



**EMPOWERING SOUTH SUDANESE
YOUTH AFFECTED BY DISPLACEMENT TO
CONTRIBUTE TO PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE
IN THEIR COMMUNITIES: PILOTING THE
YOUTH REGIONAL PEACEBUILDING
PROGRAMME IN UGANDA**

**Promising Practice
in Community-Based Protection
in Uganda**



This document is intended for general distribution. All rights reserved. Reproductions and translations are permitted, except for commercial purposes, provided the source is acknowledged.

© United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, December 2023

Cover photo: Youth mentors participating in the Regional Youth Peacebuilding Programme receive training before leading a peacebuilding workshop for their peers in Moyo, Uganda (2022).

Photo credit: © UNHCR/Grace Opicara

Title: Empowering South Sudanese youth affected by displacement to contribute to peaceful coexistence in their communities: Piloting the Youth Regional Peacebuilding Programme in Uganda

Type of practice: Emerging Practice

Programme objective: To strengthen the leadership capacity of youth to contribute to peaceful coexistence through a tailored peacebuilding curriculum and increased access to sustainable livelihoods opportunities; and to build a regional network of South Sudanese peacebuilders

Dates: 2020 to present

Population groups: Refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons and host communities

Partners: Local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs); refugee-led organizations (RLOs) and other community-based structures; local governance institutions in refugee settlements, notably the Refugee Welfare Council (RWC); the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM); and Ugandan government representatives at district level

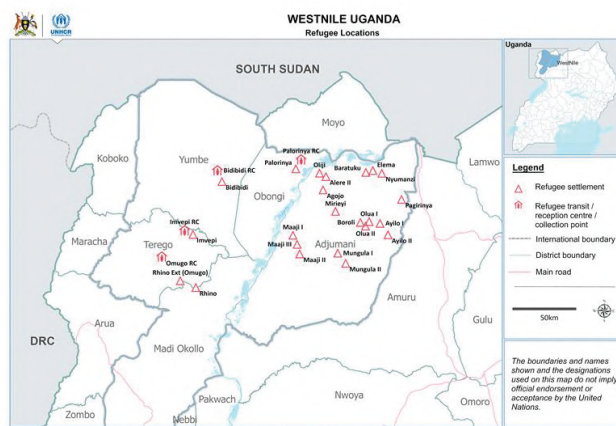
Programme overview

In 2020, UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, launched a multi-year regional youth peacebuilding programme (RYPP) targeting South Sudanese displaced persons in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan. The programme seeks to increase the leadership capacity of youth,¹ to contribute to peaceful coexistence in the communities in which they live (countries of asylum or nationality, upon return) through peacebuilding training and complementary vocational and technical skills-building interventions to promote self-reliance; and to build a sustainable regional youth network of South Sudanese peacebuilders.

While activities are ongoing in Ethiopia (Assosa and Gambella), Kenya (Kakuma refugee camp and Kalobeyei refugee settlement), Sudan (White Nile State) and Uganda (West Nile sub-region: Bidibidi in Yumbe; Rhino and Impevi in Arua; Adjumani and Palabek in Adjumani; Palorinya refugee settlement in Moyo-Obongi; and Kiryandongo), this practice draws primarily on implementation of the programme in Uganda, because the first piloting of the peacebuilding training component started there in April 2021, with other activities being rolled out fully since 2022.

¹ In line with United Nations definitions, UNHCR applies the term “youth” to those aged between 15 and 24 years old. “Young people” is a catch-all term that includes adolescents and youth. See [Applying the UNHCR age, gender, and diversity policy to youth](#)

Some 150 forcibly displaced South Sudanese young people have been trained by UNHCR as peacebuilders in Uganda, who then became mentor-trainers for their peers. Through peer-training, the youth mentor-trainers reached 2,535 young people by the end of June 2023. These mentors were also trained in mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to strengthen their own mental and emotional well-being and help other young people in their communities. With the support of existing community-based structures,² youth peacebuilders rolled out peacebuilding training for community leaders and mobilized communities for engagement in peaceful coexistence actions through youth-led dialogue sessions, radio broadcasts, sports tournaments and cultural and artistic activities. They also acted as mediators in conflicts between groups of young people and monitored and reported incidences of conflict in their communities.



The achievements and lessons learned from the Uganda experience will contribute to strengthening the RYPP model for replication regionally and globally.

Context

The South Sudanese refugee population is the largest in Africa, with 2.3 million living in camps, settlements and urban areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and Uganda by the end of 2022.³ Of these, some 915,000 individuals reside in Uganda,⁴ the country currently hosting the largest South Sudanese forcibly displaced population globally. After a decade of conflict, and despite ongoing efforts to implement the 2018 peace agreements, persisting intercommunal conflict, economic instability and major flooding continue to sustain protracted and cyclical population movements within and across South Sudan.⁵

The South Sudan situation disproportionately affects children and youth, with two out of three South Sudanese refugees being under the age of 18 and 33 per cent being between 15 and 24 years old.⁶ In addition to losing homes and family members, this population is confronted with higher risks of gender-based violence (GBV), as well as forced recruitment by armed groups, among other risks, throughout their displacement cycles. Additionally, ethnic tension and conflict from South Sudan have, from time to time, spilled over into neighbouring countries, leading to violence and discrimination among refugees and sometimes even affecting the host community. Young South Sudanese refugees have often been instrumentalized in such violence, preventing them from being able to find their place in designing and shaping a peaceful society.⁷

² These include any formal or informal groups that facilitate community participation.

