, EDPs, and the EiESWG.

<sup>9</sup> Note that settlement and non-settlement schools could both be either government or community schools; this category is not an indication of ownership or funding source.

education to the government’s mandate for inspection, oversight, and a regulatory framework, rather than service provision. Therefore, having limited the beneficiaries based on settlement/non-settlement schools, prioritised activities, and excluded service delivery of early childhood education, the identified costs of US\$ 389 million do not represent the full needs of refugee and host community education services.

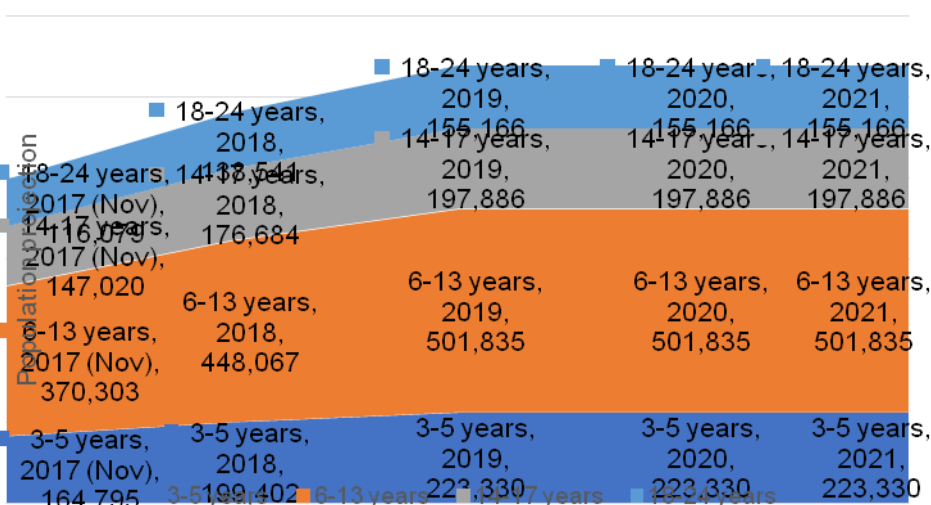
**Figure 5: Estimated costs of the ERP by objective and school type**



Source: ERP costing model

The costs were based on projections of the refugee population (see Figure 6) and host community population (from a base of November 2017), as well as targets for enrolment rates, pupil–teacher ratios, and so forth. There were some limitations in the data; for example, refugee enrolment data was not available for all 12 refugee-hosting districts, so had to be estimated based on the data that was available from other districts. However, the costs are not broken down and presented by geography; although district-level data was used to estimate the total enrolment of refugee and host community children, these children are then presented as collective groups with costs amalgamated as a national ERP total.

**Figure 6: Population projection for refugees used in ERP costing model**



Source: ERP costing model

ERP stakeholders recognise that the needs are not static, and in fact have been growing since the ERP was developed in 2017. There has been a further influx of refugees, particularly from the DRC: 'the numbers are increasing. So, because of that the need is increasing' (Secretariat staff). The needs of the refugee crisis were a surprise to the Government of Uganda when the main influx first started in 2013 and escalated again in 2016. The scale of the crisis was unforeseen. As one respondent said, 'with these additional huge needs, it just became overwhelming' (EiE partner). However, as the number of refugees keeps growing, it is hard for Uganda to keep on top of the needs: '...because of daily increasing numbers of refugees, as you plan more influx comes in, so that means the resources can never be enough' (Steering Committee member). As the ERP was costed based on a refugee population projection (staying constant from 2019), if the actual population increase has been higher than the projection then the real costs of meeting the needs of activities under the ERP would now be higher than the US\$ 389 million. Moreover, if the number continues to grow, then the goals are getting further away – and costs have not been re-estimated with updated data.

### 5.1.2 Identifying and tracking ERP finances

**The financing needs of the ERP have not been met 2.5 years into implementation of the 3.5-year Plan, and there is a significant challenge in actually identifying and tracking funding to the ERP in order to understand the scale of the gap.**

Although the costs of the ERP were estimated at US\$ 389 million, this is not a 'budget' *per se* since this figure was not based on an identified and secured resource envelope. Rather, it was always expected to be funded from a range of sources, i.e. government, EDPs, and humanitarian partners (NGOs and UN agencies), which secure funding from EDPs and from private philanthropy and fundraising (see Box 4 for a summary of the ERP's financing). The ERP did not contain an estimate of what funds would be available or from which sources (even though estimating government financing should be relatively straightforward) – or what the gap would be even if these funds were secured.

#### **Box 4: Who spends what on the ERP?**

The ERP is broadly implemented by three types of actors:

- Government – which is responsible for service delivery at primary and secondary level through government schools, policy oversight for all levels of education, and coordination.
- Humanitarian partners – NGOs (both national and international) and UN agencies (UNHCR and UNICEF). These are coordinated by the EiESWG.
- EDPs – who may implement themselves or may use firms or consultants.<sup>10</sup>

In turn, the ERP is funded by three main sources:

- Government domestic revenue. At the district level this is channelled through conditional grants for wages, non-wage recurrent expenditure (capitation grants to schools – which are to cover operational and maintenance costs, measures to improve access and learning, and sports and co-curricular activities – and monitoring and inspection funds for the district office) and development expenditure (for infrastructure). At national level, MoES officers' time is spent on policy development and oversight relevant to the ERP, and budget lines (known as subventions) are provided for recurrent and development expenditures – such as textbooks or new infrastructure.
- Bi- and multi-lateral donors – which may fund implementation through government ('on-budget') or through their own staff, procurement of goods or services, or through grants to NGOs.
- Philanthropic fundraising – which includes both international fundraising campaigns by large NGOs such as Save the Children and the corporate social responsibility or foundation arms of private organisations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Source: interviews for the financial tracking exercise

The consensus among ERP stakeholders is that the financing needs of the ERP have not been reached. In the words of one Steering Committee member:

'maybe the challenge [is] in terms of availability of resources to meet the set targets and of course the needs are quite enormous – that's why sometimes the resources are not adequate'.

(Steering Committee member)

Two partners went further to acknowledge that the challenge is even greater than it first seems, since the aim of US\$ 389 million is already a prioritised set of activities and does not cover 100% of the children that need to be reached (since it only includes 20% of non-settlement schools). To one funder, the underfunding of the ERP to date is the biggest problem in implementing the Plan and this needs to be recognised by the Steering Committee and presumably given priority in its coordination activities.

Although there is clear agreement on the underfunding, the actual status of funding of the ERP is not known due to challenges in collecting the relevant data. This is understood by the Steering Committee as a major challenge and priority to address, in order to then know where to focus if more funds become available. A finance tracking exercise was undertaken

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<sup>10</sup> UNICEF falls into both the humanitarian partner and EDP categories.

in 2019 which looked at spending in Year 1 of the Plan (July 2018 to June 2019), but as the Steering Committee felt it to hold a number of limitations the Secretariat is undertaking a new tracking exercise in 2020 with Maintains' support. The results of the 2019 tracking exercise are shown in Table 5, but **these were not approved by the Steering Committee due to the limitations discussed further below**. The results show that US\$ 35 million was funded in Year 0 and US\$ 90 million in Year 1; however, different definitions and methodologies were used across the two years and so the numbers are not exactly comparable. Various EiE partners are aware of the difficulties in defining what constitutes ERP funding, which are the same as the limitations in the 2019 exercise, and 'there is a challenge understanding what funding has come from where, through who, for what and in which location' (Steering Committee member).

**Table 5: Estimated spending on the ERP from the 2019 tracking exercise (USD millions)**

| Funder                                     | Year 0 (January – June 2018) | Year 1 (July 2018 – June 2019) | Total        |
|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Government – 11 districts</b>           | 17.0                         | 42.4                           | 59.4         |
| <b>Donors</b>                              | 17.6                         | 42.1                           | 59.7         |
| <b>EiESWG NGOs funding not from donors</b> | Not captured                 | 5.1                            | 5.1          |
| <b>Total</b>                               | <b>34.6</b>                  | <b>89.5</b>                    | <b>124.2</b> |
| <b>Target</b>                              | 68.8                         | 95.0                           | 163.8        |
| <b>Gap</b>                                 | -34.2                        | -5.5                           | -39.7        |

Source: ERP Secretariat (2019a). The Year 0 data was taken from a separate earlier study (Fraser and Minford, 2018), and used a different methodology.

A major difficulty in tracking ERP spending relates to the geographical aspect of the Plan's design and funding structure, and the need to only include spending on the target beneficiaries in the refugee-hosting sub-counties rather than spending across the entire refugee-hosting district. In the 2019 tracking exercise, this was a limitation for both EDP spending and government spending. EDP spending was included for the whole district (rather than a portion for the relevant sub-counties). Similarly, government spending – wage, non-wage recurrent (which includes capitation grants, inspection, and monitoring), and development conditional grants – was included for the whole district. Ideally these sources should consider spending only on settlement schools and only 20% of non-settlement schools, in line with the costing explained in section 5.1.1. Thus, the 2019 tracking exercise gave a highly inflated impression of EDP and government spending on the ERP.

A particular challenge highlighted by respondents is reporting relevant spending by EDPs, which often have development projects in refugee-hosting districts but are apparently not sure whether to include them as relevant spending against the activities costed in the ERP. This should be resolvable if EDPs review the objectives and activities costed in the Plan and match their own activities and spending against it. The problem is seen as part of the challenge with the 'humanitarian–development nexus', the (often poor) connection between humanitarian and development programming (OCHA, n.d.), in which development partners see themselves and their activities as separate from humanitarian partners and objectives. However, it can be more general than the specific humanitarian–development nexus



challenge, given that an activity might have benefits for all schools within a refugee-hosting district (such as capacity building for district officers in planning or an aspect of education policy) but is not directly addressing issues in the ERP (specific to refugee education). This same problem would hold regardless of refugees being seen as a humanitarian issue; it could be the same for a focus on, for example, girls' education or inclusive education. When reporting spending against the ERP, an EDP might find it hard to decide whether their activity (like the aforementioned capacity building for district officials) matches sufficiently with an activity in the ERP.

It is easier to attribute NGOs' spending to the ERP. NGOs tend to be clearly aligned (intentionally or not) with activities in the ERP, as these activities largely relate to the delivery of standard education services to improve education access and quality in the targeted geographies. An example of this is the funding from ECW, in which US\$ 11 million per year for three years is targeted specifically at the refugee-hosting districts and ERP activities. That said, it is difficult to collect data on spending from NGOs: there are over 90 partners on the EiESWG (of which 80 are NGOs) and coordination mechanisms are limited.<sup>11</sup> However, with a more effective coordination and reporting mechanism for NGOs, it should not be difficult to identify and track their spending towards the ERP.

It is a further limitation that a systematic and regular tracking process is not available, particularly for off-budget funding (i.e. funds from partners that are not channelled through government systems or approved by Parliament). The MoFPED Aid Management Platform (AMP) is supposed to collect data from all donors in Uganda, for all sectors. However, it is widely acknowledged by stakeholders in and outside government that the AMP does not have complete or accurate data and that it cannot currently provide the level of granularity needed to track spending against the ERP. The CRRF Secretariat and MoFPED are planning to improve the AMP, but this is currently on hold due to a redirection of activities and financing to respond to COVID-19. The OPM is developing a Refugee Response Monitoring System, which will coordinate agreements with implementers, including NGOs. Ultimately, the coordination mechanism for NGOs and EDPs – whether at national or district level – needs to be strengthened first in order to execute a complete and accurate financial tracking mechanism as a component of the coordination function.

### 5.1.3 Financing gaps

**The relative magnitude of gaps in financing are not known, and perceptions of gaps tend to relate to prioritising the basic inputs required for improving education access.**

Without an accurate and complete picture of what has been funded to date, it is extremely difficult for the Steering Committee to identify where there are specific gaps in spending (or, equally, where there are gaps in the delivery of activities identified by the ERP as necessary for meeting its outcomes). Thus, responses from interviewees about where there are gaps tend to be based on broad impressions or perceptions of where the greatest need is, which

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<sup>11</sup> The EiESWG contact list from 2019 includes 80 NGOs, 11 development partners (including Maintains), and three governmental bodies (ERP Secretariat, MoES, and the OPM).

is in itself a prioritisation exercise (rather than actually an analysis of which activities are funded relatively more or less). However, one EiE funder stressed that it is too soon to start highlighting specific areas (such as the primary or secondary levels) that need more funding, because the whole plan needs more funding just to meet the original needs set out before even touching on the additional refugee numbers.

High enrolment – and therefore pressures on infrastructure and teachers (particularly when government has not included refugee enrolment in its budgeting, which is discussed below) – is causing the major gap against needs according to a number of Secretariat staff and humanitarian partners; this was not differentiated between settlement and non-settlement schools. Gaps in the financing of required classrooms was mentioned by many respondents, as well as teacher numbers, stances (latrines), and teacher accommodation. In general, primary is felt to have the biggest gap, although the number and proximity of secondary schools was also raised as an issue, as they are in limited supply and often great distances from communities. Again, this likely reflects an element of prioritisation (get the basics right for access – classrooms and teachers<sup>12</sup> – before focusing on many of the other quality education and system strengthening activities in the Plan) rather than an assessment that other activities (e.g. teacher training, provision of sanitary kits, piloting innovations, coordination, and M&E activities) are relatively better funded.

Although the government states that refugees ‘have now been incorporated in the national development plan’ (MoES official), refugee numbers are not fully recognised in government education planning and this leads to challenges for districts and schools. Whilst government commits to paying for ‘coded’ schools (i.e. schools recognised as government owned and financed that have received an official number in the EMIS), it only uses enrolment data on Ugandan nationals to allocate capitation grants and teachers to those schools (see Box 4), leaving the coded schools with higher enrolment due to refugee children attending the school but short of their financing needs. In addition, districts face a cap on teacher recruitment. One way districts deal with the cap on recruitment, according to an EDP respondent, is to reallocate teachers within the district to help balance the additional need due to refugees in hosting schools; however, this still leaves the refugee-hosting districts short overall.

Furthermore, districts’ role in overseeing education for refugees is not well recognised – partners outside of government feel it should be part of districts’ mandate, yet that expectations are not aligned and districts are underfunded to deliver against this.<sup>13</sup> If local governments are not funded (whether by government or partners) to coordinate the activities of non-government partners, they will see supporting NGOs’ activities as a burden and ‘will not prioritise it’ (EiE partner). This problem is likely to be exacerbated if NGOs are not forthcoming in sharing information with the district. Districts’ role in tracking the financing of the ERP is discussed further in section 5.3 below.

