

Teachers in Refugee and Displacement Settings: Uganda Case Study

Challenges and Strategies for Teacher
Quality and Workforce Sustainability

May 2024



James Manirakiza, a teacher at Rwamwanja Primary School in Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement, teaches Mathematics to his Primary Six class of 99 pupils, 97 of whom are refugees, alongside 2 Ugandan students. His commitment ensures that every child, no matter their background, gets the education they deserve. © UNHCR/Tukundane Yonna

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Acronyms

AEP	Accelerated Education Programmes
BRMS	Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards
CBOs	Community-based Organizations
CCTs	Centre Coordinating Tutors
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CTPD	Continuous Teacher Professional Development
DEO	District Education Office
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
ECW	Education Cannot Wait
EiE	Education in Emergencies
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ERP	Education Response Plan
FCA	Finn Church Aid
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FTS	United Nations Financial Tracking Service
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KI	Key Informant
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
PLE	Primary Leaving Exam
PPAs	Project Partnership Agreements
PRM	Bureau of Population Refugees and Migration
PTAs	Parent-Teacher Associations
PTR	Pupil-to-Teacher Ratio
SMCs	School Management Committee Members
TA	Teaching Assistant
TMIS	Teacher Management Information System
TPD	Teacher Professional Development
TTIs	Teacher Training Institutions

UgIFT	Uganda Intergovernmental Fiscal Transfers Program
ULEARN	Uganda Learning Acceleration Program
UN	United Nations
UNATU	Uganda National Teachers Union
UNEB	Uganda National Examinations Board
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency (formerly United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)
UNITE	Uganda National Institute of Tertiary Education
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USE	Universal Secondary Education
WI	Windle International

Case Study Overview

Teachers are central figures in any education system, yet they rarely receive the attention they deserve (Schwille, Dembélé, & Schubert, 2007). Amidst the latest policy trends and educational innovations, their contributions and needs remain largely neglected. The Uganda case study examines what is happening across the teacher management, teacher professional development, and teacher well-being dimensions for different profiles of teachers working in refugee and displacement settings. It further situates these dimensions against the current global push for including refugees in national systems.

The case study is part of a larger study on *Teachers in Refugee and Displacement Settings: Challenges and Strategies for Teacher Quality and Workforce Sustainability*¹ that aims to identify the challenges, opportunities, and implications for strengthening teacher quality and workforce sustainability to make needed changes. The individual country case studies conducted in Chad, Malaysia, and Uganda capture the complexity of national education systems and teacher policies and practices in refugee-receiving contexts by describing the current state of affairs in rich detail.

Within the context of Uganda, the case study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the profiles of the teachers working in refugee settings in Uganda?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities for improving teacher management, professional development, and well-being among teachers working in refugee settings in Uganda?
3. What are the implications of these challenges and opportunities for strengthening teacher quality and promoting workforce sustainability among different profiles of teachers?
4. What are the implications for the inclusion of refugee teachers into the national system?

The case study presents the country context, study methodology, teacher profiles; key findings related to teacher management, professional development, and well-being; implications for improving quality, promoting workforce sustainability, and advocating for the inclusion of refugee teachers into the national system; and recommendations for the way forward (while simultaneously acknowledging that there is no straightforward path).

¹ Mendenhall, M. (2024). *Teachers in Refugee and Displacement Settings: Challenges and Strategies for Teacher Quality and Workforce Sustainability*. UNHCR.

