



Tuseme Model: Empowering Learners in Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Settings - Perspectives from Uganda



Executive Summary

Purpose of the study

This study was conducted by the Global Partnership for Education's Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (GPE/KIX) Tuseme Project to **identify key barriers and enabling factors to the effective implementation of an adapted Tuseme model in IDP and refugee settings in Uganda.**

The GPE KIX: Tuseme – A voice for internally displaced and refugee children project is a partnership between the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the Higher Education Resource Services – East Africa (HERS-EA), and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), UK.

Brief overview of Tuseme

The Tuseme model is a participatory empowerment approach that helps young people “speak out” on challenges hindering their education (Khaitisa et al 2025). Adapted by FAWE, Tuseme has enhanced the agency and confidence of learners in traditional school settings across Sub-Saharan Africa. However, its effectiveness has not been tested in refugee and IDP settings, which present unique challenges, *including limited resources, transient populations, and the complexities of cultural integration.*

Summary of key findings on enabling/disabling factors for scaling the Tuseme Model in Refugee and IDP Settings in Uganda

Enabling Factors in Refugee and IDP Settings



- The existing structure of mandated school clubs, teacher and administrative Support
- Student Motivation and Peer Support
- Community and Parental Belief in Education
- Partnerships among existing agencies and external support

Disabling Factors in Refugee and IDP Settings



- Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources
- Lack of Sustainable aid; Weak coordination among the actors
- Low Teacher Morale and Capacity: Time Constraints
- Psychosocial and Safety Issues
- Poverty and Socio-Economic Barriers
- Low Parental engagement in school activities
- Deep-seated Cultural and Gender Norms

High-level implications for refugee/IDP settings/ government policy

Scaling the Tuseme model in refugee and IDP settings directly advances Uganda’s Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) VI’s equity, quality, and gender commitments and Education Response Plan (ERP) II’s vision of inclusive national systems for refugees and host communities. However, meaningful impact depends on pairing empowerment programming with infrastructure investment, teacher support, child protection, community norm change, and sustainable public financing.



The Chief Guest, RRDO Ms. Poulina, receiving a gift from FAWE RS Deputy ED Ms. Teresa Omondi-Adeitan during the International Refugee Day in Rwamwanja, besides Ms. Rebecca Byamukama from FAWE Uganda on 20th June 2025



Call to Action: Ministry of Education and Sports & District Education Offices

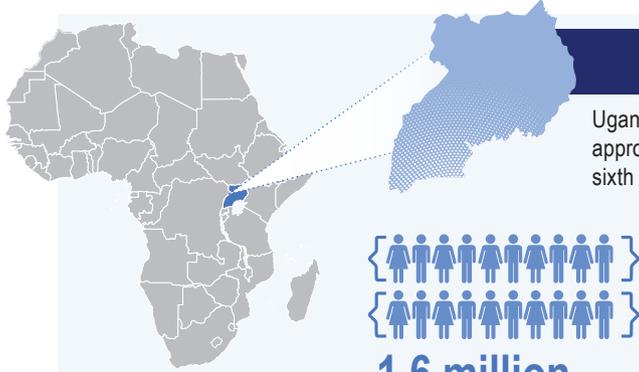
- 1 To advance Uganda's commitments under the **Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP VI)** and **Education Response Plan II (ERP II)**, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), in collaboration with District Education Offices, should institutionalize and scale the Tuseme model in refugee- and IDP-hosting schools as a core strategy for gender equity, learner empowerment, and inclusive education.
- 2 MoES should **formally integrate Tuseme into national co-curricular and life-skills programming**, accompanied by clear implementation guidelines, teacher training, and safeguarding standards tailored to displacement contexts. District Education Offices should prioritise Tuseme within school improvement plans, ensuring alignment with investments in gender-responsive infrastructure, teacher deployment, and psychosocial support services.
- 3 Both national and district actors must **strengthen coordination with child protection, gender, and community development structures** to address early marriage, gender-based violence, and harmful gender norms that limit girls' participation and leadership. Finally, MoES should **allocate predictable public financing and embed Tuseme within sector planning and monitoring frameworks**, reducing reliance on short-term aid and ensuring sustainable impact for refugee, IDP, and host-community learners alike.