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<sup>12</sup> Although payment of teachers’ salaries is considered an activity under the quality objective in the ERP.

<sup>13</sup> In fact, district capacity for monitoring and supervision is an issue in all districts, and is just exacerbated by districts that host refugees, due to government schools containing refugees but not being resourced for it, non-government schools being provided to meet the demands, and a number of partners supporting refugee education in all types of schools despite this ideally being coordinated by the district government.

In terms of geography and target groups, there are concerns that partners' resources are not being equitably distributed between locations. One Steering Committee member explained that the southwest districts receive less funding from partners and are therefore less able to coordinate implementation of ERP activities than the districts in West Nile. This is because the refugee influx from South Sudan into West Nile started longer ago, and so funding is better established (and possibly partners prioritised these locations based on the data when the ERP was developed), whereas funding for the more recent influx of refugees from DRC is less adequate. Another member argued that the mechanism for coordinating partners and therefore funding is not adequate, leading to a proliferation of partners and projects in some settlements and zones based on the quality of an NGO's proposal but too few in others. Meanwhile, from another view, two respondents (an official from MoES and an EIESWG member) felt that partners tend to focus only on refugees, so there is more of a gap in providing for host communities.

There could also be an issue if the activities being funded are those prioritised by funders rather than those prioritised in the ERP. As part of consultations for the nascent 2020 financial tracking exercise, stakeholders explained that early childhood education is funded and implemented by partners even though it is not in the ERP. This is actually consistent with the view that it should be funded by households or the non-state sector, but implies an expectation that everything else within the ERP should be eligible to be funded by government – even if initially the funding is a mix of government, donors, and philanthropy, the aim would be to move to government funding eventually. The only response in the interviews for this research on misaligned priorities was a view from an Education Consortium member that ECW is focusing on mental health and psychosocial support so all its partners are implementing this. However, this activity is in fact included in the costing of the ERP, with training for all teachers in settlement schools costed to be conducted every year. Thus, there is no clear evidence that partners are implementing activities that are not included in the ERP.

The financial burden for households is a gap in meeting the needs for delivering the ERP. Households across Uganda face this burden but it is exacerbated in refugee communities. Examples given include children not transitioning to secondary school because of affordability, and children (and even teachers) being hungry at school so not being able to concentrate, as parents cannot afford to contribute to school feeding programmes.

#### **5.1.4 Financing mechanisms**

**Despite the intention to align and harmonise financing mechanisms, funders use a broad range of channels, and do not disburse through government systems. The establishment of an NGO consortium has been a starting point for efficient management of funds. Partners want to see a further shift to multi-year and flexible financing commitments.**

Funding flows through a variety of mechanisms for implementing the ERP. Government funding is channelled to local governments through fiscal transfers, or via MoES as budget lines called subventions that then get distributed to local governments. Partner funding goes through a mix of channels – some EDPs directly fund technical assistance to national and local government, some directly fund NGOs and UN agencies to implement programmes (as

with private philanthropy), and some funds are managed as a portfolio with a selected fund manager. Specifically, the funds from ECW and ECHO are pooled to the Uganda Education Consortium, managed by the Consortium Management Unit (led by Save the Children), which then distributes funds to NGOs on the basis of proposals.<sup>14</sup>

In the first year of the ERP, a study reviewed the options for a joint financing mechanism to encourage multiparty, aligned, and coordinated ERP financing (Fraser and Minford, 2018). The study concluded that a pooled fund was 'likely to be more advantageous than continuing with existing separate bi-lateral and multilateral education-related donor spending, as long as the pool is sufficiently large' (*Ibid.*, p. iii), but that a 'wallet' of options was likely to be needed given the pros and cons of different mechanisms. To date, there has been success in setting up the Education Consortium, in which there is a fund manager. However, no pooled fund has emerged in which various funders (whether EDPs or private funders) pool their resources into one mechanism. A key reason for this, according to one partner who worked on developing the ERP, is that EDPs want to be able to report on their results separately, which goes against the principles of a pooled fund. This was not specifically raised in interviews with EDPs and will be further explored in subsequent research phases.

Funding from partners relevant to the ERP does not tend to pass through government, often to their dissatisfaction. One reason for the delay in the signing of the ERP was apparently that MoES wanted donors to channel funding through the government, but donors did not want to take on these fiduciary risks. EDPs see the risks around delays due to procurement, or diversions of funding, as risks that are too great to take. As a result, government officials feel they are not in control of ERP spending decisions. The lack of partner funding 'on-budget' (see Box 4) also led to misaligned expectations at district level, with district officials apparently thinking the ERP came with funding for them to manage and be accountable for. As the funding actually goes through partners, districts are reported by national-level stakeholders to remain unclear of their role. These issues will be important to explore in the next phase of research at district level.

There are calls from many ERP stakeholders for the conversation on refugees to shift from humanitarian to development financing: 'We no longer talk about emergencies' (EiE partner). The refugee crisis is not a short-term crisis (even if it currently presents as an emergency), and longer-term planning is needed to support refugees as well as disadvantaged host communities. Funders and implementers alike called for the need for longer-term commitments for funding (and sticking to those commitments). With humanitarian financing, UN agencies and NGOs tend to work in one-year funding cycles, which are inefficient for the longer-term planning needed here – respondents suggested 'multi-year' or 'three-year' commitments. These would need to be flexible in order to allow implementers to respond to changing circumstances (such as population movements or government policy changes). Such longer-term focus would also mean implementers could 'reduce the transaction costs so that [implementers] can focus more on delivering and less on running around chasing funds' (Steering Committee member).

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<sup>14</sup> ECW funds are also given to UNHCR to fund the ERP Secretariat.

## 5.2 The ERP and financing

### 5.2.1 Responsibilities for resource mobilisation

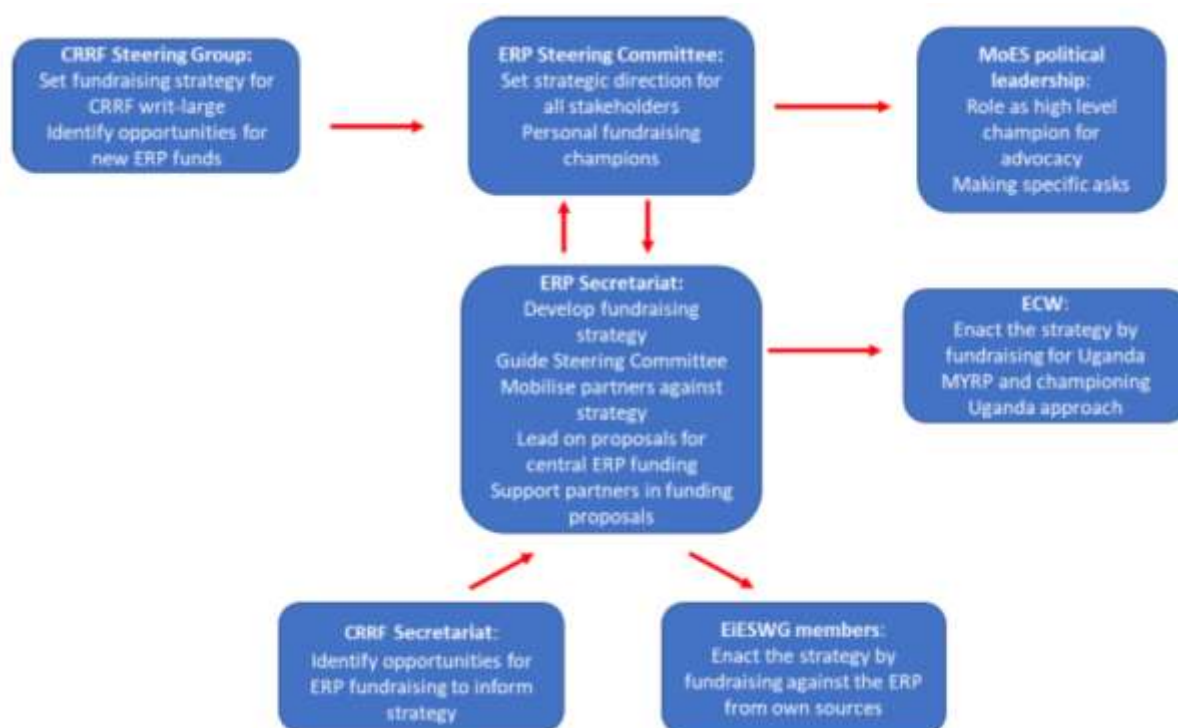
**The ERP Steering Committee is meant to lead efforts to mobilise resources for the ERP, but members are not clear on their own responsibilities and efforts have been slow-moving up to now.**

As noted above, adequate financing of the activities in the Plan is not just an underlying assumption of the ERP, but also an objective of the ERP itself: 'This Plan calls for the international community to provide financing towards this goal and clearly shows the results which can be achieved if the financing becomes available' (MoES, 2018, p. 28). Two of the main roles of the ERP Steering Committee are to ensure transparency and accountability on funding towards the Plan, and to promote and support resource mobilisation (*Ibid.*, p. 40).

A number of Steering Committee members recognise that the ERP is a fundraising plan, but there are differing views on who is responsible for fundraising. Some members see the responsibility for raising the US\$ 389 million as falling on national and district government officials and development partners. However, MoES officials view the Plan as a platform for raising funds from EDPs, not from government. As one explained, 'UNHCR and other partners need to continue to mobilise resources by trying to attract some potential donors' (MoES official). Such a view pushes the responsibility for funding or for fundraising efforts away from government and the Steering Committee. This was confirmed by another respondent: 'This plan is for the Ministry of Education, but it is mostly sponsored by development partners and development partners come and pick out items [to finance]' (MoES official).

Two EDPs identified that the Steering Committee – and therefore the Secretariat – are responsible for fundraising but that they could do more. A draft fundraising strategy was developed by the Secretariat in August 2019, which sets out the responsibilities of partners in fundraising as shown in Figure 7 below (ERP Secretariat, 2019b). The fundraising strategy has three main components: deepen existing partnerships, develop new partnerships, and diversify the donor base. There are also two cross-cutting areas: communication and advocacy; and funding channels.

**Figure 7: Fundraising roles and responsibilities**



Source: ERP Secretariat (2019b), p. 2

Minutes of a fundraising task team meeting show that the strategy was deemed to be very generic and that a list of fundraising activities and events was needed in order to make it operationalisable (ERP Secretariat, 2020a). The first such activity was an event in late June 2020 (which, due to the COVID-19 lockdown, was held as a video conference), following a decision for it made in March 2020.<sup>15</sup> One interviewee explained that this meeting would showcase what has been done and achieved so far under the ERP, as well as what is still needed to meet targets and funding gaps. This approach appears in line with the suggestion of a funder that donors need to see evidence of the achievements of the ERP, including systemic changes, in order to continue providing resources. Given the fundraising gap was identified as early as mid-2019, it is notable that a decision to hold such an event was not taken until March 2020, and reflects the repercussions from delays in setting up the Secretariat, who eventually led this effort. The task team's minutes reflect no discussion about the allocation and clarity of roles and responsibilities for fundraising. As the members of the task team are not necessarily members of the Steering Committee, it is not surprising that there remains some ambiguity about roles among Steering Committee members.

In addition to fundraising, the Plan has ambitions around coordinating any funding: 'efforts will be made to align donor financing where possible in order to promote efficiency and enhance the effectiveness of coordination, oversight and delivery' (MoES, 2018, p. 44). This ambition has not been met; interviewees spoke about the challenges with coordination of activities and financing, and as discussed in 5.1.4 very little alignment has taken place.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews were held before the event took place.

## 5.2.2 Influence on fundraising outcomes

**It is not clear that the ERP has made a substantial contribution to financing education services for refugees and host communities in its first two full years of implementation, apart from ECW funds. There is little evidence of additional funds being raised due to the ERP, or successful alignment and allocation of finances as a result of the ERP.**

The success of the ERP and its Steering Committee in influencing fundraising depends on how financing decisions are made by various funders, including government, EDPs, and the coordinators of private philanthropy.

Government resource allocation, as discussed in section 5.1.3 above, is based on enrolment numbers, but this excludes refugees. The government is looking at reforming the way the local government conditional transfers for education are allocated as part of the World Bank-supported Inter-Governmental Fiscal Transfers Project (UgIFT).<sup>16</sup> The details of the change, and the extent to which the ERP contributed to this reform, are unclear. It is likely that local governments have too little discretionary funds (through the unconditional recurrent and equalisation development grants) to allocate towards supporting the ERP, though this will be explored in Phase 2 of the Maintains research. National government supports in engaging with coordination, and ERP stakeholders want to see national policy changed so as to allow more teachers to be recruited for the coded refugee-hosting schools.<sup>17</sup>

EDPs' financing decisions take place at two levels. First, some decisions about what to allocate to a country or fund are made at the EDP's headquarters. For example, ECW raises funds from bi-lateral donors' headquarters, and when UNICEF puts out a global call for financing it is bi-lateral donors' headquarters that respond. One EDP member pointed out that bi-lateral donors have their own political landscape, and competing demands from around the world, and thus the ERP may not be prioritised by these donors. At the next level, there are decisions about what to allocate resources to. For a pooled international fund such as ECW (or GPE) there needs to be coordinated advocacy from stakeholders within Uganda in order to secure resources. Partners need to be aligned in their objectives (and often showing their own support), and there needs to be a clear guiding document, as was the case with the ERP. However, EDPs may then have their own rules or preferences that restrict their decision making. One bi-lateral is said not to be allowed to fund refugee programmes although their education programmes do take place in districts hosting refugees.

The ECW funds (US \$33.7 million) were accessed contingent on the presence of the ERP, which is a success story of the ERP recognised by a number of respondents. The ECHO funds (Euro €7 million), also channelled through a consortium, were also made available due

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<sup>16</sup> Population including refugees is expected to be part of the revised formula for allocating development grants. This was explained by a consultant for the Overseas Development Institute's Budget Strengthening Initiative. However the change was not discussed by any interview respondents and is not yet widely communicated.