³ UNHCR Global Focus. [South Sudan situation](#)

⁴ UNHCR Global Focus. [Uganda](#)

⁵ UNHCR Global Focus. [South Sudan](#)

⁶ UNHCR Global Focus. [South Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan](#)

⁷ UNHCR (n.d). Internal resource. Programme Brief: Regional Youth Peacebuilding Programme.

Despite these challenges, South Sudanese forcibly displaced young people have continued to reinforce their role as connectors and contributors by bridging social, ethnic, and geographical divides. Yet, young people are rarely the primary focus of humanitarian interventions, which tends to overshadow their unique needs, talents and capacities as a distinct group.⁸

It is within this context that country operations in the East, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes (EHAGL) region have sought ways to strengthen the agency and inclusion of displaced South Sudanese youth in collaboration with the UNHCR Regional Bureau, as part of wider efforts to ensuring age, gender and diversity (AGD) programming and accountability to affected people (AAP) as well as gender equality, in line with the [UNHCR 2018 AGD policy](#).⁹



UNHCR Field Office Adjumani staff meets with youth from a community in the Boroli Refugee Settlement. © UNHCR 2022.

⁸ See [Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to youth](#)

⁹ UNHCR EHAGL (2022). Internal resource. Operationalizing UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity policy in EHAGL region.

Programme background

Prior to the establishment of RYPP, UNHCR country operations in the EHAGL region had limited programmes targeting youth from South Sudan. Since the majority of young people were out of school and only spoke South Sudanese local languages, those who attended UNHCR-supported peacebuilding activities in the past were primarily educated male refugees with English language skills, which also reflected prevailing societal norms among South Sudanese communities.

In order to gain more information about the key issues South Sudanese youth shared across host countries in the region and guide the structuring of an inclusive peacebuilding programme model, UNHCR conducted a field study in 2019 under the Prospects Partnership Project.¹⁰ The research revealed that South Sudanese youth displayed significantly higher levels of mental and psychological distress than fellow nationals in other age groups. It also highlighted how the lack of access to educational and economic opportunities, which varied significantly across locations of displacement, resulted in increased grievances and levels of alcohol and substance use, often leading to fighting between and within youth groups. In addition, local approaches to conflict resolution in refugee camps and settlements seemed inadequate because they tended to be dominated by community tribal elders and community leaders who often did not include key disempowered populations such as out-of-school youth and/or young women and girls.¹¹

The research also found that despite these difficulties, refugee youth from South Sudan longed for a peaceful environment and a change in their lives, which could be capitalized to engage

them to participate in a peacebuilding programme. Following this research, UNHCR embarked on a consultative process to learn about what works in peacebuilding, social cohesion, reconciliation and youth programming. Valuable lessons were drawn from the experience of the Danish Demining Group (DDG), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), United Nations (UN) agencies and Oxfam, among others, working in the field.¹²

Based on the above-mentioned findings and consultations, the programme design was structured particularly to empower those who are often side-lined from playing a role in leading change, including young mothers, out-of-school young people, women and girl leaders, members of marginalized ethnicities and those without English language skills. The key objective was to implement tailored peacebuilding curricula and skills-building interventions aimed at boosting self-sufficiency and psychological well-being.

