

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

Financing of 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 financing of the ERP.

The Maintains research explored the ERP's financing needs and mechanisms; whether the plan has influenced national education financing for refugees and host communities; and the role of districts in generating financing for ERP activities. 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

One of the aims of the ERP is to coordinate and mobilise financing for delivery of the activities to improve learning outcomes for refugee and host community children, which contribute to the objectives of improving access, quality, and system strengthening.

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

The total ERP cost represents a sub-set of the potential needs of refugee and host community children. Although this financing was earmarked for priority activities and communities and considered a realistic expectation of what could be raised and delivered under the plan, the full amount had not been secured two years into the plan's implementation.

ERP stakeholders recognise that the needs are not static, and in fact have been growing since the ERP was developed in 2017. The scale of the crisis was unforeseen, and as the number of refugees keeps increasing, it is hard for Uganda to provide enough resources to address the needs and meet the real costs of service delivery.

Although there is clear agreement on the plan's underfunding, the actual amount raised toward the ERP to date is difficult to track. Spending on refugee activities is interlinked with other national and district financing from partners and donors unrelated to the ERP, making it difficult to separate out and quantify specific activities only for the plan across various budgets.¹

Finding 2: Government funding toward 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 refugee education services within existing government systems and formally coding settlement schools are identified as critical to helping them access government funds. Partners state that these funds could go directly to schools as capitation grants, allowing the hiring of additional teachers under the government wage bill, and improving district access to operational expenses for coordination and monitoring. This, however, may come at a notable cost to government.

Finding 3: The presence of the ERP was an enabling factor for securing funds from other donors, which together account for approximately US\$ 40.7 million – 11% of the ERP's costs. Still, the plan is seen as having had little impact on improving total funding for ERP activities.

Many NGOs have successfully secured funds to implement ERP activities directly, with some expanding their coverage to include refugees and using the plan to lobby for funds. Although the success of this is not yet known, with 80 NGOs working in the Education in Emergencies Sector Working Group (EiESWG), it is felt to be a worthwhile strategy.

However, most stakeholders do not believe the plan itself was a critical factor in acquiring resources for refugee education, beyond those that would have come in regardless from donors like the European Union and World Bank.²

It is unclear whether the ERP has contributed to more aligned financing across donors. Funders do not channel resources through a pooled fund or through the government, as the plan had intended. Resultantly, government officials are left feeling side-lined from spending decisions.

EiESWG members feel that funds for refugees have not generally increased and that donors have actually reduced funding since the start of the response in 2013, as there is less interest in supporting the ERP now. While this is not entirely corroborated by financial data, the reported gaps in financing are an indication that it has been difficult to confirm the large sums required to fully implement the ERP.

¹ Short-term technical assistance, supported by Maintains, captured and documented this information in a financial tracking database for the ERP Secretariat following completion of this report.

² It is possible that some efforts and successes were either not known about or not considered substantial by the partners interviewed for this research. The EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) has five projects aimed at supporting refugees in Uganda. The World Bank's Secondary Education Expansion Project has not started yet.

Who spends what on the ERP?

The ERP is broadly implemented by three types of actor:

- 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.
- Education Development Partners (EDPs) – who may implement themselves or work through other organisations.

In turn, the ERP is funded from 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, Ministry of Education and Sport (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.

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.

The refugee influx is a protracted crisis, rather than a short-term emergency. Many ERP stakeholders want funding for refugee education to shift from humanitarian to development financing, as longer-term planning and budgetary commitments are needed to offer ongoing, targeted support to refugees and host communities. More flexibility to realign funding allocations with emerging priorities and critical system inputs would help ensure the success of the plan.

The ERP Steering Committee is meant to lead efforts to mobilise resources for the ERP, but members are often not clear on their own responsibilities, and efforts have been slow-moving up to now. A number of Steering Committee members recognise that the ERP is a fundraising plan, but there are differing views on who is responsible for doing the actual fundraising – national and district government officials, or education development partners.

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 responsibilities for coordination of grants and district ERP resource mobilisation. Supporting local officials to succeed in these tasks will help secure more adequate and efficient financing through the efforts of people on the ground, and should be a priority when developing any subsequent phase of the ERP.

One of the major challenges is that, although the ERP was 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 made clear in the plan itself, their recently developed district ERPs are disjointed from the ERP in terms of priorities and costs, and they are said to struggle to capture information from partners working in their jurisdictions.

Adequate coordination and local leadership are likely to be necessary preconditions to districts being able to track funding received and the funding gap, as well as for mobilising resources to fill them.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Review refugee population and enrolment data to assess the accuracy of the ERP's projected targets and costs.

It is important to examine how precise refugee enrolment and population projections were in the ERP, and the extent to which the targets are still meaningful in making projections about reach and cost. 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 current refugee enrolment data.

Recommendation 2: Utilise current population data on refugees to revise the ERP costing model against key activities and priorities.

Revising the ERP costing model would provide a current, amended estimate for meeting the ERP's targets in all refugee-hosting districts. As advised by the Steering Committee, this estimate should be compared with the current costing model and against the costs proposed for implementing district ERPs to determine the funding required for priority actions.

Recommendation 3: Ensure the full inclusion of refugees in the national education system through planning and financing.

The Government of Uganda's open-door policy on refugees is rightly lauded. In keeping with the policy's principles, all schools with refugee children should receive government funding 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, donors, and the Office of the Prime Minister.







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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In collaboration with Oxford Policy Management, the Maintains' Uganda Education research is being implemented by Ichuli (www.ichuli.africa)



Photo: Youth Initiative for Development in Africa/ SDG Action Campaign. Youth Initiative for Development in Africa has provided early childhood education to approximately 45,000 to children living in Kyaka Refugee camp.