

## Recommendations to strengthen Uganda's Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (ERP)

### Coordination systems in the ERP

POLICY BRIEF | March 2021

### Introduction

Uganda is seen as a role model for its open-door policy on refugees, including for its ambitious plan to ensure all refugee children access a quality education. The Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (ERP), launched in 2018, aims to establish a realistic and implementable strategy to improve both access to education and learning outcomes for refugee and host community children.

The ERP aims to consolidate public and private investments in refugee education and to shift service delivery from humanitarian to development response. The ERP aims 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.

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. Our first research report (**available here**) involved engaging with national stakeholders. The research was conducted in the first half of 2020 and analysed three key components of the ERP's implementation:



**This brief presents key findings and emerging policy recommendations on improving the role of coordination systems in the ERP.**

The Maintains research explored the design of the ERP's coordination structures; their status, evolution, and effectiveness; coordination successes and challenges; and required improvements to the ERP's coordination mechanisms to ensure successful implementation of the plan. Primary data was collected from national stakeholders connected to the ERP's design and delivery, including government officials, technical advisers, education development partners, humanitarian agencies, and civil society organisations (later phases will involve inquiry at the district level). Findings are based on a compilation and analysis of respondents' opinions, experiences, and documented evidence.

## Findings

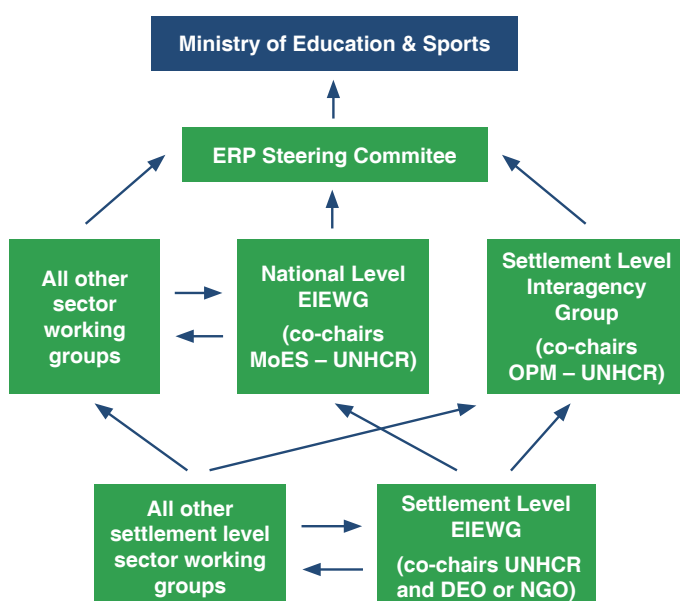
The ERP's success hinges upon executing a complex set of actions across multiple national and local actors in a short timeframe. While many government officials, development partners, and civil society stakeholders are working hard to carry out activities, several critical inputs remain to be executed.

### **Finding 1: National ERP coordinating mechanisms have been successfully established and are functioning, largely by leveraging existing structures.**

The structure and composition of the ERP's coordination mechanisms (see Figure 1) helps facilitate effective planning and management of the ERP.

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) is responsible for the overall coordination and implementation of the ERP. The Steering Committee provides strategic leadership for implementation of the ERP, as well as coordination mechanisms. These mechanisms build on existing coordinating bodies, who also have representatives on the Steering Committee. The Chair of the Steering Committee is the Permanent Secretary of MoES. Currently, the Permanent Secretary has delegated that responsibility to the Commissioner of Basic and Secondary Education. The ERP Secretariat carries out the day-to-day activities of the Steering Committee as outlined in the ERP and was established as part of the MoES. ERP coordinating bodies assist in the implementation of the ERP. They consist of various groups that support the ERP with coordination under different focus areas.

**Figure 1: The ERP coordination structure**



Source: The Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (ERP)

Building coordination mechanisms on existing systems and experienced working groups within the MoES was critical and has greatly benefited the ERP's delivery. The presence of a fully dedicated Secretariat with highly qualified staff has been key in enabling coordination and providing timely technical leadership. ERP coordination bodies contain the right mix of senior, experienced members who can readily access and engage a wide range of government ministries, MoES departments, donors, and development partners to facilitate effective coordination of the ERP.