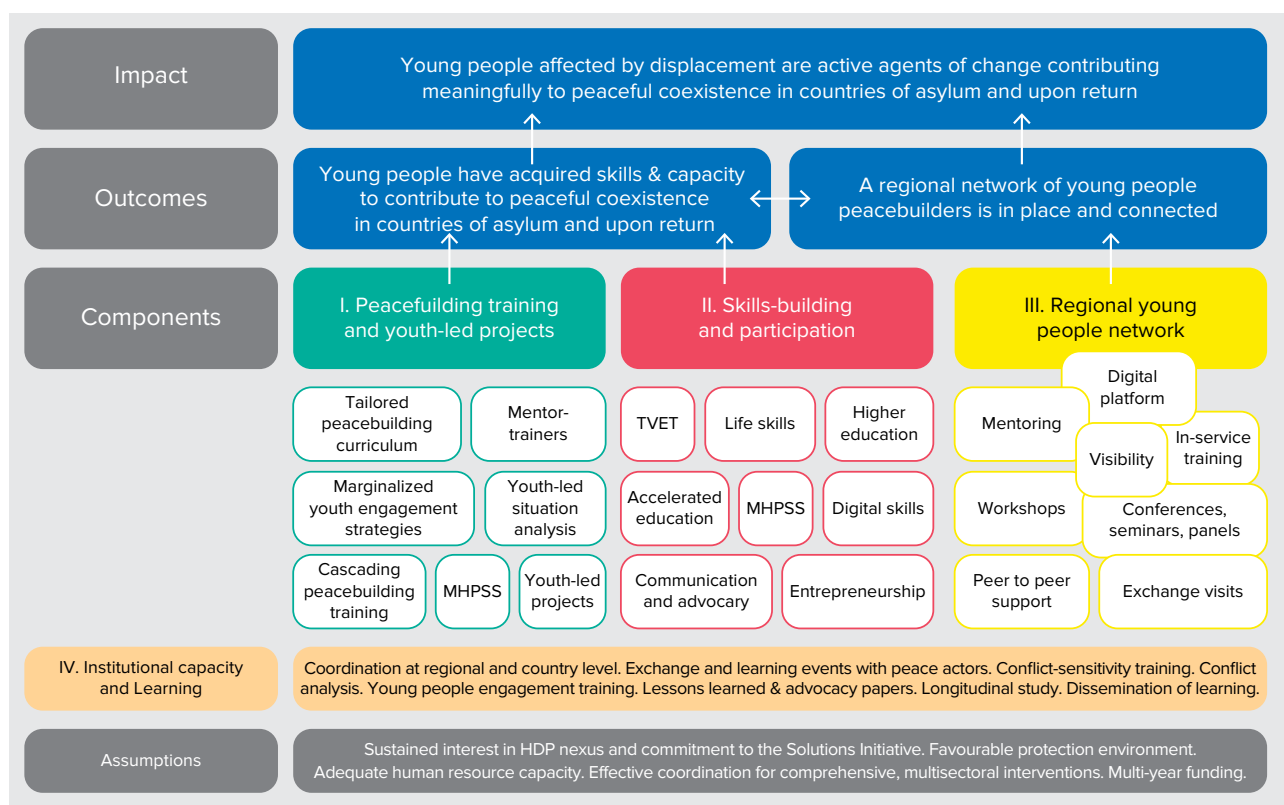
The following chart offers an overview of the resulting programme model and the main components for each of its three main pillars, which include: (i) training and youth-led activities, (ii) skills-building interventions; and (iii) a regional youth network:

While the peacebuilding training component is uniform across locations, complementary skills-building activities to boost self-sufficiency and inclusion are contextually codesigned with the young people, through a participatory methodology, to meet their needs; e.g. access to scholarships, technical and vocational training and livelihoods opportunities. Therefore,

¹⁰ The Partnership for improving prospects for forcibly displaced persons and host communities (PROSPECTS) is a multi-year programme (2019–2023) spearheaded by the Government of the Netherlands, which seeks to facilitate transitioning from humanitarian to development-centred assistance in response to forced displacement crises by involving several actors in a result-based and country-led approach. More information available at: <https://www.ilo.org/global/programmes-and-projects/prospects/lang-en/index.htm>

¹¹ Sommers (2019). South Sudanese Refugee Youth and the Peacebuilding Context in East Africa. Report of 2019 Scoping Missions to Kenya, South Sudan, Uganda and Ethiopia.

¹² UNHCR (n.d). Internal resource. Programme Brief: Regional Youth Peacebuilding Programme.



Source: UNHCR EHAGL. Programme Brief RYPP.

complementary activities vary between locations, depending on the priorities, resources and conditions at each refugee settlement.

The RYPP model is based on a **cascade approach to peacebuilding training**, which relies on the selection of youth mentor-trainers who receive instruction together in a training of trainers and then return to their settlements to pass on their knowledge to their peers and communities. In this way, programme participants provide refugees and host community members of various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds with tools to manage conflict and promote peaceful coexistence among and between communities.¹³ Taking into consideration the high levels of psychosocial distress displayed by South Sudanese refugees, including some instances of increased risk of suicide,¹⁴ training on MHPSS guidelines, tools¹⁵ and referrals to appropriate service providers is also an essential component that has been integrated into the programme.

Prior to the launch of activities by UNHCR in Uganda in 2021, field offices mapped the agencies and organizations (governmental and non-governmental) implementing programmes targeting youth and/or focusing on peacebuilding and local coexistence through community participation, approaching them to present the programme and explore opportunities for complementary efforts.

In December 2021, UNHCR organized a regional coordination meeting with RYPP staff across the four countries covered by the programme. The main purpose was for the operations to discuss and develop annual workplans and budgets to guide activities for 2022, taking into consideration that by then most of the mentor-trainers in Uganda had been trained and were getting ready to replicate the trainings in their communities. Acknowledging that transforming the way communities deal with conflict takes time, the programme takes a **long-term approach to engaging with the same population**. Starting in

¹³ See the [UNHCR Youth Report 2020–2022](#). Working with and for Youth in Situations of Forced Displacement (pp. 74-77).

¹⁴ UNHCR (2020). [Suicides on the rise among South Sudanese refugees in Uganda](#).

¹⁵ This component of the programme is addressed in Activity 7 of this document. The trainings are based on the World Health Organization publication *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress and Self-Help plus strategies*.

2023, a smaller cohort of programme participants will be followed over 15 years with continuous or repeated monitoring (a longitudinal study) to capture their aspirations and practices, reflecting how these change over time. As part of the

process, the programme seeks to strengthen the capacity of UNHCR staff to conduct conflict analysis and to process feedback from participants to measure the impact of the programme components accordingly.