<sup>17</sup> There is also a further question about government giving coded status to more community schools, such that government would then put those teachers on the payroll and give capitation grants to these schools. This is understood to be a substantial issue but was not discussed in interviews.

to the Plan, according to one EiE partner, but were apparently already secured according to another.<sup>18</sup> Partners do not feel confident that the ERP has led to any other additional funding to refugee education that would not have come anyway. One EDP identified the EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF),<sup>19</sup> which provided funding to refugees aligned with the Plan's activities, and two EDPs cited World Bank funding to youth refugees;<sup>20</sup> however, in both cases the respondents felt that this might have happened anyway in the absence of the ERP.<sup>21</sup> EiE members feel there are no increases in funds for refugees.<sup>22</sup> There is even a question of whether some EDPs have reduced funding relevant to the ERP:

'I think we do need to really ask, has the Plan actually resulted in extra resources being mobilised? If not, then why not? What is it that is stopping donors from funding the plan? I would really look at USAID and DFID [*now FCDO*] as two of the biggest international donors. I think it's a really interesting question ... to ask them why, why not? Why haven't they allocated funding?'

(EiE partner)

Some respondents feel that donor funding has actually reduced over time since the Plan went into effect, because it was easier to secure funding at the start of the response when the crisis was making big headlines. Given that the refugee influx started in 2013 and quickly became a protracted crisis continuing until today, there is a feeling among some stakeholders that there is less interest in supporting the ERP now in 2020. While this is not entirely corroborated by financial data, which does demonstrate an increase in funding in 2019, the reported gaps in financing are an indication that it has been difficult to confirm the large sums required to fully implement the ERP.

Additionally, there are concerns that decision making about what gets funding does not always relate to needs on the ground. One NGO partner explained that they might put forward a proposal to their head office for executing ERP-specific activities, but that priorities from their central office can cause the design to change. When NGOs have funding from

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<sup>18</sup> ECHO also provides EUR 800,000 to UNESCO for education in refugee-hosting districts.

<sup>19</sup> The EUTF has five projects aimed at supporting refugees in Uganda (see <https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/horn-africa/uganda>). In particular, the Danish Refugee Council and ENABEL have funding under the Support Programme to the Refugee Settlements and Host Communities in Northern Uganda project, which is then distributed to other implementing partners ([https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/horn-africa/uganda/regional-development-and-protection-programme-rdpp-support-programme\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/region/horn-africa/uganda/regional-development-and-protection-programme-rdpp-support-programme_en)).

<sup>20</sup> The research team was not able to secure an interview with the World Bank to confirm this and it could relate to a number of different projects. In the 2019 finance tracking exercise the World Bank reported one project, known as the Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project, which includes construction of education, health, and WASH infrastructure projects across all 11 districts of Uganda. Since the 2019 tracking exercise, the World Bank's UglIFT has started, which is working to improve the adequacy and equity of funds to local governments for education and health. One EDP specifically referred to the Secondary Education Expansion Project, which has not started yet. It is expected to construct secondary schools, including in the ERP districts, and has a specific component to support refugee and host communities with formal and informal support to accessing secondary education. This project is not yet 'effective', meaning not fully approved and in operation.

<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, neither the World Bank nor EU representatives were available for interview, although both are represented on the Steering Committee.

<sup>22</sup> In comments on an earlier version of this report, the Secretariat noted that funding has been attracted as a result of efforts to promote the ERP, especially at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019. These efforts and successes were either not known about or not considered substantial by research participants.



external donors, they face rigidities from grant conditions that limit flexibility to change activities and respond to needs as they arise. Some stakeholders feel that the projects that receive funding do so because of the strength of their proposals and past experience of the funder and implementer, rather than demonstrating a clear engagement with government or a programme that responds to ERP needs. One Steering Committee member believes this is even a problem with the ECW funds managed by a consortium, which should in theory allow better coordination and alignment to the ERP and with the government. Overall, the ERP does not appear to be financed responsively – and arguably if the ERP were to be financed based on the activities as determined in late 2017, it would already be unresponsive to emerging needs.

Nonetheless, some more positive outlooks exist. One NGO expanded the coverage of its education programme to include refugees, rather than only Ugandans, in response to the ERP. Moreover, NGOs use the Plan to lobby for funds from donors and although the success of this is not yet known, with 80 NGOs working in the EiESWG, it is felt to be a worthwhile strategy:

‘A number of NGOs and UN agencies have used the Plan to raise money. I don’t know the effect of that, but... just the fact that the Plan is there has helped partners, NGOs, UN agencies... to be in a better position to raise funds because there is a Plan that has been approved, developed...by all stakeholders, and then approved by government. This gives a good justification for donors to support it.’

(Steering Committee member)

Thus, the Plan is expected to contribute to more successful fundraising if used well and with effective coordination, although this has not been evident so far.

### 5.3 The role of district governments in ERP financing

**With the ERP designed as a national document, it is not surprising if some district governments are not fully engaged with tracking and managing funds in their locations. The districts’ roles are not clear, their costed district plans are disjointed from the ERP, and they are said to struggle to capture information from partners working in their jurisdictions.**

District governments’ role in the financing of the ERP is not adequately clarified in the Plan. The Plan stresses the importance of coordination between all stakeholders, including local governments, and that each level of government ‘will adhere to the same mandate and scope of work it currently holds’ (MoES, 2018, p. 41). The Plan makes no mention of districts’ role in tracking ERP financing, or fundraising, and even acknowledges that the general coordination role is often passed down to education implementing partners in the settlements. In addition to this vague role for districts, the ERP costing was based on estimates of all refugee and host community children in Uganda (with limitations as mentioned in section 5.1.1), rather than being disaggregated by district. The Plan does anticipate that local government development plans will incorporate elements of the ERP, and that further situational analysis will be needed for each district in district level planning (ibid p. 55).

There is now a movement towards focusing on the district level for better ownership, improved coordination, and system strengthening. This shift is not without challenges, however. In late 2019, an exercise for creating district-level ERPs was initiated. The costing for district ERPs followed the following process: districts were allocated a cost ceiling, with the total US\$ 389 million cost being distributed between the districts, based on their proportion of total refugees. This is a misleading method since the costs of the ERP are a cost estimate, not a budget ceiling, and so allocating this between districts does not indicate anything about the availability of funds. Furthermore, specified activities may not be needed proportionately (to take a hypothetical example, one district may have a much more severe infrastructure shortage than another, and infrastructure is expensive), while the underlying data is already out of date for basing estimations on due to the changes in refugee numbers. District task teams were requested to prioritise their needs and activities within their cost ceiling. This means that activities considered priority A (100% coverage in settlement schools) in the national ERP (such as classroom construction) might be considered only priority C (20% coverage in settlement schools) in a district, because other needs are deemed to be greater and the 'cost ceiling' creates a false ceiling. Ultimately, this means that, if all the districts' ERPs' activities were added together, it would not total to the same number of activities in the national ERP.<sup>23</sup> As a result, whilst district ERPs may reflect local priorities and sum to a total of US\$ 389 million, there is a disconnect between attempts to understand and track financing for the overall ERP versus the district ERPs.

It is, however, valuable that district governments should know the priorities for delivering education services to refugees and host communities in their district, which this exercise helped them to identify. As such, Secretariat staff are hopeful this will allow districts to focus on these needs and better coordinate activities with local partners. The next critical step would be to use the district ERPs and increased district engagement for resource mobilisation. Ideally, district plans would identify the different finance sources already available, helping avoid duplication and identify gaps. But this is not included in the plans and it is not clear that districts manage this level of coordination.

Initial indications suggest that district governments do not have a grasp of the financing situation in their district. Respondents consulted for the financial tracking exercise (from the OPM as well as the ERP Steering Committee) commented that districts struggle to know what is going on in their district in terms of presence of partners, their activities, and their funding. These responses were given in general terms, rather than highlighting specific districts. It is not clear yet whether this is related to districts' lack of capacity to manage this, districts' lack of motivation and will, an unclear mandate, or the reluctance of partners to share grant information and engage with the local government.

Such issues will be a key point of enquiry at district level in the next phase of the Maintains research. Adequate coordination and local leadership are likely to be necessary

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<sup>23</sup> An alternative method would have been to use the same costing model from the national ERP, but with district-specific data, and theoretically the same prioritisation and assumptions as in the national ERP, across 12 district ERPs, which would lead to the same total number of activities and costs. However, this would remove the ownership and local prioritisation by districts that was possible under the actual method used for district ERPs.

preconditions to districts being able to track funding received and the funding gap, and then mobilise resources to fill the gaps.

## 5.4 Implications for ERP2

**Based on the lessons from the current ERP, the ERP2 should be developed from the district level up, fully integrating refugee numbers into the main district education planning and budget for refugee-hosting districts.**

There are calls for the ERP2 to be designed with the whole population of each refugee-hosting district in focus, rather than a plan focused only on refugees and host communities. There have been a number of lessons about the financing of the ERP in this chapter, but one theme emerged with relation to planning ERP2. This viewpoint follows from the challenges of tracking the ERP's financing, due to the definitions of 'what counts' in funding allocations, particularly for targeted beneficiaries. Many arguments were made by partners in support of this, including the following: i) if refugees are to be really integrated into planning then standard district-level planning, budgeting, and monitoring systems (not an alternative system of ERP planning) need to be inclusive of all children; ii) activities such as capacity building for district officers would support the whole school population of the district; and iii) setting up a tracking system for financing (or indeed activities and outcomes) at sub-county level would create a parallel system, whereas the district should be considering refugees across all its activities. Following the findings in Section 5.3, it would also make sense for planning, costing, and budgeting to happen at the district level as part of the national ERP2.

This shift would have major implications. For example, the total number of target beneficiaries would be very large, as it would include all children in each refugee-hosting district; as a result, the total costs would be very large to provide a quality standard of education service to all children under the ERP's design.<sup>24</sup> However, the ERP2 does not need to be seen as a standalone and mutually exclusive plan. It is really a sub-section of the ESSP, and simply represents a more detailed operational plan for ensuring refugees and host communities are adequately supported by the national education system. Whilst a standalone plan was beneficial in the early stages of the response, going forward it may be that integrating refugee education into the national system of education planning (though still with specific objectives and targets for refugees) would allow for better coordination, planning, and resource mobilisation.

## 5.5 Conclusions

**Finding 1: The financing needs of the ERP are not perceived to have been met, even against an already modest view of the needs.**

The ERP costing of US\$ 389 million already reduced the target group to only a portion of host community children, and did not aim to achieve full enrolment rates for refugees or host

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<sup>24</sup> This was the reason behind the decision to limit the geographical coverage of the first ERP to refugee hosting sub-counties rather than including all sub-counties and Ugandan nationals in the district.

communities under the Plan. Furthermore, stakeholders believe that the refugee influx has actually been greater than that projected in the ERP costing model, though no analysis has been seen to confirm the extent of this. This US\$ 389 million, though identified against priority activities and considered a realistic expectation, has not been secured to date, two years since the Plan's start date. Furthermore, the actual accurate status of financing is not known due to difficulties in defining and tracking spending on the ERP. There are concerns around gaps in the number of classrooms and teachers, as well as inequitable distribution of resources between settlement sites; however, without accurate data it is not possible to confirm these issues. Short-term technical assistance on finance tracking, currently underway and supported by Maintains, will help uncover the actual situation and help identify where the gaps are.

**Finding 2: Government funding towards the ERP will continue to be inadequate, in partners' eyes, until refugees are fully included in the government's mainstream planning and budgeting for the education sector.**

Aligning the planning and budgeting of education service delivery for refugees within existing systems, as well as recognising and coding settlement schools, would improve access to government funds. These funds would go directly to schools as capitation grants, allow for the hiring of additional teachers under the government wage bill and improve access to resources for operational expenses at the district level, including for coordination and monitoring. This, however, would come at a notable cost to government and needs further analysis and discussion.

**Finding 3: The presence of the ERP was an enabling factor for securing ECW, and possibly ECHO, funds, which together account for approximately US \$41.6 million – 11% of the ERP's costs. However, other than that the Plan is seen as having had little impact on improving total funding for ERP activities.**

Whilst there are a large number of implementing partners who have been successful in securing funds, the presence of the ERP itself is not viewed as having been an enabling factor in securing additional funds to refugee and host communities than would have come in the absence of the ERP. It is also unclear the extent to which the ERP has contributed to more aligned and efficient financing, with no funders channelling through a pooled fund or through the government as the Plan had intended; resultantly, government officials are left feeling side-lined from spending decisions. However, the ERP Secretariat as a coordination mechanism is playing a key role with respect to dialogue on spending decisions and staff are confident that clearer results in this area will be seen in the very near future.

**Finding 4: Stakeholders want to see an increase in fundraising efforts and a shift to multi-year financing commitments from donors to secure required resources and allow flexible responses to emerging needs.**

It is important to recognise that the refugee influx in Uganda is a protracted crisis rather than a short-term emergency and so there must be a shift from humanitarian to development perspectives, with longer-term financing commitments. This would be in line with global efforts to strengthen the humanitarian–development nexus. However, more flexibility within funding sources (to change priorities) signals the challenge with setting out costed activities, as the ERP does. Emerging needs are likely to change from the original set of activities, and

there must be room to allow these changes and still ensure the success of the Plan, which should focus on outcomes rather than pre-set input targets.

**Finding 5: District-level coordination and ownership must improve for financing to be better coordinated, and mobilised, at the local level.**

There needs to be clarity among all stakeholders on district local government roles and responsibilities for coordination of grants implemented in their location, as well as responsibilities for resource mobilisation. This would help secure more adequate and efficient financing, focusing on needs identified by people on the ground, and should be a priority when developing the ERP2.

## 6 Information

High-quality M&E is central to the implementation of the ERP, with the goal of supporting an ongoing process for prioritising activities under the policy to deliver education services to refugees and host communities, and regularly monitoring and capturing results from these activities as they are executed by the government and development partners (MoES, 2018). As specified under the Plan, establishing a robust M&E system for the ERP requires strengthening and supporting organisational capacity at the national, district, and sub-district levels to capture, analyse, review, and apply evidence to inform and improve the ERP's interventions.

An effective M&E system necessitates routine reporting and regular reviews to facilitate reflection and learning on the linkages between inputs, outputs, and outcomes in order to improve programming through frequent feedback loops. The ERP envisioned that this would happen by integrating the ERP's M&E system into the EMIS and reporting results in the annual Education and Sports Sector Review. The Plan also specified that data collection and reporting processes would be digitised to facilitate the timely gathering and transmission of data throughout the system from schools to districts to the Ministry.

Overall, the Plan advocates for a rigorous system of M&E so that data on the implementation of activities and the indicators linked to outcomes are tracked, reviewed, and acted upon in a timely manner, particularly at the district level.

This chapter focuses on the issue of capturing and managing information on the interventions and activities implemented under the ERP. The research questions on information are as follows:

- How is information collected, managed, shared, and utilised?
- How are findings used to improve the ERP?
- How adequate and responsive are the information systems and feedback loops under the ERP?
- What areas need improvement?