Ms. Joseline Draleru, The OPM protection focal point person leading a session during the consultation on components for adaptation on the TUSEME project in Pagirinya refugee settlement in Adjumani district on 12th November 2025. Photo by: Nancy Asibazoyo, FAWE Uganda staff

Background and Context

Uganda is among the world's largest refugee-hosting countries, accommodating approximately 1.6 million refugees and asylum seekers, ranking first in Africa and sixth globally (UNHCR, 2024; UNHCR, 2025; Figure 1).



1.6 million

Refugees and asylum seekers accommodated in Uganda, ranking first in Africa and sixth globally



60%



30%

Nearly 60% of refugees originate from South Sudan, while over 30% come from the Democratic Republic of Congo, with continued inflows driven by regional conflict and instability. (UNHCR, 2024; UNHCR, 2025).

Poorer schooling environments

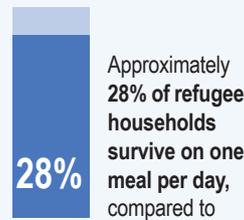


Uganda's internationally lauded **open-door refugee policy** grants prima facie refugee status and provides access to social and economic rights, including education, through integration into national systems. However, significant inequities in education access, quality, and learning conditions persist, particularly in refugee-hosting districts. **Empirical assessments indicate** that refugee learners frequently experience poorer schooling environments than host-community peers. For example, schools in refugee settlements report **pupil-teacher ratios as high as 113:1**, compared to **57:1 in non-settlement areas**, reflecting acute shortages of trained teachers and learning resources (Uwezo, 2019).

Socio-economic deprivation

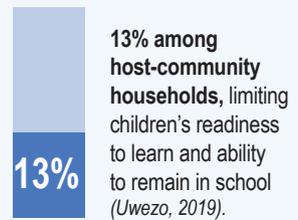


Socio-economic deprivation further undermines educational participation and learning.



28%

Approximately 28% of refugee households survive on one meal per day, compared to



13%

13% among host-community households, limiting children's readiness to learn and ability to remain in school (Uwezo, 2019).

Internal Displacement In Uganda

According to recent estimates, Uganda hosted approximately



38,000

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to disasters and nearly

5,000

due to conflict and violence by the end of 2022 (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre)

Education Response Plan for Refugees and Host Communities (ERP)



675,000

Targeted learners annually across 12 districts, prioritising teacher recruitment and deployment, school infrastructure expansion, and strengthened coordination between humanitarian and development actors (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2018;

Barriers that impede effective integration of refugee education in Uganda



lack of documentation,



language barriers,



gender-based violence affecting girls



hidden schooling costs,



limited teacher preparation for multilingual and trauma-affected classrooms,



and pervasive household poverty.

Historically, refugee education in Uganda operated through parallel delivery mechanisms. Current policy directions—aligned with global commitments—emphasise **integration into national education systems** as a pathway to sustainability, equity, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2019; UNHCR, 2023). However, multiple barriers continue to impede effective integration, including a lack of documentation, language barriers, gender-based violence affecting girls, hidden schooling costs, limited teacher preparation for multilingual and trauma-affected classrooms, and pervasive household poverty. Addressing these structural constraints is critical to ensuring inclusive, high-quality education for refugees, internally displaced learners, and host-community children alike.

Study Overview:

Overarching objective

The study aimed at identifying and analysing key socio-cultural barriers and enabling factors to the effective implementation of an adapted *Tuseme* club model in IDP and refugee communities. This study was designed to answer three key questions:

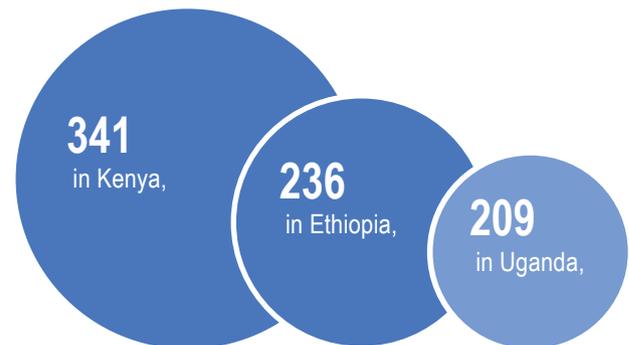


1. Can Tuseme be adapted to refugee and IDP settings?
2. What enabling factors could support its adaptation?
3. What disabling factors might hinder its effectiveness?