Resources and partnerships

The RYPP was partly funded by the Government of Denmark. It is currently funded by the European Union's Directorate General for International Partnerships (EU-INTPA) as part of the Sudan and South Sudan Solutions Initiative. The Government of the Netherlands also supports the programme under the Prospects Partnership (Opportunity Fund). The estimated budget for implementation of RYPP activities in Uganda in 2022 was \$531,444.

UNHCR Uganda community-based protection staff oversee implementation of the programme, acting as RYPP focal points at the four sites at which the programme is rolled out, namely:

- Arua Sub-office, covering mostly activities at Rhino and Imvepi refugee settlements;
- Yumbe Sub-office, for the Bidibidi refugee settlement;
- Moyo Sub-office, for the Palorinya refugee settlement; and
- Adjumani Sub-office, for the Adjumani and Palabek refugee settlements.

UNHCR RYPP focal points guide and monitor the youth-led activities implemented as part of the programme, holding frequent coordination meetings with the mentor-trainers. Implementation of the activities involves close collaboration with several actors, including national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), refugee-led organizations (RLOs), other community-based structures at settlement level, partner United

Nations agencies and governmental actors. There are some variations depending on the programme's components and the contextual conditions and stakeholders present at each site.

NGO partners with a presence **in the refugee settlements** include the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) at the Adjumani, Palabek and Palorinya settlements; the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Bidibidi; the **RLO** Community Technology Empowerment Network (CTEN), and the **community-based organization (CBO)** Hope Foundation at the Rhino and Imvepi settlements. These partners have supported activities in various capacities, including facilitating some of the peacebuilding, protection and digital skills-building **training sessions**, as well as supporting the organization of community dialogues and youth-led recreational and artistic activities. Other **international NGO partners supporting specific components** of the programme include Health Rights International, for the delivery of MHPSS training, and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) for the longitudinal research study.

Members of **Refugee Welfare Councils (RWC)**, the local governance structure at each refugee settlement, whose members are elected by the communities, also collaborate with UNHCR, inter alia, by engaging young people in community outreach and supporting the organization of youth-led peaceful coexistence activities. In addition, implementation of RYPP relies on enhanced collaboration between UNHCR and the **Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)** and Ugandan **government representatives at district level in the main refugee-hosting areas**.

➤ Process and activities



COMPONENT I: PEACEBUILDING TRAINING AND YOUTH-LED ACTIONS



1 DEVELOPMENT OF PEACEBUILDING TRAINING MATERIALS AND TOOLKIT

In 2020, UNHCR developed the [Youth Peacebuilding Training Manual](#) containing key skills and concepts in peacebuilding and conflict resolution and a step-by-step guide for facilitators on how to share and apply these techniques with young people.¹⁶ The

manual was developed alongside a [Youth Peacebuilding Toolkit](#), with additional activities for engagement during the modules or after they have been completed. The package was tested and adjusted based on consultations and feedback received during initial trainings.



2 SELECTION, TRAINING AND ONBOARDING OF MENTOR-TRAINERS

Each UNHCR sub-office implementing RYPP in Uganda developed its own process for the selection of mentor-trainers, seeking a diverse composition in terms of gender, ethnicity, education level and language skills, in keeping with the programme's focus on inclusion. The sub-offices advertised the mentor-trainers' position requirements across various settlements, in collaboration with NGO partners and community structures. These community groups also played an important role in the selection process, inter alia, by issuing letters of recommendation for applicants,¹⁷ confirming the accuracy of the information provided and participating in selection interviews.

UNHCR organized a one-week peacebuilding training for each cohort of selected mentor-trainers per location, with the first training taking place in Arua at the end of April 2021. The trainings

were facilitated by a consultant in collaboration with UNHCR and NGO partners' staff, following the content and methodology contained in the youth peacebuilding training manual.



Youth mentors from Bidibidi refugee settlement attending the first training of trainers organized by UNHCR in 2021.
© UNHCR/Allen Kisira

¹⁶ The manual includes seven modules on the following topics: i) introduction; ii) Who Am I? Understanding mental health and psycho-social well-being; iii) How do I see the world? Understanding and managing perceptions; iv) Effective communication for peacebuilding; v) Engaging in peacebuilding in my community; vi) Problem solving with others; vii) Peer-education facilitation techniques and grounding of training.

¹⁷ In Palabek, for instance, the Refugee Welfare Council issued letters of recommendation for applicants to confirm their residency status in the district area.

As part of the onboarding activities, mentor-trainers also received security briefings and were introduced to protection topics including, inter alia: protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), child protection, community-based protection (CBP), AGD mainstreaming, GBV prevention and response, and referral mechanisms. Additionally, UNHCR organized refresher trainings on peacebuilding and protection issues at each location, which were contextualized to the training needs of the group based on consultations with the mentor-trainers.

Mentor-trainers, in close collaboration with the UNHCR RYPP focal points for each refugee

settlement, developed workplans outlining the main activities to be implemented in the communities. To support their work, UNHCR provided RYPP mentor-trainers with identity cards, visibility materials, megaphones, rain gear, stationery for the delivery of training sessions and community dialogues. The operation also arranged for mobile data bundles so that they could have permanent access to the UNHCR RYPP focal points, as well as WhatsApp groups and social media platforms for community outreach. To address transportation challenges, some sub-offices also provided mentor-trainers with bicycles.