The sources of information for this chapter were KIIs and documents shared by the ERP Secretariat and EiESWG (including the ERP M&E guide and logical framework, M&E framework (ERP Secretariat 2019c, 2020b) as well as databases and tools).

The first section of this chapter addresses the steps taken to establish an M&E system under the ERP, what gaps remain, and why. The second section explains: 1) how effective the ERP's information collection and management mechanisms have been in terms of monitoring implementation of the ERP and applying results to improve the intervention; and 2) the changes that must be affected to improve the ERP's information collection and management mechanisms in the coming phase. The final section outlines conclusions drawn from the research regarding information management under the ERP to date and its effect overall on the ERP's implementation.

## 6.1 Establishing the ERP's information systems

**With one year to go in the ERP's timeframe, the information system is still being established to support M&E of the Plan and link data to existing national government M&E systems.**

An information management task team was established in August 2019, under the Steering Committee, to oversee the process of developing the M&E system for the ERP. It held its first meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2019. However, according to a Steering Committee member knowledgeable of the process, this work is 'still ongoing because the information system is not yet fully in place' and 'there's still a lot of work' required to complete it.

Respondents acknowledged that the task of establishing an information system for a policy like the ERP is complex, as it must be designed to capture information from a range of stakeholders across many locations and from a variety of projects with divergent indicators and monitoring systems. Moreover, the ERP's system must be developed through a consultative process to ensure buy-in from district and national government officials, and to confirm that it aligns with existing MoES structures and reporting systems.

Many informants stated that the responsibility for developing and executing the ERP's M&E system sits with the Secretariat. According to the ERP itself, the Secretariat is responsible for 'conducting periodic monitoring of implementation of the ERP, including commissioning assessments, reviews and evaluations related to the Plan and its implementation' (MoES, 2018, p. 40). The Plan also specifies that 'dedicated M&E capacity situated inside the MoES will provide the expertise to realise this' and that, under MoES guidance, 'an M&E Framework for the Plan will be developed and approved' (MoES, 2018, p.45).

However, the ERP Secretariat was only established in mid-2019, although implementation of the policy started in June 2018. Respondents acknowledged that this led to delays in establishing the ERP's M&E system, which has been under development since the Secretariat was created and staffed. Despite delays related to the formation of the Secretariat, progress to date on the ERP's M&E system is clearly attributed to their investment in executing the often complex processes involved in developing a system that not only meets the needs of the Plan but also aligns to the requirements of MoES's existing national systems. According to respondents, the Secretariat could not fast-track their work as desired as they were required to align the ERP's information system with the government's national monitoring system, and ensure that it accommodated a range of needs across many civil society stakeholders. As one respondent from the EiESWG stated:

'The information management system is the backbone [of the ERP and required]... a back and forth [discussion] between different agencies. We [had to align with] the government monitoring system... and the needs of NGOs.'

(EiESWG member)

While this investment of time and energy on behalf of the Secretariat was necessary to consult relevant stakeholders and ensure buy-in to the government's M&E system, it clearly slowed the development of the ERP's information framework overall. Despite these delays, the Secretariat's work to date has supported a more systematic collection, management,

and sharing of data through the revision of the ERP's reporting tools and the logical framework, as well as the development of a harmonised database and M&E Guide.

### **6.1.1 Creating tools and mechanisms**

The sub-sections below focus on the tools and mechanisms for information management under the ERP that were available at the time of this research. The analysis focuses on the type of tools and documents in place, the extent to which they have been used, and the successes and challenges to date in their application.

#### **Logical framework**

**The ERP Secretariat has successfully revised the ERP's logical framework, in line with recommendations within the Plan, and shared it with stakeholders.**

As the team leading the M&E function of the ERP, the Secretariat's initial task was reviewing the original logical framework developed within the Plan. This involved identifying information gaps and revising indicators to align them with the national education monitoring system. The task was conducted by the Secretariat with technical support from the Steering Committee's information management task team and in consultation with the EiESWG. The revised logical framework was approved in December 2019 by the Steering Committee.

#### **Activity information data tool**

**The Secretariat revised the activity information data tool, previously developed by UNHCR, to align it with the ERP's outcomes and indicators and promote the regular reporting and sharing of data from partners.**

The revision of the activity information tool is one of the major achievements regarding information management under the ERP to date, enabling the regular reporting and sharing of comprehensive data about activities related to the policy against a unified framework. Partners report on their outputs every quarter, submitting the information to UNHCR, which provides it to the ERP Secretariat. The tool does not capture information on financial expenditures; instead, implementing partners report that information separately to their donors, UNHCR, or ECW, depending on the funders they are directly accountable to, rather than MoES or the Secretariat. This leads to obvious gaps in financial expenditure tracking, which have been identified as a challenge to the effective implementation of the ERP and discussed in the previous chapter.

Through the support and guidance provided by the Secretariat, data on the activity information tool is now submitted electronically. A respondent explained that this change has been the result of a long, but largely successful, process:

'The online version is very convenient because partners report directly on it, and we have access to everyone's information. But we have a lot of local partners who don't have internet, capacity, human resources, or funding to move to the online version. That's [slowed] intake for [obvious] reasons.'

(EiESWG member)



While the development and digitisation of this tool is clearly positive and aligned with the process specified in the ERP for making data readily accessible and actionable, it has left out local partners and district officials who have extremely limited internet access and capacities to use electronic systems. It is also, according to respondents, still undergoing needed revisions. This likely means that there are gaps in the data made available in the tool and these need to be addressed across the range of partners using it. Respondents reported some ongoing efforts for addressing these gaps, which are described later in this chapter, with regard to capacity building at the district level.<sup>25</sup>

Interviewees also positively indicated that the Secretariat has responded to requests to improve the tool to cater for reporting on both completed and planned activities. This data is provided to the EiESWG, which uses it to improve implementation across partners to avoid duplication and spread resources to benefit more children.

With so many partners implementing activities across numerous locations, the Secretariat recognises the need to verify the data submitted before it is disseminated at the national level. Coordinators at the settlement level are responsible for data verification; they conduct spot-checks and write reports to the EiESWG and Steering Committee. However, the cost of maintaining these positions is unsustainable over the long term, which will ultimately lead to gaps in this process.

At the national level, the Secretariat has developed suggested mechanisms, which have yet to be executed, for data quality assurance: 1) dispatch mission teams on a periodic basis to settlements to verify data; and 2) randomly select partners, on a termly basis, and conduct a random audit of their reported data. While plans have been floated for developing a data verification system at the district level, they have not yet been taken up. Consequently, districts seem to largely be left out of the data collection and reporting process.

Overall, while engagement of local partners in data collection efforts can be improved, the data captured under the activity information tool has supported decisions at quarterly coordination meetings in refugee settlements and nationally regarding project implementation and managing partner inputs. This has helped to spread resources and reduce duplication of effort.

## **M&E guide**

**An M&E guide has been developed for partners implementing projects that align with the ERP in order to guide reporting. It will be rolled out following a user training exercise after the lockdown.**

Working with national- and district-level stakeholders, the Secretariat has led the development of an ERP M&E Guide to help direct partners on data collection and reporting protocols and processes against the ERP logical framework. As one Secretariat member

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<sup>25</sup> In addition, a System Strengthening Strategy was finalised after this research was carried out. The strategy includes a number of activities to build districts' capacity.

stated, the guide ensures that ‘everyone has the same understanding in terms of rules and responsibilities, and especially the definition of indicators.’

The Secretariat particularly aims to use the document to ensure that district local governments hosting refugees are fully engaged in all M&E activities, enhancing their capacities to monitor and guide the delivery of quality education to refugees and host communities. The M&E guide is aligned with the ERP’s ToC and logic model, and has been developed to support systematic tracking and analysis of implementation progress and performance related to ERP activities. It is also intended to support regular evaluation of the ERP through the collection and reporting of data from settlements and districts to the Secretariat for compilation, analysis, and dissemination at the national level.

To ensure the ERP’s information management system is aligned with existing policy structures in the broader education system, the Secretariat developed the M&E guide through a series of discussions with local partners, the information management task team, EiESWG, Steering Committee members, and the OPM. The guide also went through various levels of approval, receiving a final sign-off from MoES in March 2020. Unfortunately, this approval coincided with the national lockdown due to COVID-19, which delayed rollout of the Guide. The new plan is to disseminate the tool in September 2020, according to Secretariat staff member.

## Database

**A harmonised database for tracking the ERP’s outputs, indicators, and outcomes has been created. It is still at the pilot stage and will be rolled out following user training after the lockdown.<sup>26</sup>**

As the central body responsible for the collection, management, and dissemination of information on the ERP, the Secretariat has created a database that is intended to ease the capturing, analysis, reporting, and sharing of information across partners using the activity information tool. The development of this critical information tool is a direct result of the active role the Secretariat in developing critical structures to strengthen data management and consolidation. Once it is rolled out, the Secretariat, Steering Committee, and EiESWG agree that it will support more regular and timely reporting of information on the ERP at all levels, from settlements to MoES. As one member stated:

‘The Secretariat is becoming a huge help in terms of M&E. They have a whole team whose job it is to track progress towards the ERP. That’s been a huge help in terms of giving us the tools that we need [to collect and report information]. We are not M&E, data collection, or analysis specialists. It’s been really valuable to have their input and expertise on tools that can help us coordinate our efforts.’

(EiESWG member)

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<sup>26</sup> The M&E tools rollout plan was finalised after this research was conducted.

Rollout of the database was planned for May, but this too has been delayed due to the COVID-19 lockdown. However, a pilot of the database was carried out in February and early March 2020 before school closures, as described by one respondent:

‘We piloted during first term [2020] to assess the data collection and reporting process to see where the gaps are. We plan to do training with key stakeholders, including the district, to ensure these gaps are filled. We are working closely with districts to ensure that a system is in place for capturing information for both refugees and host communities.’

(Secretariat member)

Delayed user training and rollout of the database means that information in many ways remains scattered, housed with the different partners who collected it, as one respondent explained:

‘We currently get data from different partners across different districts. It is not in one centralised location. [Currently, different] organisations have their own information about what they have done and current gaps [in services] in districts where they are working.’

(EiESWG member)

This situation has strained effective information management and reporting mechanisms under the ERP, which have been further complicated by lockdowns due to COVID-19. As a result, some stakeholders are dissatisfied with the current progress regarding coordinated data management and have expressed the need for improvement, as well as the importance of the rollout happening as soon as possible.

According to a respondent at the Secretariat, the harmonised database is also designed to support districts to use information ‘for evidence-based decisions and discussions.’ To date, districts are not actively engaged in collecting and reporting information due to several policy-related factors and an overall lack of capacity. As a result, UNHCR and civil society partners remain largely in control of data, with districts remaining recipients of this information. Moreover, according to a respondent on the Steering Committee, this data is shared only periodically and in a different format to that in the national monitoring system under EMIS, which leads to additional challenges with onward reporting and use.

The current practice for managing data within a system external to the district education office is contrary to the desired integration of information management described in the ERP, ‘making it difficult for the district education office to effectively manage and coordinate refugee related information’ according to the Yumbe District ERP. Interviewees indicated that the harmonised database will support districts to reclaim administrative authority over education data by ensuring that civil society partners working in their area coordinate and engage with the district on information-sharing and use. One respondent explained the purpose of the database in building the capacity of districts:

‘Traditionally, refugee response [activities have not been managed by] districts. Very few partners, if any, actually bothered to share data with district education departments. Instead, they saw it as something that was done by UNHCR and its

partners. To date, most data is still sitting with UNHCR, its partners, and at the settlements. This process will develop the capacity of districts to work with data and help them become responsible for all of the education institutions within their jurisdiction.’

(Secretariat member)

The final objective of the capacity-building plan is to enable district education offices to collect comprehensive information about both refugees and host communities, which will help them effectively work with their partners and to plan responsive education programmes for all of the children in their district. A respondent at the Secretariat indicated that the targeted capacity development of the districts to feed into the ERP’s database will eventually help them to contribute to the EMIS and support evidence-based planning decisions, empowering them to collect and aggregate data directly.

Lack of technical competence for data collection and reporting at district level has caused concern nationally with partners, with UNICEF initiating a plan for hiring data managers to support districts and improve their capacity. The ERP database is considered instrumental in this plan to strengthen the link between districts and the wider system under the policy.

Although the plan for hiring data managers caters for only five people to support two to three districts each, it is considered by stakeholders as a useful response that will help close information gaps by overseeing the collection, analysis, and management of data, as currently there is no provision in the district’s human resource structure for such a function.

## Evaluation Surveys

**Plans for a baseline survey have been delayed due to COVID-19, such that the survey will be conducted towards the end of the current ERP.**

The M&E Guide sets out plans for an evaluation, which would require a baseline survey ‘prior to the interventions’ and an impact survey ‘conducted at the end of the Plan to evaluate results against the overall goal’ (ERP Secretariat, 2020b, p.22). The baseline survey was planned to be conducted in 13 districts in February 2020, to provide benchmark information against performance indicators from the logical framework at output, outcome and impact level; including literacy and numeracy levels in P3 and P6 (ERP Secretariat, 2020b). The survey would also support the development of outcome indicator targets. However, whilst a contractor had already been procured to conduct the survey (delayed to April 2020), the closure of schools in March 2020 and the subsequent lockdown on many activities due to COVID-19 meant the survey had to be further postponed. The survey was re-planned for August 2020.<sup>27</sup> The delays mean that the survey will not happen until the third and final year of the ERP, raising into question its use as a baseline.

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<sup>27</sup> At the time of final revisions of this report (September 2020), the continued lockdown has caused an extended delay. The survey will not happen until schools are reopened, the date for which is still unknown.

## EMIS

**Data on refugees and the education services provided to them has, to date, not been integrated into the national EMIS, limiting coordination and planning at the national level for the response.**

The ERP specifies integration of the ERP's M&E system into the EMIS and the annual Education and Sports Sector Review as a requirement for aligning the response with the country's overall education system. As the official source of data for MoES, the EMIS is an important component of effective information management for the ERP. The gap in data on refugees was highlighted by numerous respondents as a challenge to effective coordination and implementation of the Plan, although many hoped that with the ongoing revision to the ERP refugee data will be included.

Although revision of the EMIS is the responsibility of the government, and was recommended in a review of the system conducted in 2017, the exercise is yet to be completed. As a result, many stakeholders resort to using information collected outside of the education sector by the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), as explained by one respondent:

'The national census has projections of each category of the school-going age population. At the district, we have data on enrolment for host community children. Using this information, we make projections. It is likely not accurate, because UBOS's projection is based on population statistics from 2014.'