Below: Education Working Group meeting at Kyempango Primary School in Rwamwanja refugee settlement, Kamwenge district on 22nd May 2025. Photo by: Kapuru Kenneth, FAWE Uganda

Methodology

The study methodology comprised a multi-country (Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda) qualitative design that allowed country-specific context-sensitive insights. Data were collected using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with students, teachers, and parents and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with government officials and education stakeholders. Specifically, the research **engaged over 784 participants across the three countries**, including:



with 4 schools per country (n=12).

The four schools in Uganda comprised Pagirinya Secondary School and Arinyapi Secondary School in Adjumani District, and Rwamwanja Secondary School and Ntenungi Secondary School in Kamwenge District (*Khaita et al, 2025; FAWE, HERS-EA & ACER, 2025 a; FAWE, HERS-EA & ACER, 2025 b*).





Key Findings: Enabling and Disabling Factors

Ms Namara Susan (in a black top) from HERSEA getting feedback during the validation exercise in the boardroom of FCA in the presence of FAWE Uganda team, representatives of FAWE RS, OPM and Fin Church and other invitees during validation in Rwamwanja refugee settlement on 18th June 2025. Photo by: Ibrah Kawooya, FAWE Uganda

Enabling Factors in Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons’ (IDP) Settings (Figure 2)

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Positive School Culture: Teachers and school administrators have positive relationships, facilitating a conducive learning environment. Schools are also actively promoting gender-inclusive leadership roles, with some progress in balancing prefect roles.
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Student Motivation and Peer Support: Students are highly receptive to new opportunities and possess a strong intrinsic desire to learn, make friends, and achieve their goals. They show a clear willingness to voice their opinions and engage in club activities, with strong peer-to-peer support facilitating a collaborative environment.
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Community and Parental Belief in Education: Many parents, especially mothers, overwhelmingly believe in education as a means for their children’s self-improvement and future success. In some areas, PTAs and community
- organisations actively collaborate with schools to support student education, providing crucial resources and a positive environment for learning. They also build trust in and awareness of school-based initiatives.
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Partnerships and External Support: The schools have a history of successful collaboration with external organisations and NGOs. This provides a clear pathway for new programs to be implemented and sustained through external aid and local community donations.
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Existing Frameworks: The presence of established school clubs, even if dormant, provides a foundational framework that can be reactivated with proper support. The government’s push for school clubs and a new curriculum that values creativity and peer collaboration further supports the Tuseme model.

Disabling Factors in Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) Settings (Figure 3)

01

Inadequate Infrastructure and Resources: Schools were often overcrowded, accommodating many students beyond their capacity. Overcrowded classrooms further hinder effective teaching and learning. Schools face severe resource shortages, including a lack of essential infrastructure, classrooms, and teaching materials.

02

Sustainability of Aid: Donor aid is often sporadic, short-term, or narrowly focused. This creates a cycle of dependency where initiatives collapse once external funding ceases. There was weak coordination among schools, local leaders, and NGOs, limiting the Tuseme club's program's effectiveness.

03

Teacher Morale and Capacity: Teachers are overworked, underpaid, and often lack compensation for extracurricular involvement. This leads to low morale, high turnover and insufficient motivation for new initiatives.

04

Psychosocial and Safety Issues. Students face a range of psychological and emotional challenges, including hopelessness about the future and trauma from conflict and displacement. Ongoing ethnic conflict and safety concerns severely disrupt education, while a lack of parental and societal involvement contributes to behavioural challenges. Yet, the schools lack trained psychosocial staff, placing the burden of emotional support on overwhelmed and untrained teachers.

05

Time Constraints: Regarding establishing and managing Tuseme clubs, time constraints and the geographical location of participants posed significant challenges.

06

Socio-Economic Barriers: Poverty prevented many girls from engaging in empowerment programs. It limits many parents from being able to afford school fees and basic needs. The financial hardship forces many students into labour and is a key driver of high dropout rates and absenteeism, particularly for girls, due to a lack of sanitary pads.