### **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 leverage the existing capacities of MoES departments, staff, and oversight mechanisms without requiring too many additional resources. Reasonable successes have been achieved regarding information-sharing across government departments and providing technical guidance to partners. There is always a department, agency, or institution within the structure that can be easily identified to provide the required technical support or intervention oversight to implementing partners.

However, systemic challenges are believed to weaken the overall effectiveness of coordination outcomes. For example, poor reporting or under-reporting, undesirable competition among some implementing partners at the settlement level, challenges aligning project budgets and donor priorities with ERP priorities, and poor communication and follow-up within government departments may be hampering coordination structures within the ERP. 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.



**Finding 3: Partners value the MoES's oversight role but hope to continuously strengthen internal systems and more directly engage a wider range of MoES senior leadership to facilitate timely decisions related to policy implementation and service delivery.**

Although the Secretariat is housed within the MoES and officially represents the government as the ERP's coordinating body, it is seen by partners as an external structure unable to exercise executive powers alongside the Steering Committee on high-level policy decisions. A key reason may be that most government departments are under-resourced, which makes it challenging for current partners (such as NGOs) to gradually step back and release coordination responsibilities to the government.

Respondents positively reported that the coordination functions of the Steering Committee and Secretariat are complemented by partner consortiums, including Education Cannot Wait, which funds projects that implement ERP priorities. Importantly, partners hope to explore opportunities for more targeted government engagement and ownership of key areas of the plan. These key areas include coordination of partners and conducting a

review of policies that may limit government support for schools in refugee settlements such as school capitation grants and teacher recruitment.

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

A highlight of the Secretariat's coordination work is the development of district ERPs. They are intended to help local officials identify context-specific approaches and priorities for executing the ERP based on the needs of the refugee and host community populations in their district, considering the unique constraints and challenges they face. However, districts are 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. However, shifting the onus of fundraising to the districts, which are already constrained in terms of coordinating activities in their localities, may be difficult.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1: Articulate and implement a set of actions to support additional senior MoES officials to spearhead key technical and policy decisions related to the ERP.**

The current ERP will conclude in mid-2021. With guidance from the Steering Committee and Secretariat, specific actions can be outlined and

implemented in phases, for the remainder of the ERP, to encourage the involvement of senior officials. Ideally, in the short term, this will involve continuation of external financial support for the Secretariat, while in the medium to long term a transition plan will be needed to allow MoES departments to assume full responsibility.

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## **Recommendation 2: Leverage MoES leadership to improve coordination and strengthen accountability among partners to better align their funding and activities under the ERP.**

ERP coordination can be strengthened by increasing the accountability of partners to align their activities with the objectives and activities of the ERP at both the national and district levels. MoES leadership can 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. Continual commitment to and communication about the ERP from senior officials across all relevant MoES departments can strengthen key messages regarding implementation.

## **Recommendation 3: Enhance district local government capacity to coordinate and monitor ERP partners working in their catchment area.**

Findings suggest that the best delivery modality for the ERP is a decentralised district mechanism spearheaded by local government officials and NGO partners working with refugees. To strengthen districts, capacity-building activities can be carried out to improve data collection and management, budgeting, and expenditure tracking for education

activities targeting refugees. Empowering local officials to operationalise their district ERPs will strengthen planning and implementation and promote accountability. Donors can prioritise providing technical support to districts.

## **Recommendation 4: Future plans targeting refugee education should prioritise district-level planning and budgeting from the start to ensure effective service delivery.**

Future iterations of national plans catering to refugee education should start with a broad national framework, followed by district-level planning to identify and contextualise local needs, costs, and gaps in service delivery. These plans should be incorporated back into the overall education sector plan to ensure alignment between interventions and costs.

### **About Maintains**

Maintains is a five-year (2018–2023) operational research programme 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.

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