(Secretariat member)

Given that the UBOS statistics are so out of date, they cannot accurately support planning for the education response for refugees. The pending revision of the EMIS is therefore critical to providing accurate figures, as well as to ensuring that refugee data is integrated into the national information system. Although the revision of the EMIS has started, with support from FCDO and GPE (through the World Bank as grant agent), work has slowed down due to COVID-19. Interview respondents did not know when the exercise would be completed, and it remains unknown when a revised EMIS will be operational. However, stakeholders expect that the revision will cater for information on refugees, given that numerous discussions have occurred to date between the EMIS team, which includes the UNESCO official who prepared the EMIS evaluation in 2019, EDPs<sup>28</sup> and the ERP's coordinating bodies. These discussions were informed in part by a master list of schools in the country, including refugee schools.

## 6.2 System effectiveness

**The ERP's information system is still being established, so its effectiveness in measuring change cannot yet be determined. However, the development and revision**

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<sup>28</sup> The World Bank, and the FCDO's Strengthening Education Systems for Improved Learning (SESIL) technical assistance programme staff, also supported these discussions.

**of frameworks, guidelines, and tools has been effective in preparing stakeholders to collect data tied to the Plan and to lay the groundwork for linkages with the national system.**

Interview data indicates that, in spite of the information system being work in progress, there are instances of effectiveness based on M&E activities implemented to date. The Secretariat has provided technical support to the Steering Committee in terms of positioning the ERP's M&E system to link with the national monitoring system, although this process is not complete. Tools and mechanisms have been created to improve the collection and management of information under the ERP. The M&E Guide and database were rolled out in the first school term of 2020, but the associated capacity building activities have been delayed by COVID-19. Data collection and sharing among partners has improved with the use of the activity information tool, but more improvements to the tool still need to be made. This section further explores the effectiveness of the ERP's information system through the lens of adequate and timely data.

### **6.2.1 Adequacy of information**

**While output-level data is more readily available at a national level regarding access to education services, data on the quality of those services, as well as on teaching and learning outcomes, is sparse.**

For a sub-section of policymakers responsible for identifying needed inputs to the system, and discussing them with partners to direct their support, the information generated to date under the ERP is generally adequate. This stakeholder group requires information on gaps in service provision related to inputs like classrooms, teaching and learning materials, enrolment, and teacher placements. The activity information tool provides details of these actual and expected outputs, allowing stakeholders to identify and agree on plans to fill the gaps. A respondent described the situation:

'For the sake of the government, we can flag data to help us bridge gaps. For example, we can say that out of the 100 classrooms which were supposed to be built over a two-year period we only built 40, so there is a gap of 60 in these locations. Then we can decide that partner A will take on five, partner B can take on 10, etc. so that there is no duplication. That gap analysis provided by the data helps.'

(EiESWG member)

A different category of stakeholders, however, reported that the information collected under the ERP is inadequate, largely due to the lack of data on the quality of education services (e.g. the knowledge and skill level of teachers). One Secretariat staff member explained that there is limited 'information on the adequacy of teachers, their training and preparation for teaching, or their performance'.<sup>29</sup> This gap affects planning decisions regarding teacher

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<sup>29</sup> The Secretariat have explained that the baseline survey will assess these areas. The baseline was due to take place in mid-2020, which would already be a very delayed baseline given the ERP started in January 2018, and this reflects the late establishment of the Secretariat. It has been further delayed due to COVID-19.

professional development and placement, which can hinder the delivery of effective instruction. National stakeholders in the EiESWG and Steering Committee also pointed out the inadequacy of information at the district level regarding children in host communities, which in part is driven by delays in linking the ERP's information system to the districts. This causes challenges in planning for education services for host communities in terms of financing and inputs, as enrolment numbers are not available, nor is the absolute population of the sub-counties that are hosting refugees within a district. Documentation and recording of district-level meetings where information is discussed that is critical to delivering adequate services to host communities is also fragmented, according to respondents, leading to inconsistent provision of data that could help organisations and the national government plan better.

Overall, while access to information on service delivery to refugee children attending settlement schools is more forthcoming, lack of district data on host communities makes the review of implementation progress and the planning of future programmes under the ERP difficult. It will also likely delay the process of linking the ERP to the national system, since data may not be readily available to feed into the EMIS.

Respondents also indicated that the information provided to the ECW consortium is also often inadequate for their needs, making it difficult to mobilise funding, write grants, and report on implementation progress to donors. The ECW grant requires significant reporting of key information that, if not provided, can have implications for funding availability. Respondents explained that required data is not always submitted at the national level where the funds are managed, leading to lack of information to inform decisions and a lack of data to monitor progress. This information gap will delay critical activities, as well as jeopardise the receipt of additional funds.

## 6.2.2 Timeliness of information

**Information is collected and shared from the settlement level to the national level in a timely fashion, with stakeholders working together to ensure the flow of data across the system. However, information is sometimes provided piecemeal rather than as an entire dataset, which can lead to delays in reporting and dissemination of results and updates on the ERP's progress.**

Overall, information is collected on time within the existing system, with partners working to support multiple termly data collection processes for their organisations, the Secretariat, and MoES at both the settlement and national level. These numerous data demands help drive prompt data reporting and sharing, with information flowing from partners to UNHCR and the Secretariat. Partners report data regularly to UNHCR, even outside of termly reporting requirements, immediately after review meetings at the settlements. This helps to ensure that pertinent information is relayed quickly to inform decisions at a national level and to ensure data is disseminated rapidly to stakeholders.

While the timely availability of information is a success under the ERP, it is important to reflect on the packaging of data for onward sharing, as respondents indicated that it can be difficult to find necessary data all in one place. This is particularly significant when the data is required to inform discussions on funding. Some respondents suggested that structuring the

information on a webpage or publication regarding ERP progress would be a useful step to resolve this challenge.

### 6.2.3 EMIS gaps

**With the pending revision of EMIS, there may be success in the ERP's intention to integrate refugee data into the EMIS. However this has not been achieved yet.**

As discussed above, the government's revision of EMIS has been slow and has been further delayed by COVID-19. Until this revision is carried out, the existing EMIS is inadequate at capturing the situation accurately with regards to refugee education. In the opinion of one member of the Secretariat, if the national system does not reflect, for example, the population size, gender, and ages of refugee children and children in host sub-counties accessing services, this means that determining the exact quantity and type of instructional inputs they require is virtually impossible. Many respondents observed that this data gap is not new, as the government has lacked comprehensive school data for years. The presence of multiple implementing partners, different donors, and the complexity of the data collection and analysis process has rendered the EMIS nearly completely useless, according to one respondent:

'The Government of Uganda does not have a comprehensive list of schools in the country at present, nor do they know the number of teachers or who they are hired by. For example, UNHCR is paying some teachers, partners are paying some teachers, and parent-teacher associations are paying some teachers. That's a lot of different data to collect, and the EMIS has to be completely redone in order to capture it.'

(EiESWG member)

In the view of one member of the Steering Committee, the slow process of revising the EMIS could create challenges in holding stakeholders accountable. With critical data on refugees not integrated into national systems, it is difficult to ensure that all stakeholders report full and meaningful data. Besides, the delays mean that with the national-level data on schools sitting in several different places, it will remain difficult for stakeholders to agree on what has been achieved and what remains to be done. For instance, while some stakeholders were confident that there is no comprehensive school list, a few firmly stated that this had been compiled in 2019. This and enrolment details will be issues to pursue further in the next research phase.

### 6.2.4 Mismatched technical capacities

**Partners are well equipped to collect and report data from settlements, but there are some fears that the districts' low capacity for information management hinders the collection and reporting of data from host communities.**

ERP partners are responsible for collecting data in the settlements, while their district counterparts are charged with the responsibility of data collection in host communities. However, according to one EiESWG member, while partners are very efficient at collecting data every term, which they 'organise very well and share with colleagues at the



coordination meetings', the district teams do not always deliver data and many do not communicate their calendar of meetings to partners. This may be linked to the reality of an increased number of schools and learners, in relation to the increased number of implementing partners, which does not match the static numbers of district education staff.

Consequently, there is usually little to no information available on host community schools, while data on settlement schools is delivered to UNHCR education focal persons and subsequently to the Secretariat.

Significant technical limitations in districts' systems, including the use of paper tools for collecting and reporting data, stand in sharp contrast to partners' use of technology for capturing and reporting information. Lauding the regular coordination meetings at the district and settlement levels as good practice for information management and sharing, a member of the Steering Committee observed that district teams are not empowered to share the data they may have because 'they don't have the right computers [to capture data on], or the right people to analyse it for them'. This gap is critical and is a direct threat to the healthy functioning of the ERP's information management system.

The challenge districts face in closing their data gaps is significant. Most districts largely depend on data from an annual school census to capture information on their schools, teachers, and learners; this is a laborious, paper-based exercise that takes months to complete and the last one was conducted in 2016. Without an annual school census, districts are reported not to have 'clear education data', which a member of the ERP Secretariat identified as 'one of the biggest challenges'.

Further, many partners do not regularly share their data with the districts where they work, and when they do so as a courtesy districts can be slow to take ownership of it and act on the information provided. Many respondents recognised the inherent challenge in breaking this cycle, although they largely focused on the overall lack of capacity among local government for leading data collection and management processes under the ERP. Some informants, however, stressed the potential of the districts to perform if they are given the right tools, training, and support to do so. Empowering them to mandate that partners working in the district avail relevant information on their projects and inputs is another significant factor in improving information management processes at local levels; this also must be addressed as a priority. It is important to follow this up in subsequent research phases, especially after the hiring of the district data managers tasked with strengthening districts' capacity to collect and manage data.

## 6.3 System improvements

Consistently during interviews, stakeholders expressed the need for improvement regarding information management under the ERP in three areas: continuous training on data collection tools, fast-tracking revisions to the EMIS, and holding partners accountable to the districts where they operate.

### 6.3.1 Continuous training

**Continuous training for partners and districts should be provided to ensure they master the use of data collection and reporting tools and guidelines.**

This chapter has noted the work done by the Secretariat to improve a unified data collection tool for reporting on ERP activities, which can be used to collect data from schools in both settlements and host communities. For that tool to be utilised successfully, continuous training must be provided for partners and district personnel in completing the tool, as well as following the M&E guidelines for reporting on ERP indicators, targets, and outcomes. Ensuring that partners and districts can submit data using the harmonised database is another critical factor in improving information management under the ERP, which will require ongoing inputs and support from the Secretariat and EiESWG members. Following the initial rollout of these systems and tools, continuous training and support must be provided to ensure that partners and government officials master their use and apply them routinely in data collection, management, and reporting under the ERP.

### **6.3.2 EMIS revisions**

**The Steering Committee must take the lead and lobby the government to fast-track revision of the EMIS to support integration of the ERP's information systems with the national M&E framework, especially given that this is the final year of the ERP.**

Stakeholders recommended that a 'total overhaul' of the EMIS system be undertaken, and that data on refugee children as well as children in host communities be integrated into the new system. This involves adding special categories and indicators to the EMIS to capture relevant information on refugee children in the Ugandan education system, disaggregated by country of origin, refugee status, languages of instruction, gender, disability status, etc.

The need for this change is so great that one member of the Steering Committee suggested that MoES departments be empowered to use their mandates to specifically collect and disseminate data on refugees. While these departments can and should engage in evidence-based discussions and decisions on specialised inputs, such as teacher training and development, special educational needs and others, none of the departments would be able to make data inputs into the EMIS without a revised design that includes data on refugee children.

The Steering Committee, with its representation of government, donor, and civil society stakeholders, must go beyond participating in the general discussions around changes to EMIS and instead actively lobby MoES management to fast-track revisions and ensure the new system includes data on refugees for onward planning.

### **6.3.3 Accountability**

**Partners must be held accountable to the districts where they operate, and work alongside them to generate, share, and utilise data for evidence-based decision making that supports improved education service delivery for refugee and host community children.**

It is critical that development partners and local governments work closely together to plan, execute, monitor, and evaluate education programming. Presently, partners and district education authorities often do not routinely communicate with one another, which causes challenges in the implementation of a policy like the ERP. Partners must recognise the role of the district in education service delivery and engage with them in the collection, analysis,

and reporting of data. According to some respondents, this relationship is about ethics, and particularly about making partners and donors accountable to the districts where they implement programming. As one respondent stated:

‘When it comes to data, all the information and work produced by every stakeholder is supposed to be linked up. At the district level, there’s a lot of reluctance from partners. I package my information, send it to my head office in Kampala, and move on, not bothered about the implication of that work to the district education department or to other partners. So, until the head offices of all the agencies that are in the refugee response realise that there is a need to engage at the district level, the same way that engagement seems to work at the national level, it’s going to be a big challenge to change this.’

(Steering Committee member)

The Steering Committee and EiESWG need to utilise their strategic positions and review the requirement for transitioning the ERP and integrating it with the existing local education structures, while identifying the best means of achieving this. One option is requiring implementing partners to plan their programmes with the input of district teams, including them in the design, monitoring, and management of the initiatives. Moreover, partners must be required to deposit records of their programme activities and programme data with the district offices where they work using an agreed format that suits the data needs of the district as well as the ERP’s information management system.

## 6.4 Conclusions

**Finding 1: The system for collecting, managing, sharing, and utilising data on refugee and host community education service delivery under the ERP is still being developed. Several key activities, including finalising the ERP log frame and creating the M&E guide and tools, were implemented. However, user training on these materials has largely not yet been rolled out due to COVID restrictions, limiting their uptake and integration into information management processes under the ERP.**

The Secretariat has provided active leadership to develop and revise the ERP’s M&E framework and tools to guide stakeholders’ collection and reporting of information under an aligned set of indicators and outcomes. Positively, the process was consultative and ensured the ERP’s information management system complied with established government policies and data systems already in place.

However, there is still work to do to make sure that the information system works effectively. This includes further improvement of the tools tested in Term 1 2020, user training on the tools and systems, and additional support to implementing partners to provide adequate, timely information to guide ERP planning and improvements. Capacity building of district officials in the collection, management, analysis, and application of data on refugees and host community children is another critical factor in ensuring the effectiveness of the information system. These activities have understandably been delayed by COVID-19 in 2020, but must resume in earnest in the final phase of the ERP to ensure the production and tracking of critical data and information.