07

Cultural and Gender Norms: Deep-seated cultural resistance and traditional gender roles continue to limit girls' freedom and opportunities, particularly in leadership roles. The heavy burden of household chores and practices like early marriage disproportionately affects female students and leads to high dropout rates.



Students of Rwamwanja SS performing a play to mark the International Refugee Day in Rwamwanja stadium on 20th June 2025. Photo by Ogara Collin, a FAWE Uganda staff.

Implications for Scaling the Tuseme Model to Refugee and IDP Settings in Uganda



1. Institutionalisation within the National Education System Is Essential

The presence of mandated school clubs, committed teachers, and supportive school leadership indicates that Tuseme can be institutionalised within government school structures rather than implemented as a parallel or project-based intervention. For effective scaling, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) should formally embed Tuseme within co-curricular and life-skills programming in refugee- and IDP-hosting schools, aligned with national gender and inclusion policies. Institutionalisation would reduce dependence on external actors and enhance sustainability.



2. Gender-Responsive Infrastructure Must Accompany Pedagogical Innovation

Infrastructure deficits—particularly the lack of gender-responsive sanitation, learning materials, and science facilities—pose a significant constraint to meaningful participation, especially for adolescent girls. Scaling Tuseme without parallel investment in minimum school infrastructure standards risks undermining its objectives. Government-led expansion should therefore integrate Tuseme into broader school improvement and infrastructure plans in refugee and IDP settings.



3. Teacher Capacity, Workload, and Wellbeing Require Systemic Support

Although teacher commitment emerged as a key enabling factor, low morale, time constraints, and limited training threaten implementation quality at scale. Scaling Tuseme implies the need for targeted teacher professional development, workload recognition, and psychosocial support, particularly for educators working in high-stress displacement contexts. Without this, the model risks overburdening already stretched teachers.



4. Psychosocial Protection and Safety Are Foundational, Not Optional

The prevalence of gender-based violence, trauma, and restricted mobility among displaced girls highlights that Tuseme must be implemented within safe, protective school environments. Government scaling efforts must therefore strengthen links between schools, child protection services, and referral mechanisms to ensure that empowerment activities do not inadvertently expose girls to harm.



5. Community Engagement Is Critical to Shifting Gender Norms

While parental belief in education exists, low engagement and entrenched gender norms continue to limit girls' participation and leadership. Scaling Tuseme requires structured community and parental engagement strategies, led by government and local education authorities, to address early marriage, domestic labour expectations, and resistance to girls' leadership.



6. Improved Coordination and Sustainable Financing Are Prerequisites for Scale

Weak coordination and reliance on short-term aid undermine continuity in refugee and IDP education. Government-led scaling of Tuseme necessitates stronger inter-sectoral coordination (education, gender, child protection) and predictable financing within national education budgets, complemented—but not driven—by partners.

Overall Policy Implication

Scaling the Tuseme model in refugee and IDP settings is feasible and timely, but success depends on moving beyond pilot-style implementation toward systemic integration, gender-responsive infrastructure investment, teacher support, and community norm change. Without addressing these structural constraints, Tuseme's transformative potential for displaced girls and boys will remain limited.

Recommendations for Policy Makers (Ministries of Education)

Implications for Scaling the Tuseme Model in Refugee and IDP Settings in Uganda (Aligned with Uganda's Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP VI) and Education Response Plan II (ERP II)).



Overall Policy Message

Scaling the Tuseme model in refugee and IDP settings directly advances ESDP VI's equity, quality, and gender commitments and ERP II's vision of inclusive national systems for refugees and host communities. However, meaningful impact depends on pairing empowerment programming with infrastructure investment, teacher support, child protection, community norm change, and sustainable public financing.