3 CASCADING OF PEACEBUILDING TRAINING

Mentor-trainers organized peacebuilding training for youth groups and community leaders using the RYPP peacebuilding training manual and toolkit. For this activity, mentor-trainers were divided into pairs, with each group covering predetermined zones of a given settlement.

To select youth participants, UNHCR encouraged mentor-trainers to liaise with community leaders and community structures to nominate refugees and members of host communities who were motivated and trusted by their communities and promoted the inclusion of women and youth from different backgrounds.

Upon completion of their peacebuilding training, the youth leaders become peace ambassadors who help mobilize communities for collective action on peaceful coexistence through dialogue sessions, radio broadcasts, cultural activities and sports equipment and tournaments (described in Activity 6).

Mentor-trainers also organized peacebuilding training sessions for community leaders, including female leaders within existing community structures

and religious and cultural leaders. These sessions contributed to building capacities, dialogue and consensus among various leaders playing a key role in sustaining community engagement in peacebuilding efforts.

As part of the methodology applied in these peacebuilding training workshops with youth leaders and community leaders, mentor-trainers collected and systematized information on the main impeding factors to peaceful coexistence in the communities, based on rankings and recommendations provided by training participants using a mobile data collection tool.¹⁸



Two youth mentors drafting their workplans during a peacebuilding training in Uganda (2023). © UNHCR/Joel Obeta

¹⁸ Currently, UNHCR uses KoBo, a free open-source tool for mobile data collection initiatives around the world.

4

MARGINALIZED YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Mentor-trainers and youth leaders who participated in the peacebuilding trainings organized awareness-raising sessions and group discussions for young people facing marginalization and exclusion in their communities due to alcohol and substance abuse, joining gangs, being excluded from schools and other such factors. The purpose of these support spaces is to enhance the capacity of marginalized young people to deal with personal and social-related conflicts through non-violent conflict prevention and

resolution techniques, and to engage them to participate in youth-led peaceful coexistence activities to promote their integration into the communities.

To complement these efforts, mentor-trainers in Adjumani and Palabek engaged in mediation and alternative peaceful dispute settlement mechanisms activities for youth groups, including collaboration with peace clubs at elementary and secondary schools to sensitize students involved in violent strikes.¹⁹

5

YOUTH-LED SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS AND CONFLICT MAPPING

Mentor-trainers conducted mapping of conflict-related incidents taking place at the refugee settlements and created periodic situational analysis reports that were shared through the UNHCR operational data portal.²⁰

Information is gathered through a wide range of sources, including incidents reported by community members through community-based structures, the Refugee Welfare Council, the local police, United Nations agencies, NGOs and the Office of the Prime Minister. In collaboration with UNHCR staff, mapped incidents are classified by categories, including child protection, gender-based violence, crime, MHPSS, disputes at

community and household levels and accidents related to road safety and climate conditions. It is then uploaded to the internal KoBo Toolbox data collection tool for further analysis.²¹

Youth-led conflict monitoring and mapping has contributed to the identification and protection of refugees at heightened risk in communities, allowing youth leaders and the community at large to propose conflict mitigation and prevention measures based on the violence indicators collected. Building on the experience of implementation of these activities in Arua and Moyo in 2022, mapping is also currently being rolled-out in Yumbe and Adjumani.

¹⁹ UNHCR Sub-office Adjumani (n.d). Internal resource. RYPP Annual Report 2022.

²⁰ See some examples at: [Document - Uganda Refugee Response: Arua Settlements Conflict Mapping Report, July 2022 \(unhcr.org\)](#) and [Document – Uganda Refugee Response: Palorinya Settlement Incident Report, Q4 2022 \(unhcr.org\)](#)

²¹ The standard Uganda conflict mapping tool is available at: <https://enketo.unhcr.org/x/1JfWVLwS>

6

SUPPORTING YOUTH-LED PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE INITIATIVES

UNHCR provided material and logistical support for the development of youth-led peaceful coexistence activities, including distribution of soccer balls, nets, medals and trophies for sports tournaments and materials for making masks, customs and posters for cultural events. To promote social cohesion and local integration, team members competing in

tournaments were mixed to ensure the inclusion of women, ethnic minority groups and youth from host communities. Most of these activities were implemented in collaboration with NGO partners and community groups, who helped to disseminate information about the activities through their social networks and contributed additional material or financial resources.



COMPONENT II: SKILLS-BUILDING AND PARTICIPATION

7

MHPSS TRAINING MAINSTREAMING

UNHCR forged a partnership with the organization Health Rights International for the development of workshops on the World Health Organization's Doing What Matters in Times of Stress and Self-Help Plus strategies on MHPSS for RYPP participants. As a result of this collaboration, mentor-trainers, UNHCR staff and selected members of the Refugee Welfare Council were trained on these topics at each of the four locations at which the programme was rolled out.

Since one of the key objectives of the training was to provide youth peacebuilders with skills in psychosocial first aid to help other young people in the community cope with stress and trauma, UNHCR engaged and supported mentor-

trainers to cascade MHPSS trainings across refugee settlements. In addition, mentor-trainers organized peer-to-peer support group sessions with youth found to be in need of more focused psychological care.