**Finding 2: The ERP's information system is successfully capturing routine data from refugee settlements, in part by leveraging UNHCR's existing reporting mechanisms. However, the data collection process in host community schools requires substantial improvement. Overall, information management under the ERP must continuously evolve to align with the government's education monitoring system.**

Promoting data accountability and widespread results sharing is key to the successful execution of the ERP's information management system. Positively, partners largely demonstrate compliance with the ERP's reporting requirements and submit data regularly on their activities, particularly in refugee communities. This data is collected and reported via an existing mechanism utilising UNHCR focal point persons and partners, who submit information to a central database that is shared with the Secretariat. Partners also share their data with one another, although stakeholders reported that they fail to routinely share it with district education officials.

Ultimately, these two mechanisms for data collection and sharing run parallel to monitoring and reporting under the government education system, resulting in a separate and temporary information management system that currently is not integrated into existing national structures.

**Finding 3: Progress has been made to incorporate indicators on refugees into the national EMIS. However, as the EMIS is still under revision and not operational, it has not yet produced relevant data to support evidence-based decision making under the ERP.**

The ERP specifies that data on refugees must be integrated into the EMIS to ensure alignment with the government's national monitoring system, which has not been updated since 2016. The Secretariat has been engaging with the team working on the revision of EMIS to include indicators on refugees, though it is possible this process will continue beyond the current version of the ERP.

Partners hoped that the Secretariat and Steering Committee will utilise their position and authority to ensure that the revision process is underway, and that the new EMIS captures data on refugee and host community children to inform policy and planning regarding education service delivery.

**Finding 4: It is critical for the ERP's information system to track and report on output-level data related to education access, data on the quality of the services provided and evidence on teaching and learning outcomes.**

While understanding the status of outputs such as classroom and school construction, teacher hires and placement, and the provision of teaching and learning materials is key to measuring components of the ERP's implementation, access data is not enough to evaluate the policy's success. Data on the quality of the inputs and services provided under the ERP is critical to assessing the achievement of the policy's outcomes, and must be tracked alongside other indicators. Importantly, the final year of the ERP must focus on ensuring the information system is capable of capturing, analysing, and reporting on both access and quality outcomes to feed into the assessment of the policy's impact. Thus, the assessment planned for in the M&E Guide will be particularly critical to implementation.

## 7 Implementing the ERP during COVID-19

At the time of this research, the ERP had been in its implementation period for almost two years, with Year 1 having been launched in July 2018. However, in the very recent period before the research, Uganda's education sector and the ERP's stakeholders were dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The ERP did not specify how the Plan might be adjusted and implemented in the face of new shocks, including how the national coordination, financing, and information mechanisms would be affected.

This chapter explores how the ERP's stakeholders have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and what that means for the education services the ERP seeks to provide for children in refugee and host communities. Aligning with Phase 1's focus on coordination, information, and finance, this chapter focuses on how coordination mechanisms under the ERP have responded to the pandemic and to what extent, if any, the ERP's mandate to support delivery of education services in refugee and host communities has continued and evolved amidst the closing of schools in Uganda from 20 March 2020. Additionally, as funding shifts to meet the time-sensitive demands of the humanitarian and health sector response to COVID-19, the chapter explores the impacts on funding for the ERP. As the pandemic moves from response through to recovery and reform, the chapter also outlines key lessons arising about the delivery of distance learning initiatives for refugees, and what this might mean longer term. Finally, it reflects on the ERP's ability to respond to the additional, secondary shock of COVID-19 in addition to the refugee crisis.

### 7.1 The government and ERP response during COVID-19

**Implementation of the ERP has been affected by school closures and lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many activities unable to continue. Efforts to ensure continuity of learning whilst schools are closed have been spearheaded by the MoES Preparedness and Response Plan (PRP). The PRP explicitly refers to the inclusion of refugees in its mandate, but the role of the ERP in aligning with this mandate is not so clear. COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated the reported challenges arising from coordination and communication between national and district levels, as well as issues with the availability of quality data to inform the response.**

The COVID-19 pandemic forced close to 90% of the world's school children – 1.58 billion students across 191 countries – and 63 million primary and secondary teachers to miss school, with them being confined at home and places of shelter (UN News, 2020). Uganda's schools closed on 20 March 2020, impacting close to 15 million children's schooling (MoES, 2020a). How Uganda responds could have significant implications for the global discourse on how to ensure continuity of learning. The crisis also puts further pressure and scrutiny on the ERP and how its structures are able to continue towards the goal of improved learning outcomes for refugee and host community children and youth across Uganda.

Due to the onset of the pandemic and nationwide curfew and lockdown, which has in turn resulted in the cessation of livelihoods and economic activities it has become clear – and understandable – that implementing ERP activities is currently on pause for the most part.

. Whilst several interviewees suggested that some teachers are still being paid and construction work on schools has still been able to continue in certain localities, the procurement and delivery of construction materials have become more expensive due to lags in supply chains. It is not clear whether only NGO-supported schools are able to remunerate their teachers and, if so, how long they will be able to continue to do so. Moreover, any construction that is taking place would not conform to lockdown rules and so these activities are not being endorsed nationally – either by MoES or the Secretariat.

### 7.1.1 Leadership of the COVID-19 response

**MoES took strong and early leadership in responding to the pandemic and emphasising the need for learning continuity despite school closures. However, responsibility for ensuring that learning continues, and how to do this, is not differentiated by refugee and non-refugee learners.**

The PRP for COVID-19 was developed in early April by the MoES Taskforce for COVID-19 (MoES, 2020a) and was launched in a circular on 20 April (MoES, 2020b). It has three focus areas: continuity of learning, the learning agenda, and reopening of schools and institutions after lockdown. In line with the PRP, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), in collaboration with MoES, is promoting a number of nationwide learning initiatives through forms such as radio, television, and print.<sup>30</sup> The NCDC has created self-study materials for home-based learning with the intention of having materials available across all grades and content areas. The intention to ensure continuity of learning should be commended, with one humanitarian partner praising MoES for ‘providing leadership’ by acting swiftly to set up radio and TV programmes and study at home learning materials, which are readily available online. However, the reach of these initiatives to Uganda’s rural households is limited, as the majority of families do not have TV or internet at home. Radio is more widely available, and likely provides the best hope for children to access learning content while schools are closed.

There are clear synergies between the goals of the ERP and the national education response to COVID-19. For example, the PRP states that an ‘additional 600,000 refugee learners in 13 districts hosting refugees will also be included in the plan’ (MoES, 2020a, p. 11) and that mapping of education stakeholders at the national and district levels should include refugee settlements. However, the PRP is less clear on the specific needs of refugee learners and how to address them in order to meaningfully include this group in the plan. For example, whilst respondents explained that some distance learning content is being translated into local languages so that students across Uganda can benefit, there are currently no plans to translate these into the dominant languages spoken by refugees. Indications would suggest that capacity is limited, and priorities are constrained during this time. That being said, the PRP Taskforce membership includes the Secretariat and some

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<sup>30</sup> The NCDC, in collaboration with UNICEF, has uploaded ‘Covid-19 Self Study Materials’ to its website. Under the section ‘Home schooling materials 2020’ materials for primary (1–7), O-Level (senior 1–4) and A-Level materials (senior 5 and 6) can be found. There is also a ‘Parents’ guide to support children’s learning at home’. Furthermore, there is an e-learning portal accessible via the NCDC website, with materials (audio and PDF formats) for Kindergarten, Primary, and Secondary levels, as well as COVID-19 awareness material.

Steering Committee members, which offers the opportunity and platform to raise issues and advocate for adjustments that are specific to refugee learners.<sup>31</sup>

While the ERP does not specify or mandate a response to shocks such as COVID-19, continuity of learning in refugee and host communities was flagged as particularly important by several EDPs, EiESWG, and Steering Committee members. The ERP M&E team, with the agreement of and coordination with EDPs, is in the final stages of developing a framework of indicators to track new activities in refugee and host communities that are supporting the continuity of learning in response to COVID-19.

There are challenges throughout Uganda in accessing home learning initiatives. As one Steering Committee member emphasised: ‘when you look at where refugees are located and their environment, you don’t expect them to have adequate TV or radio access.’ As a result, it is crucial to ensure that printed materials reach refugee learners. The new indicators will include the extent to which printed materials have been distributed and seek to understand whether home learning materials are being used, although it is not clear how this will be carried out. It is difficult to ascertain at present, given the finalisation of indicators and gaps in data, the feasibility of ensuring refugee learners receive printed self-study materials. Even if received, the ability to tap into parental and other support for learning at home is challenging.

### **7.1.2 Coordinating the response from partners**

**The ERP’s coordination mechanisms are trying to manage the COVID-19 response. However, the extent of the emergency has further exposed the challenges with coordination and information-sharing.**

COVID-19 has highlighted the lack of ownership of the ERP by MoES. A Steering Committee member noted that the pandemic might yield an opportunity for EiESWG stakeholders to tap into the capacity of the Ministry to specifically support refugees, which raises questions about the current oversight and commitment MoES has towards the ERP. Technically the ERP is led by MoES (and the Secretariat sits in MoES), but interviews suggested that there is a lack of ownership of the ERP and that the ERP has taken a further backseat during the COVID-19 response. Whilst it is clear that the challenges around ERP coordination and information were present prior to the pandemic, the pandemic is undoubtedly further hampering the ability to respond to the needs of refugees and host communities.

Coordination and communication of information and activities between ERP implementers has been exposed as a challenge during the COVID-19 response. As one EiESWG partner said, ‘the only challenge is when communication of activities is not thorough and does not flow well from the national level to the community level and even to donors.’ This hinders the ability to address needs at the local level, and coupled with disparity in data the response

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<sup>31</sup> The Secretariat commented that task teams were set up by MoES to coordinate activities for refugees, around distance learning: (radio, home and digital learning) and a Communication with Communities task team. This was not raised in the research interviews

from the ERP's stakeholders to COVID-19 is also hampered. An EiESWG implementing partner draws on a specific example of efforts to ensure continuity of learning just before a school closed in a district and how gaps in coordination, communication, and data are exacerbated under COVID-19:

'Four different organisations had resources to support with giving children scholastic materials. However, the ability to coordinate who was going to distribute at which school and how many children need scholastic materials took weeks and weeks. So, the process of saying there are this many children enrolled in schools, therefore we need this many scholastic materials, this partner will do these schools and that partner will do those schools – this meant that by the time schools had to close due to COVID, they still hadn't distributed scholastic materials, even though school was in about week seven.'

(EiESWG member)

This example is reflective of sentiments shared earlier on national-level coordination among the EiESWG, the Steering Committee, and the Secretariat and indeed how the ERP has been able to respond in practical terms at the district level. While these challenges are not unique to COVID-19, it emphasises the challenges arising from a lack of data and the need for stronger coordination structures so there is a clear delineation of responsibilities and synergies between different partners to avoid duplication and enhance efficiency. Indeed, in this case it was not about funding *per se* – money and materials were readily available – but this was hindered by a lack of coordination, communication, and data among implementing partners and district education offices.

Whilst there are challenges, the coordination structures are trying to improve their response. The EiESWG decided to meet twice a month instead of its usual once a month in order to respond to the rapidly changing situation on the ground. One EiESWG member was keen to highlight that the group is cognisant of not meeting 'just for the sake of it' and the need for tangible information and updates to share with partners – something that has not always been deemed to be the case. These additional meetings are not geared towards coordinating a specific response through the ERP, however, and nor do they have a special mandate from MoES to implement activities specific to the goals of the ERP.

Finally, it was noted that not every donor or NGO that had planned activities pre-COVID-19 can respond with new initiatives, which has resulted in the halting of some ERP activities. An EiESWG member explained:

'Not every partner has the means and resources to start a response. They don't have a team on the ground, they don't have enough secured funding to shift and reallocate towards a COVID-19 response, and this means, for a lot of partners, stopping activities.'

(EiESWG member)

Where new activities outside of current planned ERP initiatives are taking place, it is hoped that the new ERP M&E indicators will help stakeholders better understand how different actors have responded to COVID-19 and what further gaps still need to be addressed.



## 7.2 Financing the ERP under COVID-19

**ECW has rapidly released extra funds to assess the impact of COVID-19 in relation to the ERP, and has increased flexibility in how resources can be allocated.**

**The challenge of fundraising in order to realise the ERP's objectives and planned activities has intensified in the face of shifting donor priorities. Fundraising activities have been delayed, limiting current and potential funders' understanding of progress made thus far.**

Amidst school closures, there has been a swift acknowledgement of increased financial needs and action taken to address the pandemic's impact on learning – including specifically for refugee communities. The most significant of these contributions has been additional investments made by ECW. At the onset of the pandemic, ECW pledged a new US\$ 1 million in support to Uganda (ECW, 2020) to 'look at COVID in relation to the ERP' (EDP member) and increased flexibility in how the existing resources can be used. In addition, 'there has been a reallocation of resources within the ERP to respond to [COVID-19]' (EDP member).

There are concerns about the ability of the ERP to attract any additional funding in light of the pandemic. As discussed in Section 6, there is still a large gap in terms of meeting the needed US\$ 389 million for the ERP. Plans to raise further funds through fundraising activities have been hampered by COVID-19, as one Secretariat staff member explained:

'We had planned to have a fundraising activity with donors from different agencies whereby we share the activities and achievements since the inception of the project and also present the items that need more funding... but the fundraising event is still pending due to the COVID interruption.'

(Secretariat member)

This event eventually took place as an online ERP status and results seminar on 26 June.

There are fears amongst EiESWG partners that donors will redirect any unspent but previously committed funds to other priorities. This would also apply to securing any new funds. These fears have been realised among EiESWG members, who have already had to review entire proposals and justify why education funds should continue now that schools are closed. Whilst large organisations with significant cashflows and committed funding from diverse sources might be able absorb these pivots in funding, there was particular concern about smaller local organisations. These smaller organisations do not tend to have steady funding streams and this might impact the activities they are implementing under the ERP.

There have been efforts to mitigate the potential effects of funding reallocation by emphasising the importance of continuing to support education at this time. The Uganda Education Consortium released a briefing note (Save the Children, 2020) within 48 hours of school closures that highlighted the risk of school closures to children and the protection that education can offer for the most vulnerable. It provides tangible, practical examples of how learning can continue, and although not cited explicitly as an advocacy tool during interviews it was inferred that it has been used informally to make practical suggestions and calls to action with in-country and international donors and government.

## 7.3 Lessons from distance learning initiatives

**Distance learning initiatives have played an important role in the response phase of COVID-19, and will continue to play a significant role in the recovery and reform phase of the pandemic. Given constraints in infrastructure and reach, more research is needed to better understand and tailor distance learning to refugees and host communities to ensure it is effective and inclusive.**

The government and partners moved fast to develop and share materials for distance learning. However, these initiatives have faced a number of challenges that were highlighted by interviewees, especially in relation to refugees and host communities. These centred on three interconnected themes: infrastructure, effectiveness, and inclusiveness.