Policy Brief Matrix – Aligned with Uganda’s Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP)

Policy Priority Area	Key Actors	Priority Actions	Expected Outcomes
1. Institutionalisation of Tuseme	MoES (Basic & Secondary Education Departments); District Education Offices (DEOs); National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formally integrate Tuseme into national co-curricular and life-skills frameworks Issue MoES implementation guidelines for refugee and IDP contexts Embed Tuseme within School Improvement Plans (SIPs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutionalise Tuseme as a government-led intervention Reduced reliance on project-based delivery Consistent implementation across refugee, IDP, and host-community schools
2. Teacher Capacity and Support	MoES (Teacher Education & Training); DEOs; Teacher Training Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide in-service training on gender-responsive pedagogy and facilitation skills Recognise Tuseme facilitation within teacher workload planning Provide psychosocial support to teachers in displacement settings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved quality of Tuseme facilitation Increased teacher motivation and retention Enhanced learner engagement and participation
3. Gender-Responsive Infrastructure	MoES (Infrastructure Unit); DEOs; Local Governments; Development Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritise gender-responsive sanitation facilities in refugee/IDP schools Improve access to learning materials and science facilities Align Tuseme rollout with school infrastructure investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safe and inclusive learning environments for girls Increased attendance and retention of adolescent girls Reduced gender-related barriers to participation
4. Child Protection and Psychosocial Safety	MoES; Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD); DEOs; Child Protection Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish school-based safeguarding and referral mechanisms Train teachers and administrators on GBV prevention and response Strengthen linkages with community child protection services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safer spaces for girls’ voices and leadership Reduced risk of harm linked to participation Improved psychosocial well-being of learners
5. Community and Parental Engagement	DEOs; School Management Committees (SMCs); Local Leaders; MGLSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct community dialogues on girls’ education and leadership Engage parents through school forums and outreach Address early marriage and harmful gender norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased parental and community support for girls’ education Shift in attitudes toward girls’ leadership Improved school–community relations

Policy Priority Area	Key Actors	Priority Actions	Expected Outcomes
6. Coordination and Governance	MoES; Office of the Prime Minister (OPM); DEOs; Education Sector Working Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen coordination between education, gender, and protection actors • Align Tuseme implementation with ERP II coordination structures • Harmonise roles of government and partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced duplication of efforts • Improved efficiency and accountability • Coherent education response in refugee and IDP settings
7. Sustainable Financing and Monitoring	MoES (Planning & Budgeting); Ministry of Finance; DEOs; Development Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate budget lines for Tuseme within sector plans • Integrate Tuseme indicators into EMIS and monitoring frameworks • Track gender and displacement-disaggregated outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predictable financing for scale-up • Evidence-based decision-making • Demonstrated impact on girls' participation and leadership

Key:

Immediate priorities for the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) decision-making

Next Steps in the Research

The next steps in the research will comprise of 1) development of a Tuseme Adapted Model that can be implemented in refugee and IDP settings 2) Deployment of the adapted Tuseme model in target refugee and IDP schools with ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities 3) Evaluation of validity of findings and impact of the Adapted Tuseme Model and 4) Learning and dissemination of findings.