Country Context

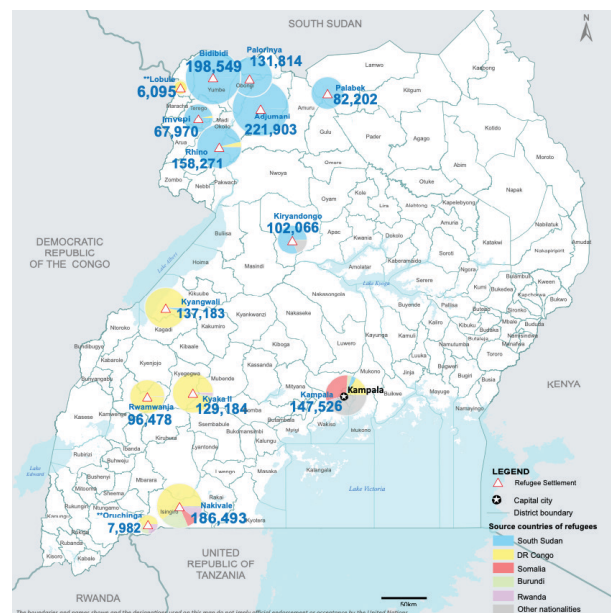
Since Uganda's independence in 1962, the country has faced numerous economic, political, and social challenges within and across its borders (Akseer & Karamperidou, 2020). Concurrent crises in the region have led to a large influx of refugees in the country for over 50 years, with the current refugee population in Uganda exceeding 1.5 million. Some Ugandans also face internal displacement due to conflict, violence, and natural disasters (e.g. floods, heavy storms and landslides.). There is limited evidence about the status of internally displaced persons (IDPs), but estimates show there were 2,000 IDPs due to conflict and violence and 34,000 IDPs due to disasters in Uganda in December 2021 (IDMC, 2023).

Overview of displaced populations

As of April 2024, Uganda hosted 1,673,717 refugees and asylum seekers, 91 per cent of whom reside in settlements within refugee-hosting districts with local Ugandans. Over 80 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers are women and children, and 56 per cent of the population is under 18 years old (UNHCR, 2024a).

The 13 districts hosting refugees in Uganda, in order of population size, are Adjumani, Isingiro, Kampala, Kamwenge, Kikuube, Kiryandongo, Kyegegwa, Koboko, Lamwo, Madi-Okollo, Obongi, Terego and Yumbe (UNHCR, 2023a; see map below for names and populations of settlements).

Uganda hosts refugees and asylum seekers from multiple African countries, with the largest numbers hailing from South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, Burundi, Eritrea, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Sudan (UNHCR, 2023). See Table 1 for a breakdown of the population by country of origin. Due to ongoing emergencies, refugees from the DRC and South Sudan are expected to continue to seek refuge in Uganda for extended periods.



Map 1: Refugees and asylum seekers in Uganda (UNHCR, 2024b)

Country of Origin	Population
South Sudan	939,538
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	518,373
Somalia	51,536
Eritrea	49,913
Burundi	42,805
Sudan	33,438
Rwanda	24,368
Ethiopia	12,294
Other	1,451

Table 1: Refugee population by country of origin

Source: Government of Uganda Office of the Prime Minister (2024)

The large population of refugees has put a strain on the economic systems in host communities, as many of the hosting districts are among the most impoverished and underdeveloped communities in the country (Uganda Government Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) & UNHCR, 2022). Although the majority of the refugee population in Uganda is considered highly vulnerable, there is some indication that the duration of a refugee's stay in Uganda is inversely related to their poverty level (Uganda Government (OPM) & UNHCR, 2022). A 2018 World Bank household survey found that refugee households who resided in Uganda for more than five years were less reliant on aid such as food and cash assistance (Uganda Government (OPM) & UNHCR, 2022).

National inclusion efforts: an overview

Uganda is well known for its approach to welcoming and hosting refugees and is regarded as a model for inclusion by the international community. Uganda is a signatory to several global and regional policies that codify the rights of refugees. Specifically, Uganda is signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 protocol as well as the following international and regional conventions and charters: the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Kampala Convention, Sustainable Development Goals, African Union Continental Education Strategy, and the Djibouti Declaration. Uganda also passed the 2006 Refugee Act, followed by the 2010 regulations, which protect the right to education, social services, and the pursuit of work for refugees (UNHCR, 2018). The rights of refugees and asylum seekers in the 2006 Act are viewed to be on par with those of Ugandan citizens (UNHCR, 2018).

In 2016, Uganda developed the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), a joint-sector holistic approach to the refugee crisis in Uganda. This framework outlined a three-year (2018-2021) multi-stakeholder approach that was human rights-oriented in responding to the continued influx of refugees in the country (UNHCR, 2018). Recently, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) released the Inter-Agency Uganda Country Refugee Response Plan (2022-2025) with UNHCR, other UN Agencies, and international and national partners that strives to respond to numerous social and economic challenges, especially those exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the plan emphasizes the importance of peaceful co-existence between refugees and host communities and promotes the self-reliance of refugees living in rural and urban environments (Uganda Government (OPM) & UNHCR, 2022).