### 7.3.1 Infrastructure

Access to relevant infrastructure to benefit from distance learning initiatives is a concern globally, and one that is particularly acute in low-income countries. Nearly 90% of students in sub-Saharan Africa do not have household computers, while 82% are unable to get online. Beyond this, refugees and host communities in Uganda face further infrastructure issues.

As refugees tend to face greater barriers to accessing technology, there is a risk that COVID-19 will increase educational inequality, especially if interventions are not targeted to ensure accessibility for refugees. Globally, refugees are 50% less likely than the general population to have an internet-enabled phone and 29% of refugee households have no phone at all (Grandi, 2020). One Uganda Education Consortium NGO found that, among the most vulnerable refugee households, less than 25% had access to radio (Corbishley, 2020). In addition to hardware, refugees may not be able to afford data/connections, and many refugee camp settings are in remote areas that are not reached by national FM signals (UNHCR UK, 2020). The West Nile region, which hosts more than 50% of Uganda's refugee population, is constrained by very limited infrastructure, including roads and electricity. UNHCR's Innovation Service has worked with mobile operators to improve network coverage in certain areas, but many areas in the West Nile settlements suffer from poor network coverage and speeds.

In terms of radio teaching, it was highlighted by a government official that 'some places are unable to connect to any of the radio stations' and 'not every household has a radio'; consequently, there is a clear danger of 'eliminating a very big cluster of people out of the education system'. With schools closed, refugee children – who are no stranger to prolonged absence from school – are also missing out on essential additional assistance that schools provide, such as language classes and psychosocial support that is crucial in addressing the trauma of their plight.

### 7.3.2 Effectiveness

Even if students are able to access TV or radio classes, the classes and materials need to be effective at helping children learn. In this respect, one Steering Committee member pointed out the need for effective M&E mechanisms to understand whether there is an actual benefit from these methods of teaching, stating:

‘It is one thing sitting in a classroom seeing a teacher and another thing sitting under the tree and listening to somebody on a radio who is supposed to be a teacher. The issue of accent, words, and language matter in learning.’

(Steering Committee member)

It is likely that issues around digital literacy and language will limit the effectiveness of distance learning programmes for refugee children.

### **7.3.3 Inequality**

Concerns about the accessibility of distance learning initiatives are exacerbated for children with special needs. One Steering Committee member warned that, ‘there are huge challenges and we need to think of inequality and especially for those most vulnerable. How can remote learning be adapted to meet their needs?’ Another Steering Committee member noted that ‘marginalisation has increased because children with special needs might not be able to use the self-study materials.’ They conclude that whilst MoES has responded positively and committed to printing self-learning materials in braille, there have been delays and the intention has been hampered by a lack of funding. In addition, special needs children have a variety of needs; material in braille is not all encompassing.

### **7.3.4 Responses**

EiESWG members and NGOs have responded to the challenges outlined above with specific initiatives in refugee settlements. For example, one NGO is providing bicycles for teachers and training on social distancing so they can hold group learning for up to three people. Another NGO provides phones and airtime to parents of children with special needs, pairing them with specialist inclusive education officers for remote support. Parents might be an underutilised support mechanism – something that a Steering Committee member stated as an opportunity Uganda must take advantage of:

‘Then there is the role of parents, who because of COVID maybe be getting more engaged and involved in their children’s learning. We spend a lot of time in refugee and rural settings sensitising on the importance of education and parents being actively involved in their children’s learning. I am hoping that COVID can become a catalyst for reforms to curriculum and greater parental involvement.’

(Steering Committee member)

It is not clear how widespread the various initiatives are, however, and this reinforces the need for the new indicators to track these initiatives and help coordinate them.

### **7.3.5 Longer-term impacts**

School reopening in Uganda is likely to be staggered, so remote learning initiatives will continue to be important for the recovery and reform phases of COVID-19. Efforts to ensure gains made and wider structural issues around reducing dropout and ensuring school completion will need to be addressed. Two years ago, over half of school-aged refugee children were out of school, and currently the gross enrolment rate for primary school

children is around 80%. A record number of refugee learners passed the primary leavers' examination in 2019 (Corbishley, 2020). COVID-19 has put these gains in education at risk and those most vulnerable are prone to dropout even after schools reopen, as one Steering Committee member noted:

'One of the biggest challenges that we also see is usually when vulnerable children have stayed away from school for a long period. They can be more vulnerable and more likely to drop out. We have seen gains in access to education and ensuring children stay in school, but with COVID, the economy, and with parents struggling for food, I worry these gains will be lost as some children will need to support their households. Many children were already in vulnerable situations and COVID has really compounded this vulnerability.'

(Steering Committee member)

Though it was not highlighted by interview respondents, girls may be particularly at risk of dropping out of school due to pressures such as child marriage and poverty. Indeed, the Malala Fund estimates that across 10 countries, including Uganda, half of refugee girls will not return to school when they reopen (GPE, 2020).

## 7.4 Implications for ERP2

**The ERP has been lauded as a blueprint that maps out a response to the significant refugee inflow and education needs of refugee learners. In future versions (such as ERP2), elements of wider resilience and shock preparedness could be incorporated.**

In its current form, the ERP is designed to address a specific challenge and mandate arising from significant refugee inflow and the resulting education needs of refugee learners and host communities. Its design does not encompass an overarching and general blueprint for shock response *per se*, or additional shocks within the refugee-hosting districts. The ERP is a context-specific plan that is now being reviewed in the face of a shock (i.e. the pandemic) that it was not intended or designed to address. That being said, interviewees identified a lesson from the pandemic that future iterations of the ERP should be designed with an in-built shock-response mechanism. A government official went on to say that, whilst different in context and impact on Uganda, the lessons from Ebola could be incorporated. The official was concerned that eight years on from Ebola, shock response has not yet factored into core policy frameworks. This is echoed by a Steering Committee member who reflected on the difficulty of securing finance in the face of the pandemic, who urges the existence of a 'plan B' so that when donors 'pull back funding' in the light of unforeseen circumstances, mechanisms can mitigate potential negative impact as best as possible. It is not clear what a 'plan B' would entail and whether this is entirely feasible, however, especially given that the financing needed to deliver the ERP without factoring in COVID-19 has not been entirely forthcoming.

## 7.5 Conclusions

**Finding 1: The implementation of the ERP was hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many activities unable to continue amidst nationwide school closures and lockdown.**

Whilst construction of school structures has continued, it progressed at a slower pace due to increasing procurement cost and supply chain delays. Other activities related to improving service delivery, teacher capacities and instructional methods were postponed. Despite the ERP's function as an emergency response policy for refugee education, it was not inherently designed to be flexible or to respond to a secondary shock such as COVID-19.

**Finding 2: The government has been lauded for the swiftness of its response and preparation of distance learning initiatives. However, this response may not be appropriate for refugees, and little is yet known about the effectiveness of distance learning in the face of a global pandemic.**

Positively, the government's nationwide response explicitly mentions coverage for the country's 600,000 refugees; however, there is little effort to tailor the response and materials to their particular needs. Refugees face additional barriers to accessing distance learning initiatives due to limited infrastructure and language issues.

A better understanding of how effective distance learning is, and how to improve these systems to respond to the specific challenges faced by refugees, is especially important given that remote learning will continue to play a significant role in the response and recovery phases of the pandemic. In addition, more emphasis and understanding are needed on how distance learning provides for those who are most vulnerable within refugee communities, including children with special needs and children at risk of dropping out from education even when schools reopen – especially girls.

**Finding 3: COVID-19 has exacerbated some of the pre-existing constraints of the ERP, testing the still developing mechanisms behind its coordination, as well as communication and information flows between national- and district-level stakeholders.**

In some circumstances at the district level, stakeholders report that it was not funding constraints that were preventing development partners from implementing activities to mitigate school closures but rather a lack of data and coordination among them. Efforts to increase the regularity of engagement of the EiESWG do not make up for challenges at the local level, and the unclear mandate of the ERP and its stakeholders in responding to COVID-19 adds to the gaps.

However, ERP partners have taken steps to improve coordination and information in relation to the pandemic. The ERP Secretariat, in collaboration with the EIESWG, immediately refocused its coordinating role to ensure support to the government in developing, implementing and monitoring the COVID-19 response plan to ensure continuity of learning for children. Three task teams and a COVID-19 log frame were created. The ERP M&E team, coordinating with EDPs, developed a set of indicators to track new activities for refugees and host communities to support continuity of learning in response to COVID-19, and thus feed into decisions on further responses.

**Finding 4: The ERP was not designed to be a response plan for all shocks, but COVID-19 has highlighted that it is critical to include elements of shock preparedness in future iterations.**

Stakeholders are uncertain of how they should respond to the COVID-19 crisis under the umbrella of the ERP. The ERP does establish the flexibility of its framework when new issues emerge. This is particularly pertinent to the constraints on funding caused by the re-prioritisation towards the COVID-19 response (and likely other shocks in the future). At the same time, including expectations for additional shock responses is unrealistic in light of the several unfunded objectives of the existing Plan.

## 8 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter draws together the final conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions are organised under the four main themes from the report: coordination, financing, information, and COVID-19. The findings are based on interviews with national level stakeholders in government and civil society in April to June 2020; often, the opinions of government and development partners differed. The conclusions are a compilation and analysis of respondents' views, their examples and evidence provided, of which more details are in the previous findings chapters. The recommendations are structured under the themes of government leadership, data and financing, and future policies.

### 8.1 Conclusions

Uganda is seen as a role model for its open-door policy on refugees and for establishing the ERP as a specific and ambitious plan responding to refugee and host community needs for education. The ERP's ambition includes a large number of activities, associated coordination mechanisms and needed funding, all of which were set out to be in place from the inception phase (Year 0) of the plan, which started in January 2018. Given the level of ambition, it is perhaps not surprising to find that 2.5 years into the ERP's duration, the status of implementation across coordination, financing and information has not kept pace with its original intentions. A major cause of this is the delay involved setting up a dedicated Secretariat in the MoES to drive coordination, which was needed in turn to achieve financing and information objectives. The Secretariat was officially functioning by September 2019 – in Year 2 of the ERP. Positively, despite this short time frame, several critical activities were implemented by the Secretariat regarding. The achievements are illustrated in the different chapters here. However, just as the Secretariat was gaining momentum in spearheading implementation of the ERP, COVID-19 shut down the country's schools in March 2020, severely affecting all education programming and service delivery nationally – including under the ERP.

Importantly, the ERP is a very ambitious plan requiring a complex set of inputs from multiple actors for it to be successful. A key lesson learnt to date is the need for a realistic timeframe for executing a plan as aspiring as the ERP. While a number of government departments, individuals, civil society stakeholders and development partners are working hard to carry out activities – and achieving identifiable progress in key areas – a number of critical inputs remain to be executed before the ERP ends in mid-2021.

#### 8.1.1 Coordination

**C1: National coordinating mechanisms have been successfully established and are functioning, largely by leveraging existing structures to support oversight and management of the ERP.**

Data collected at the national level illustrates that the structure and composition of the ERP's coordination mechanisms are well designed to facilitate effective planning and management of the policy. The coordination bodies contain the right mix of high-profile, appropriate individuals in their membership to access and engage with relevant government ministries, MoES departments, EDPs, and implementing partners to facilitate effective coordination of

the ERP. Building the ERP's coordination mechanisms on existing systems and working groups that have the experience and capacity to coordinate refugee response was critical to this process, and has greatly benefited the ERP's coordination and delivery. ERP coordination mechanisms have been particularly successful in providing technical advice to implementing partners, and the presence of a fully dedicated Secretariat with highly qualified staff has been key in facilitating coordination processes and providing different actors with required information and timely technical guidance. However, the progress achieved regarding coordination has been affected by delays in establishing the ERP Secretariat. As part of the MoES, and designated as the technical team responsible for overall coordination of the ERP, the Secretariat is a key element in its operations and must continually expand its function alongside the Steering Committee, which provides strategic leadership.

**C2: The ERP coordination model successfully engages key stakeholders across a range of institutions, departments, and actors, but its overall effectiveness is diminished by several systemic factors.**

The ERP's coordination structures make a good attempt to oversee and manage the delivery of the response by leveraging the capacities of people, existing departments, and mechanisms without requiring too many additional resources. Reasonable successes have been recorded regarding information-sharing across government departments, as well as provision of technical guidance and support to implementing partners through coordination linkages. However, national level stakeholders report that systemic factors and weaknesses somewhat limit the overall effectiveness of coordination outcomes under the ERP. Sub-quality reporting, under-reporting, challenges aligning project budgets and donor priorities with ERP priorities, and limited time from overstretched government departments with many responsibilities are some of the key factors seen to be constraining effective coordination of the Plan.

**C3: The MoES is responsible for overall leadership and coordination of the ERP. Partners value this oversight role, but expressed a need to continuously strengthen internal systems and more directly engage a wider range of the MoES senior leadership to facilitate timely decisions related to policy implementation and service delivery.**

While the MoES is technically responsible for providing overall leadership to implement the ERP, development partners acknowledged that they contribute a significant amount of time and investment to its management and delivery. They hope to explore opportunities for more targeted, direct government engagement and ownership of key areas of the Plan, specifically regarding coordination of implementing partners and spearheading policy and practice improvements. Although the Secretariat is housed within the MoES and officially represents the government as the coordinating body for the ERP, it is seen by partners as an external structure supporting coordination; moreover, neither the Secretariat nor Steering Committee are seen by partners as exercising executive powers despite their prescribed roles.

**C4: District ERPs are seen as vital in empowering local governments to take ownership and authority of the Plan, better coordinate ERP resources and activities, and strengthen synergies between the local and national education system.**



A highlight and achievement of the Secretariat's work aligning coordination at local level is the development of district ERPs, although this process was ongoing in most districts at the time of this report. District ERPs are expected to streamline and strengthen coordination activities at district and settlement level, as well as help align district ERP priorities to funding. However, given that districts are already constrained by a lack of personnel, resources and capacity, efforts to improve planning and coordination mechanisms through district ERPs will only be successful if funds are raised and allocated to implement them. The upcoming ERP system strengthening strategy includes a number of other intended activities aimed at improving planning and coordination at both local and national levels.