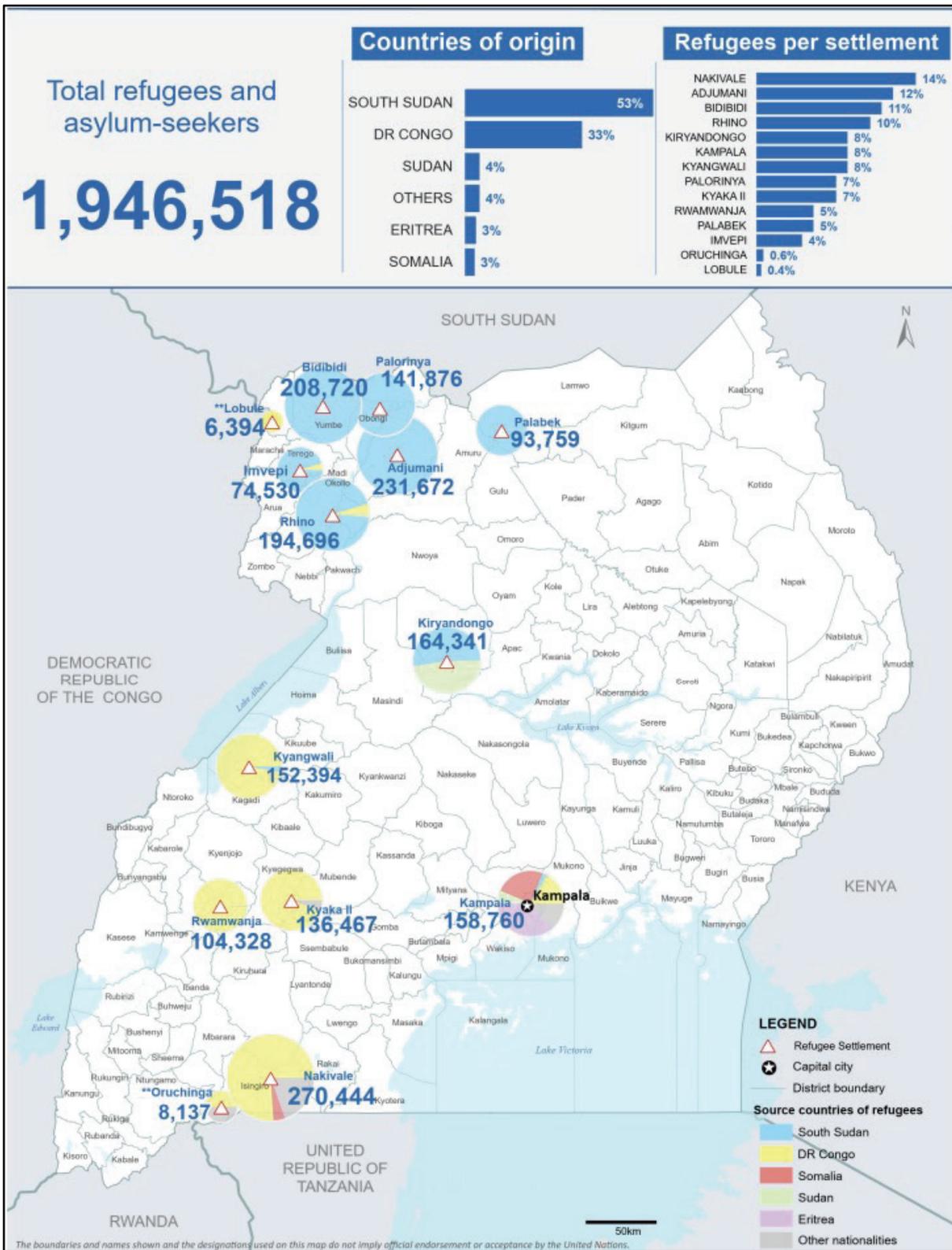


A group photo of participants during the TUSEME, GRP and COE training at the Resource Centre in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, Kamwenge district on 20th August 2025. Photo by Kwizera James, FAWE Uganda staff

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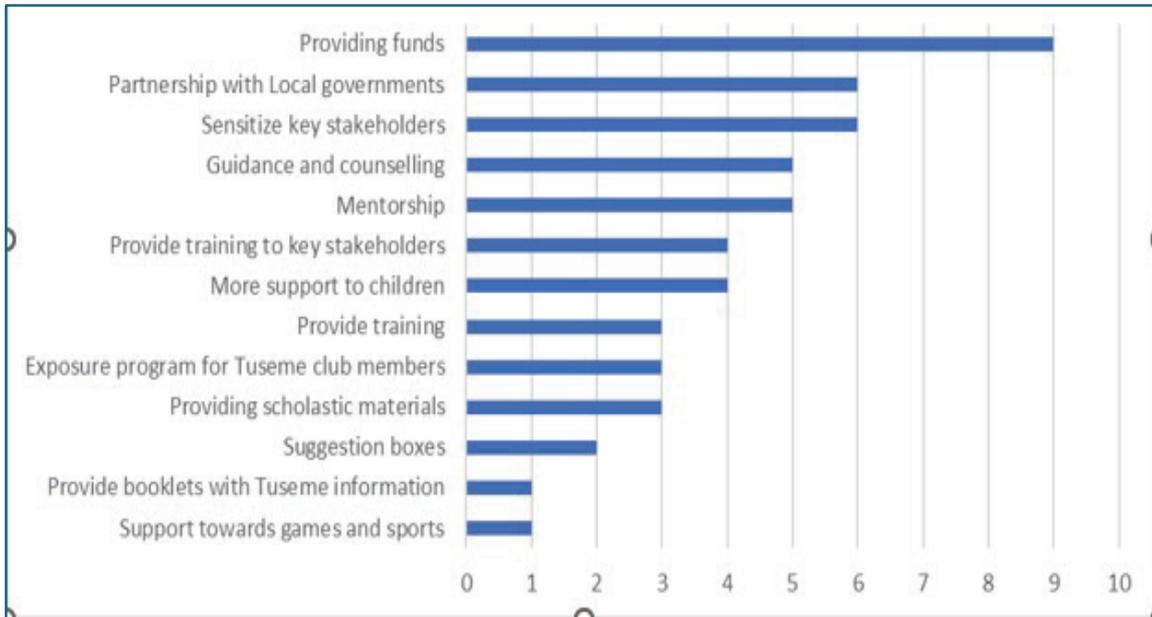
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Figure 1: Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Uganda as of 31-August 2025