Young peacebuilders participating in a mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) workshop in Adjumani in 2022.
© UNHCR/Joel Obeta

8

CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING TO PROMOTE ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND LIVELIHOODS OPPORTUNITIES

UNHCR mapped and established partnerships with local and international NGOs, United Nations agencies and community-based organizations working with youth in vocational training, entrepreneurship and digital learning, as well as scholarship and internship opportunities,

promoting the inclusion of youth refugees in these initiatives. Furthermore, each sub-office overseeing implementation of RYPP supported capacity-building workshops for youth enrolled in RYPP in thematic areas relevant to the specific context and training gaps identified in each settlement.



COMPONENT III: YOUTH-LED REGIONAL NETWORK

9

ESTABLISHING A SOUTH SUDANESE YOUTH-LED NETWORK IN UGANDA

The RYPP programme envisions the creation of youth networks at host country level, which will then be connected across the region to form a regional platform. The main objective behind these networks is to create spaces in which young people can share opportunities, ideas and experiences as peacebuilders and collaborate to disseminate and replicate best practices and recommendations through

peer-to-peer support and participation in global forums. For Uganda, UNHCR created a confidential database with profiles of youth that have been reached through the programme. Given the youth-led nature of the platforms, participants have developed their own mechanisms to stay connected, mainly through WhatsApp groups and social media platforms at field and national levels.

10

YOUTH LEADERSHIP, ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC SPEAKING TRAINING WORKSHOPS

In 2022, UNHCR, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and supported by the Prospects Partnership, launched a six-month online training package: Refugee youth leadership, advocacy and public speaking, which was intended for young peacebuilders and youth leaders in Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan and Sudan. Of the 64 selected participants, 21 were based in

Uganda and were given data bundles to ensure that they could access the Internet from their settlements.

Once the training was complete, a selected number of representatives from each location was invited to attend a regional youth conference in Nairobi, Kenya, to exchange experiences and connect with other young people and peacebuilding experts at regional level.



The winning team receiving their trophy during the Sports for Peace tournament in Imvepi settlement. © UNHCR/Abur Wanda

Participation and accountability

RYPP has been developed through a participatory process, involving South Sudanese youth at all stages of the programme cycle. In addition to the feedback provided by programme participants during post-training surveys, UNHCR RYPP focal points in Uganda held regular coordination meetings with mentor-trainers to monitor progress and address challenges encountered in implementation of the activities. UNHCR focal points also remained connected with mentor-trainers and youth leaders in the communities through WhatsApp groups, which served to share activity reports and enabled participants to raise questions and concerns. Moreover, RYPP focal points at sub-office level share monthly reports with the office in Kampala and the EHAGL Regional Bureau, concerning gaps and concerns in relation to the programme, by way of further guidance. The

[Inter-Agency Feedback Referral and Resolution Mechanism \(FRRM\)](#) helpline also contributed to ensuring that UNHCR and its partners were better placed to identify needs and respond to youth refugee feedback and complaints in a timely manner.

In order to promote implementation of the UNHCR age, gender and diversity approach, mentor-trainers and youth leaders were trained and constantly briefed and reminded to apply AGD and accountability to affected people (AAP) guidelines during introductory meetings with communities, as well as in coordination and capacity-building sessions, inter alia. Furthermore, in 2022, support packages on AGD principles were delivered to community leaders to support awareness-raising sessions with their communities, including in emergency-affected areas.²²

Achievements, results and impact

By the end of June 2023, a total of 150 youth mentors, including 70 women, had been trained and supported by UNHCR as peacebuilders in their communities across Uganda. They went on to identify and train 2,535 youth across the four sites at which the programme is being implemented. The following table provides an overview of the number of mentors and youth reached by location:

Refugee youth reached by RYPP in Uganda (April 2021 to June 2023)

Site	Mentor-trainers	Youth reached in cascades
Arua (Rhino and Imvepi camps)	66	937
Bidibidi (Yumbe)	32	405
Adjumani	30	193
Moyo	22	1,000
TOTALS	150	2,535

Additionally, all mentor-trainers received training in MHPSS to strengthen their own mental and psycho-social well-being and help other youth in their communities. Mentor-trainers, supported by community groups, have also trained refugee leaders and host community leaders on conflict prevention, management and response as well as alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

Based on self-assessment surveys completed before and after the peacebuilding training sessions, the programme has been successful in **equipping young South Sudanese refugees with conflict analysis and resolution tools to contribute to peaceful coexistence in their communities**, as well as in boosting their

²² The support packages contained Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous (SASA) materials, including posters and comics, as well as information about the UNHCR AGD Policy and questions concerning the provision of support for women's empowerment, people with disabilities and minority groups.

confidence in their ability to mobilize and train other young people in peacebuilding.²³ They have also been able to demonstrate these capacities by successfully replicating the training sessions with their peers and community leaders, while earning their trust and recognition.