### **8.1.2 Finance**

**F1: The financing needs of the ERP are not perceived to have been met, even against an already modest view of the needs.**

The ERP costing of US\$ 389 million already reduced the target group to only a portion of host community children, and did not aim to achieve full enrolment rates for refugees or host communities under the Plan. It is also thought that the population of refugees has grown more than anticipated when the ERP was developed, though no analysis has been seen to confirm the extent of this. This US\$ 389 million, though identified against priority activities and considered a realistic expectation, has not been secured to date, two years since the Plan's start date. Furthermore, the actual accurate status of financing is not known due to difficulties in defining and tracking spending on the ERP. There are concerns regarding gaps in the number of classrooms and teachers, as well as inequitable distribution of resources between settlement sites. However, without accurate data, it is not possible to confirm this. Short-term technical assistance on finance tracking, currently underway and supported by Maintains, will help uncover the actual situation and help identify where the gaps are.

**F2: Government funding towards the ERP will continue to be inadequate, in partners' eyes, until refugees are fully included in the government's mainstream planning and budgeting for the education sector.**

Aligning the planning and budgeting of education service delivery for refugees within existing systems, as well as recognising and coding settlement schools, would improve access to government funds. These funds would go directly to schools as capitation grants, allow for the hiring of additional teachers under the government wage bill, and improve access to resources for operational expenses at the district level, including for coordination and monitoring.

**F3: The presence of the ERP was an enabling factor for securing funds from ECW, and possibly from the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), which together account for approximately US\$ 41.6 million – 11% of the ERP's costs. But other than that, the Plan is seen as having had little impact on improving total funding for ERP activities.**

Whilst there are a large number of implementing partners who have been successful in securing funds, the presence of the ERP itself is not viewed by interviewees as having been an enabling factor in securing additional funds to refugee and host communities beyond those that would have come in the absence of the ERP.<sup>32</sup> It is also unclear the extent to which the ERP has contributed to more aligned and efficient financing, with no funders channelling through a pooled fund or through the government as the Plan had intended; resultantly, government officials are left feeling side-lined from spending decisions.

**F4: Stakeholders want to see an increase in fundraising efforts and a shift to multi-year financing commitments from donors to secure required resources and allow flexible responses to emerging needs.**

It is important to recognise that the refugee influx in Uganda is a protracted crisis rather than a short-term emergency – and so there must be a shift from humanitarian to development perspectives, with longer-term financing commitments. This would be in line with global efforts to strengthen the humanitarian–development nexus. However, more flexibility within funding sources (to change priorities) signals the challenge with setting out costed activities, as the ERP does. Emerging needs are likely to change from the original set of activities, and there must be room to allow these changes and still ensure the success of the Plan, which should focus on outcomes rather than pre-set input targets.

**F5: District-level coordination and ownership must improve for financing to be better coordinated, and mobilised, at the local level.**

There needs to be clarity among all stakeholders on district local government roles and responsibilities for coordination of grants implemented in their location, as well as responsibilities for resource mobilisation. This would help secure more adequate and efficient financing, focusing on needs identified by people on the ground, and should be a priority when developing the ERP2.

### 8.1.3 Information

**I1: The system for collecting, managing, sharing, and utilising data on refugee and host community education service delivery under the ERP is still being developed. Several key activities, including finalising the ERP log frame and creating the M&E guide and tools, were implemented; however, user training on these materials has largely not yet been rolled out due to COVID restrictions, limiting their uptake and integration into information management processes under the ERP.**

The Secretariat has provided active leadership to develop and revise the ERP's M&E framework and tools to guide stakeholders' collection and reporting of information under an aligned set of indicators and outcomes. Positively, the process was consultative and ensured the ERP's information management system complied with established government policies and data systems already in place.

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<sup>32</sup> It is possible that some efforts and successes were either not known about or considered substantial by the partners interviewed for this research.

However, there is still work to do to make sure that the information system works effectively.<sup>33</sup> This includes further improvement of the tools tested in Term 1 2020, user training on the tools and systems, and additional support to implementing partners to provide adequate, timely information to guide ERP planning and improvements. Capacity building of district officials in the collection, management, analysis, and application of data on refugees and host community children is another critical factor in ensuring the effectiveness of the information system. These activities have understandably been delayed by COVID-19 in 2020, but must resume in earnest in the final phase of the ERP to ensure the production and tracking of critical data and information.

**I2: The ERP's information system is successfully capturing routine data from refugee settlements, in part by leveraging the United Nations High Commission for Refugees' existing reporting mechanisms. However, the data collection process in host community schools requires substantial improvement. Overall, information management under the ERP must continuously evolve to align with the government's education monitoring system.**

Promoting data accountability and widespread results sharing is key to the successful execution of the ERP's information management system. Positively, partners largely demonstrate compliance with the ERP's reporting requirements and submit data regularly on their activities, particularly in refugee communities. This data is collected and reported via an existing mechanism utilising UNHCR focal point persons and partners, who submit information to a central database that is shared with the Secretariat. Partners also share their data with one another, although stakeholders reported that they fail to routinely share it with district education officials.

Ultimately, these two mechanisms for data collection and sharing run parallel to monitoring and reporting under the government education system, resulting in a separate and temporary information management system that currently is not integrated into existing national structures.

**I3: Progress has been made to incorporate indicators on refugees into the national Education Management Information System. However, as the EMIS is still under revision and not operational, it has not yet produced relevant data to support evidence-based decision making under the ERP.**

The ERP specifies that data on refugees must be integrated into the EMIS to ensure alignment with the government's national monitoring system, which has not been updated since 2016. The Secretariat has been engaging with the team working on the revision of EMIS to include indicators on refugees, though it is possible this process will continue beyond the current version of the ERP. Partners hoped that the Secretariat and Steering Committee will utilise their position and authority to ensure that the revision process is underway, and that the new EMIS captures data on refugee and host community children to inform policy and planning regarding education service delivery.

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<sup>33</sup> As indicated in the M&E tools roll-out plan, finalised after this research was conducted.

**I4: It is critical for the ERP's information system to track and report on output-level data related to education access, data on the quality of the services provided and evidence on teaching and learning outcomes.**

While understanding the status of outputs such as classroom and school construction, teacher hires and placement, and the provision of teaching and learning materials is key to measuring components of the ERP's implementation, access data is not enough to evaluate the policy's success. Data on the quality of the inputs and services provided under the ERP is critical to assessing the achievement of the policy's outcomes, and must be tracked alongside other indicators. Importantly, the final year of the ERP must focus on ensuring the information system is capable of capturing, analysing, and reporting on both access and quality outcomes to feed into the assessment of the policy's impact.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the assessment planned for in the M&E Guide will be particularly critical to implementation.

#### **8.1.4 Implementing the ERP during COVID-19**

**CVD1: The implementation of the ERP was hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many activities unable to continue amidst nationwide school closures and lockdown.**

Whilst construction of school structures has continued, it progressed at a slower pace due to increasing procurement cost and supply chain delays. Other activities related to improving service delivery, teacher capacities and instructional methods were postponed. Despite the ERP's function as an emergency response policy for refugee education, it was not inherently designed to be flexible or to respond to a secondary shock such as COVID-19.

**CVD2: The government has been lauded for the swiftness of its response and preparation of distance learning initiatives. However, this response may not be appropriate for refugees, and little is yet known about the effectiveness of distance learning in the face of a global pandemic.**

Positively, the government's nationwide response explicitly mentions coverage for the country's 600,000 refugees; however, there is little effort to tailor the response and materials to their particular needs. Refugees face additional barriers to accessing distance learning initiatives due to limited infrastructure and language issues. A better understanding of how effective distance learning is, and how to improve these systems to respond to the specific challenges faced by refugees, is especially important given that remote learning will continue to play a significant role in the response and recovery phases of the pandemic. In addition, more emphasis and understanding are needed on how distance learning provides for those who are most vulnerable within refugee communities, including children with special needs and children at risk of dropping out from education even when schools reopen – especially girls.

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<sup>34</sup> Some ERP partners are conducting surveys of learning outcomes but these will not comprehensively cover the Plan's target beneficiaries. The ERP Secretariat will conduct a wider baseline, but earlier delays in Secretariat set-up, and COVID-19, mean that this activity will take place in year 3 of the ERP, very late for a baseline.

**CVD3: COVID-19 has exacerbated some of the pre-existing constraints of the ERP, testing the still developing mechanisms behind its coordination, as well as communication and information flows between national- and district-level stakeholders.**

In some circumstances at the district level, stakeholders report that it was not funding constraints that were preventing development partners from implementing activities to mitigate school closures but rather a lack of data and coordination among them. Efforts to increase the regularity of engagement of the Education in Emergencies Sector Working Group (EiESWG) do not make up for challenges at the local level, and the unclear mandate of the ERP and its stakeholders in responding to COVID-19 adds to the gaps.

However, ERP partners have taken steps to improve coordination and information in relation to the pandemic. The ERP Secretariat, in collaboration with the EIESWG, immediately refocused its coordinating role to ensure support to the government in developing, implementing and monitoring the COVID-19 response plan to ensure continuity of learning for children. Three task teams and a COVID-19 log frame were created.. The ERP M&E team, coordinating with EDPs, developed a set of indicators to track new activities for refugees and host communities to support continuity of learning in response to COVID-19, and thus feed into decisions on further responses.

**CVD4: The ERP was not designed to be a response plan for all shocks, but COVID-19 has highlighted that it is critical to include elements of shock preparedness in future iterations.**

Stakeholders are uncertain of how they should respond to the COVID-19 crisis under the umbrella of the ERP, which does not establish the flexibility of its framework when new issues emerge. This is particularly pertinent to the constraints on funding caused by the re-prioritisation towards the COVID-19 response (and likely other shocks in the future). At the same time, also including expectations for additional shock responses is unrealistic in light of the several unfunded objectives of the existing Plan.

## **8.2 Recommendations**

### **8.2.1 MoES leadership**

**Recommendation 1:** The MoES leads national-level coordination of the ERP. In the Plan's final year, implementation arrangements require significantly more high level engagement from senior leaders within the MoES to inform decision-making on critical policy and practice issues. The Steering Committee and Secretariat should articulate a specific set of actions to achieve this in phases throughout the ERP's final year. Ideally, this will involve continuation of external financial support for the Secretariat in the short term, with a transition plan in place to ready MoES systems and departments for assuming full financial responsibility in the medium to long-term, which can also be achieved by integrating the ERP's management and logical functions into relevant departments.

**Recommendation 2:** MoES leadership should be further leveraged as a key resource for promoting the ERP among partners, including EDPs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). ERP coordination can be strengthened by increasing accountability from partners

for aligning their activities with the objectives and activities of the ERP at both national and district level. MoES leadership should also promote better coordination of funding to ensure activities are planned to respond to identified priority needs, and that gaps are filled in previously less served areas. In effect this leadership means continual commitment and communication from senior officials across all relevant MoES departments, to showcase a strong message. It also requires that the Steering Committee has the clout to make and execute strategic decisions.

**Recommendation 3:** The MoES should enhance district local government capacity to coordinate and monitor partners working in their catchment area. This capacity-building should include how to collect information on activities, budgets, and spending by non-governmental partners operating education programming for refugee and host communities in the districts. Districts would then be empowered to operationalise their district ERPs, making them a meaningful planning and implementation tool to promote accountability. EDPs should provide resources and technical support for this as a priority, as it is increasingly likely that the best mode of delivery for the ERP is a decentralised mechanism that functions at local level between government officials in districts and NGO partners working on the ground in refugee settlements and host communities.

### 8.2.2 Data and financing

**Recommendation 4:** Stakeholders consistently reported that there are more refugees than initially expected, recommending that the Secretariat, on behalf of the Steering Committee, review the refugee population and enrolment figures for the last three years against the projections made in the ERP. This would determine how close to reality the population projections were, and the extent to which the targets in the ERP are still meaningful. This will allow an analysis of the gap to determine whether it was due to the larger-than-expected influx of refugees, or under-performance against targets. Ideally, a new school census would be carried out by the MoES to capture actual enrolment data.

**Recommendation 5:** The Secretariat, on behalf of the Steering Committee, should revise the ERP costing model on the basis of the original activities and prioritisation but using the updated population data. This would give an updated and more realistic idea of what the cost of meeting the ERP's targets would be, which is likely to be higher than the initial US\$ 389 million estimate. This should also be compared to an update of the costing model using the revised priorities as coming out of the district ERPs, and has already been proposed by the Steering Committee.

**Recommendation 6:** It is commendable that the revision of the EMIS by the MoES has commenced with funding from FCDO and the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The MoES must prioritise this process and ensure the inclusion of data on refugees in the new system. The Steering Committee should keep this high on the agenda given its importance for monitoring and evaluation, and leverage their collective strengths and capacities to help resolve bottlenecks in revising the design of the EMIS as needed.

### 8.2.3 Future policies

**Recommendation 7:** The Government of Uganda's open-door policy on refugees is rightly lauded. The government now needs to ensure that the principles of its policies are executed,

particularly regarding the full inclusion of refugees in the national education system through planning and financing. This means incorporating refugee enrolment figures and needs in the national EMIS monitoring system and the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), as well as ensuring that all schools with refugee children receive government resource allocations for teacher salaries and student capitation grants. This will require greater funding to the education sector, and coordinated action from the MoES, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED), EDPs, and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM).

**Recommendation 8:** Some of the critical systems and structures core to the functioning of the ERP, such as the district ERPs, are only just being established over two years into implementation of the Plan. Reflecting on lessons learnt from implementation to date is important for ensuring that critical outcomes are achieved, either by making adjustments to current targets or extending the ERP's timeframe. This is even more relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of schools for the 2020 academic year, which has further delayed implementation of ERP activities.

**Recommendation 9:** Education planning authorities at both the national and district level should cast holistic plans that include all children of school-going age in the country within existing national strategies and policies wherever possible. The Steering Committee should review and reflect on whether a separate document for refugees – such as an ERP2 – is the most effective way to cater for refugee education in the national policy framework for the education sector. The refugee 'crisis' is no longer a short-term emergency; rather, it is a protracted situation that is now a permanent, long-term development issue. While the ERP can be depended on to prioritise the education needs of vulnerable children in refugee settlements and host communities, the certainty of achievement of its objectives should be catered for by integrating the system strengthening component of the Plan into the ESSP.

**Recommendation 10:** Ideally, future iterations of national plans and policies catering for refugee education should start with a broad national framework, under which a district-level planning process is used to identify and contextualise real needs, associated costs, and financing gaps on the ground to deliver services. These district-level plans should be generated from the onset as part of the core policy development process, and be fed back into the national plan as it is being written so that national and district interventions and costings are consistent and well-integrated throughout the document.

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