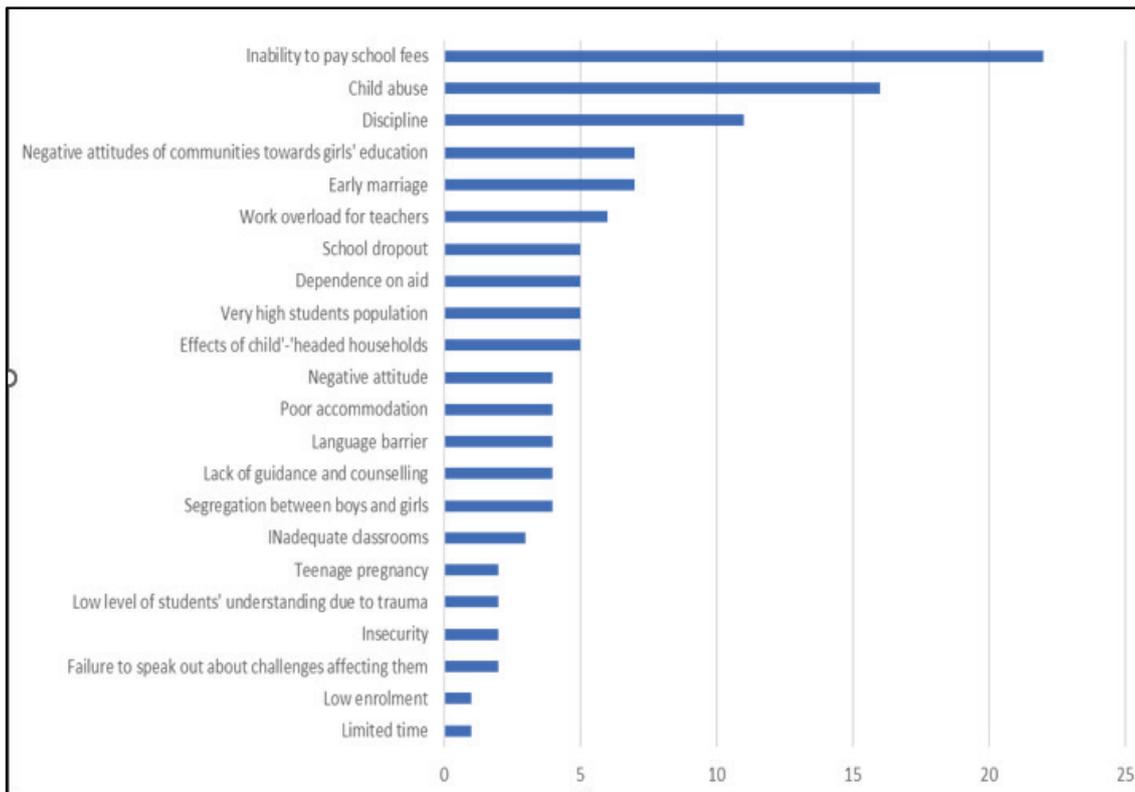
Source: UNHCR (2025). Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Uganda as of 31-August 2025. United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)

Figure 2: Opportunity areas to enhance self-esteem, leadership, social and life-skills for Learners in Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Settings in Uganda



Source: FAWE, HERS-EA, and ACER UK, (2025). GPE KIX Tuseme Phase 2 Research Report

Figure 3: School Environment Barriers to Student Participation in Tuseme Clubs in Uganda: 2025



Source: FAWE, HERS-EA, and ACER UK, (2025). GPE KIX Tuseme Phase 2 Research Report



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