The programme has also **contributed to uniting young South Sudanese refugees in Uganda**, as participants from various ethnic groups (and clans and sub-clans) that are in conflict within South Sudan and across borders reflect together about the sources of conflict and how they play a major role in standing together to overcome them. Participants experienced first-hand how they could forge friendships and collaborate towards achieving common goals and how this could also be achieved at a broader societal level.

Furthermore, the profile and contact information of youth identified and trained through the RYPP process are being added to a confidential database enabling UNHCR to reach them with information on social, capacity-building and livelihoods opportunities and to help them stay connected through digital platforms. These are all considered **important steps towards the consolidation of a national refugee youth network in Uganda**, which is also being connected with other youth networks at regional level.

Across all RYPP implementation sites, **youth demonstrated their role as connectors and multipliers**, reaching out to other young people and the wider communities to share information, develop skills, and promote social cohesion. Through youth-led conflict mediation and awareness-raising sessions on peaceful coexistence, excluded groups also played a significant role in preventing and managing violence. In addition, they promoted local

integration within and across refugee and host communities by **mobilizing young people, their families and relevant local authorities to participate in and support youth-led social events**, including sports tournaments and commemorations of important dates linked to peace and human rights.



South Sudanese refugees dancing during a youth-led cultural gala in Bidibidi refugee settlement (2023). © UNHCR/Moses Musisi

By engaging youth in conflict incidence mapping, the programme has contributed to **the development of a UNHCR-managed conflict tracking tool** which produces situational reports and supports the identification of refugees at heightened protection risk. In addition, conflict data trends and situational reports are shared with community structures, local police and other relevant humanitarian actors leading to further collaboration among these actors to find joint solutions and **give more visibility to young people as key actors in peacebuilding processes**.

Implementation of the programme has also contributed to **mainstreaming peacebuilding across the humanitarian response in Uganda**, by promoting stronger links and improved information-sharing between a wide range of actors implementing youth and peacebuilding initiatives and strengthening the peacebuilding capacity of community-based structures.

²³ UNHCR Uganda. Internal resource. RYPP training of trainers reports.

Lessons



ENABLING FACTORS

- 💡 **Recognizing youth as a bridging factor between different generations:** young people play an important role in bringing together different generations within communities. They possess an understanding of community traditions and fresh ideas on how individuals across different age groups can better interact with one another and contribute to the maintenance of positive community relations among diverse groups.
- 💡 Working with youth based on their country of origin rather than the country of asylum ensures that tools are contextualized to the experience of all young people from the same country: common tools and a common language for speaking about conflict resolution help young women and men affected by displacements (re)integrate and rebuild social cohesion upon their return.
- 💡 Having a **common peacebuilding training methodology and learning materials that are easy to use** leads to more engaging learning environments.
- 💡 **NGO partners' knowledge of communities:** NGO partners have been working with communities for several years, so they understand the social dynamics of their members and how to earn their trust. This knowledge proved to be key to ensuring smooth implementation of the process among the youth involved.
- 💡 **Strong stakeholder buy-in:** community leaders, NGO partners, other United Nations agencies and local authorities are actively involved in youth-led activities conducted under RYPP and support mobilization of

the community through their networks, creating a very positive environment for individuals and groups engaging in this initiative. Furthermore, since some other United Nations agencies and NGO partners are supporting other peaceful coexistence projects, they have collaborated more directly in organizing certain events, such as the youth-led cultural galas, contributing material or financial resources to support the activities.

- 💡 **Pre-existing youth groups:** young members of the community had different forms of community structures before the programme began, which made it easier to build on these community groups to develop the programme.
- 💡 **Coordination among peacebuilding youth workers has been key:** UNHCR worked closely with other agencies with youth-centred expertise and activities. A coordination platform²⁴ was created to keep relevant stakeholders abreast of progress made in the field and to identify potential solutions to the challenges that emerged throughout the process. Good internal **coordination between UNHCR regional, country and field offices implementing the peacebuilding initiatives** was also important in order to ensure consistency across various locations at which the programme was being implemented. This coordination space also served to share information and help UNHCR staff learn from each other, as lessons learned were identified and shared as the process unfolded.

²⁴ Coordination among agencies occurs at the general protection and legal sub-sector meetings.

- 💡 **Language skills within communities:** identifying community members proficient in English and local languages made it possible to translate some of the peacebuilding learning and communication materials, ensuring effective communication to the various language groups in the community.
- 💡 **Peacebuilding as a cross-cutting issue:** mainstreaming peacebuilding issues across the humanitarian response helps to mitigate the risks of tensions and conflicts that may arise in other sectors, such as WASH or Shelter.