Despite the inclusive policy environment, refugees in Uganda face numerous barriers to accessing employment in Uganda: lack of transport to urban areas, lack of access to sufficient land for cultivation, language barriers, limited social networks, and the non-recognition of education and training certifications acquired in their countries of origin (Uganda Government (OPM) & UNHCR, 2022; Key Informant Interviews (KII), 2022).

Inclusion in the education system

Refugee children in Uganda have access to free universal primary education and pre-primary, secondary, and tertiary education (UNHCR, 2017). Refugees who reside in the settlements attend school with Ugandan national students either in the host community or the settlement. They learn the Ugandan curriculum and sit for the national school-leaving exams at the end of primary and secondary school. All national and refugee teachers working in the settlements are formally qualified. Refugees without a teacher training certificate can be recruited as teaching assistants and offer support by translating classroom instruction into local languages. Refugees can access the teacher training institutes and acquire teaching credentials while displaced in the country, though they may face challenges. The Ugandan government is also "coding" community schools²

² Coded schools have to follow Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards (BRMS), which include regulations about teacher: pupil ratios; pupil:desk ratios, etc.

in the refugee-hosting districts (as well as across the country), making schools eligible for government support. Coded schools become public, government-aided schools and benefit from conditional grants and government-deployed teachers. An education institution does not qualify for grant aid unless it has fulfilled the requirements of the regulations for licensing and registration. This initiative aims to ensure sufficient primary schools in each parish for children to attend, including refugee learners (District Education Officer, KII). Some studies indicate that qualified refugee teachers often lose their jobs once the government comes in and assumes responsibility for the school (Falk, 2023).

Overview of the education system

The current structure of the education system in Uganda, shown in Table 2, was established in 1997 when the Ugandan government implemented universal primary education (UPE) policies that made primary education free and compulsory in Uganda (Akseer & Karamperidou, 2020). The formal education system consists of seven years of primary school (P1-P7), four years of lower secondary (O level), two years of upper secondary (A level), and three years of university education (Akseer & Karamperidou, 2020).

Uganda has also introduced pre-primary school for children aged two to five. The seven years of primary school are divided into lower primary, comprising the first three years (P1-P3), and upper primary, comprising the last four years (P4-7). In the last year of primary school, the candidate class (P7) takes the primary leaving exam (PLE), a high-stakes national exam administered by the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), which dictates what government-funded secondary school the learner is eligible for as part of the Universal Secondary Education (USE) initiative.

However, school fees such as uniforms and school materials are not provided by the government and are a cost faced by refugees and local families in Uganda.

Tertiary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people aged 19-23 • Degrees are obtained at the end of university, and diplomas and certificates at the end of other tertiary institutions
Secondary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adolescents aged 13-18 • Duration: 4 years of lower secondary and 2 years of upper secondary • The Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) is obtained at the end of lower secondary, and the Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE) is obtained at the end of upper secondary
Primary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children aged 6-12 • Duration: 7 years • Free and compulsory • Pupils sit the primary leaving examination (PLE) on completion
Pre-primary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children aged 3-5 • Duration: 3 years • Non-compulsory

Table 2: Ugandan education system

Source: (Akseer & Karamperidou, 2020)

Teacher-pupil ratios

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) sets national standards of 25:1 for the pupil-to-teacher ratio (PRT) for pre-primary classrooms and a 53:1 pupil-to-teacher ratio for primary and secondary school classrooms (MoES, 2018a). Secondary schools do not strictly follow the 53:1 PTR national standard. Some subjects (humanities) have a sufficient number of teachers, while others (sciences, mathematics, languages) have fewer teachers (personal communication, UNHCR, April 2024). The pupil-teacher ratio in the settlements improved between 2017 and 2021, from 85:1 to 67:1 for primary and from 50:1 to 30:1 for secondary (MoES, 2023). Table 3 depicts the teacher and classroom gap to meet the national standard for pupil-to-teacher ratios (MoES, 2023).