ADVERSE FACTORS AND CONSTRAINTS

- **Reduced livelihood opportunities for the refugee population hinders participation in the programme:** the lack of livelihood opportunities in communities remain a central concern for youth and their families in the settlements affecting their participation in some of the activities, as they often have other pressing issues to address. Although RYPP is built upon the premise that training alone does not lead to peaceful societies, resources for livelihood projects and vocational training remain scarce.
- **Staying connected with a growing number of participants:** as the number of young people participating in the peacebuilding programme increases, operations find it hard to maintain communication with the mentor-trainers and monitor the implementation of activities being rolled out simultaneously across widespread geographical zones within the settlement. At the same time, the number of mentor-trainers available in some settlements is not commensurate to the size of the refugee population, limiting the number of young peacebuilders that are reached through the programme.
- **Language barriers:** there is a need for greater investment in the services of translators and interpreters to ensure that more individuals with limited English language skills are able to participate in the programme.
- In some settlements, **patriarchal cultural attitudes, beliefs and practices have continued to negatively affect the participation of young women** in decision-making processes and leadership within their communities. Although the engagement of traditional community leaders in the peacebuilding training is helping to promote equality for women, for societal norms to change, many more individuals need to be involved over much longer periods of time.
- Some **mentor-trainers have temporarily dropped out from the programme due to health-related or personal circumstances** requiring them to travel elsewhere and this has hindered their participation in scheduled activities.
- There are **high MHPSS needs among youth refugees in Uganda and this has a bearing on their leadership and peacebuilding potential** in their communities. Despite UNHCR and its partners' efforts to strengthen MHPSS across the RYPP peacebuilding curriculum and activities and the overall community-based protection response, resource limitations prevail in MHPSS services targeting at-risk refugee communities.

► Tips for replication and scaling up

- ✓ **Continued advocacy for sustainable livelihood opportunities is necessary**, as young adults participating in the programme repeatedly manifest facing pressure to provide for themselves and their families. It is important to seek more funding and partnerships to strengthen livelihood programming to keep young people engaged in peacebuilding activities, deter them from substance abuse and reduce MHPSS needs.
- ✓ Promote measures to **ensure that youth mentors and other programme participants without smartphones are not excluded from digital engagement**. Potential solutions include creating digital learning spaces within communities. To the extent possible, ensure that Internet data is available to mentor-trainers, peacebuilding focal points within existing community structures and other youth participants.
- ✓ Seek resources and partnerships to support more creative activities involving radio, sports, cultural heritage, music and drama, as these are great ways of mobilizing both refugee and host community youth. These activities contribute to building their creative confidence while fostering social cohesion among communities from different backgrounds.
- ✓ Take into account that peacebuilding is a long-term collaborative process: continued awareness-raising of peacebuilding by youth mentors and religious, cultural, opinion and community leaders will be necessary in order to gradually transform the cultural and structural conditions and behaviours that generate conflict.
- ✓ **Ensure participation of host communities:** even though the focus of the project is on the refugee settlements, the need has been identified to increase the participation of host communities living in nearby villages in the process.
- ✓ **Engage youth at every phase of the programme cycle** not only ensures that it remains relevant to their individual contexts, but also contributes to **strengthening their roles as citizens** and members of the community.
- ✓ **Identify influencers within the communities** and engage them in the programme to expand the reach of peacebuilding initiatives.
- ✓ Consider **investing even more in information-sharing between operations at regional level** to identify common challenges and discuss what responses could be developed across different operations. In the EHAGL region, for instance, the experience of UNHCR staff and mentor-trainers implementing the programme in Uganda could be capitalized by including them in the delivery of training in neighbouring countries.
- ✓ **Proactively engage refugee young women** and ensure that measures are taken to promote their leadership and participation in the programme. Consider the obstacles that they often face, such as social pressure to stay at home and care for their families because childcare is not available, and listen to their ideas as to how to overcome these challenges.



Football tournament organized by youth leaders to strengthen integration between refugees and host communities in Adjumani (2023). © UNHCR/Joel Obeta

- ✔ **Establish uniform data collection and reporting mechanisms on activities and people reached** through RYPP, across national operations and at regional level. This will facilitate data-sharing and analysis as well as the systematization of results in the longer term.
- ✔ **Secure resources and budget appropriately for hiring more interpreters and translators** to strengthen the inclusion and participation

of marginalized young people into the programme, particularly youth with lower levels of education and those with limited English language skills or with disabilities.

- ✔ Develop strategies and **adaptation measures to reach out to and enhance the participation in the programme of youth with disabilities and** lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer **(LGBTIQ+) youth.**

➤ More information

- Youth Peacebuilding Training Manual: <https://data.unhcr.org/fr/documents/download/93900>
- Youth Peacebuilding Toolkit: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/unhcr-youth-peacebuilding-toolkit>
- Uganda Conflict Mapping Tool: <https://enketo.unhcr.org/x/1JfWVLwS>
- Applying the UNHCR age, gender and diversity policy to YOUTH: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/tip-sheet-applying-unhcr-age-gender-and-diversity-policy-youth>

On documenting practices more generally:

On how and why to categorize an operational practice as a promising practice, emerging practice or case study, please refer to the two-page distinction table extracted from the methodology and background document²⁵ on collecting practices and case studies.



Awarding the winning team in Imvepi during the Sports for Peace tournament in Imvepi settlement. © UNHCR/Abur Wanda

²⁵ UNHCR. (2019). Internal Resource. Methodology and Background Document. Available from: https://unhcr365.sharepoint.com/sites/community-childprotect/_layouts/15/viewer.aspx?sourcedoc={accad458-2bb4-4739-9ba4-d6de65712911}

For more information, please contact:

**Division of International Protection
Community-Based Protection Unit**
hqts00@unhcr.org

Regional Bureau for East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes

UNHCR Uganda
allyn@unhcr.org