Group	Schools in settlements			Schools outside settlements			
Education level	ECD	Primary	Secondary	ECD	Primary	Secondary	TOTAL
Number of teachers	1,490	4,907	765	1,789	6,683	1,425	16,497
Pupil-teacher ratio (PTR)	56	67	30	33	47	18	-
Teacher gap for currently enrolled	1,838	1,316	963	569	501	994	6,185
No. of teacher accommodation unit	n/a	1,204	139	n/a	1,493	174	3,010
Teacher per housing unit	n/a	4	6	n/a	4	8	-
Gaps in teacher accommodation	n/a	3,703	626	n/a	5,190	1,251	10,770

Table 3: Teacher gap analysis of refugee-hosting schools and non-refugee-hosting schools

Inside and outside the settlements, it is apparent that there is an urgent need for more teachers and classroom infrastructure. Approximately 1,316 primary school teachers are needed within the settlements to close this gap and meet the national standard of a 53:1 pupil-to-teacher ratio. The learning environments in the schools refugees attend are severely impacted by overcrowding, with key informants (KI) sharing that some classrooms have 200 to 300 students. An estimated 3,925 classrooms and 1,772 latrines are needed to fill this gap within the settlements at the primary and secondary school levels (MoES, 2023). These figures are based on current gross enrollments and do not include the 53 per cent of primary-aged children and 92 per cent of secondary-aged youth out of school in refugee settlements (Okot, 2022).

Education expenditures and donor support

Over the past six years, government expenditure on education has steadily declined in Uganda. In 2015, 13.2 per cent of Uganda's total government expenditure went towards education. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, education was 11.5 per cent of total government expenditure. In 2021, the total expenditure on education was 8.2 per cent (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022).

The Education 2030 Framework for Action calls for governments to allocate at least 15-20 per cent of public expenditure to education.³

In 2022, US\$ 268.1 million in donor funding was reported to the United Nations' financial tracking service (FTS); 6 per cent of this funding was allocated to the education sector (OCHA, 2022). Based on the data reported to FTS, the World Food Programme, UNHCR, and UNICEF are the largest UN recipients of humanitarian aid (not limited to the education sector) in Uganda at 42.8 per cent, 28.1 per cent, and 7.1 per cent, respectively (OCHA, 2022). The International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Save the Children hold the most significant shares of total funding, with 3.9 per cent and 2.5 per cent, respectively (OCHA, 2022).

Study Design

This multi-pronged case study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the profiles of the teachers working in refugee settings in Uganda?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities for improving teacher management, professional development, and well-being among teachers working in refugee settings in Uganda?
3. What are the implications of these challenges and opportunities for strengthening teacher quality and promoting workforce sustainability among different profiles of teachers?
4. What are the implications for the inclusion of refugee teachers in national systems?

The methodology for the case study consisted of qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, including community-based organizations (CBOs), donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies, and teachers. It also entailed focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers.

The research visit to Uganda took place during one week at the end of October/beginning of November 2022. Data collection took place in Kampala and Kiryandongo refugee settlements. UNHCR selected Kiryandongo due to time constraints and a recent resurgence of Ebola, both of which limited our options for site visits. Co-researcher Whitney Hough travelled to Uganda to support data collection activities.

Data collection consisted of:

- **12 KI interviews** with CBOs, government, NGOs, school leaders, teacher's unions, and UN across Kampala and Kiryandongo.
- **Three FGDs with 19 teachers** with a mix of profiles (e.g. qualified national and refugee teachers and refugee teaching assistants) in Kiryandongo.
- **One FGD with five school management committee (SMC) members** in Kiryandongo.
- **One FGD/meeting with five NGO representatives** in Kampala.

For all of the research visits, we recorded the interviews with a digital recorder when possible; however, most participants preferred not to have the interviews recorded. In these cases, we took careful handwritten notes. Handwritten notes were also taken during the FGDs. All interviews were conducted in English.

³ There are two finance benchmarks outlined in the [Education 2030 Framework for Action](#). It calls for governments to allocate: 1) at least 4-6% of GDP to education, and/or allocate at least 15-20% of public expenditure to education.

For the FGDs with teachers, we invited teachers to write their ideas in response to our questions on index cards. The prompts included questions such as: *What do you like most about being a teacher? What are the biggest challenges you face as a teacher? What specific changes are needed to overcome these challenges? What pathways/options do you have for sharing your ideas for making improvements?* Participants were asked to vote/rank the top 3 challenges, which helped to focus the conversation. Although the teachers presented myriad challenges during these discussions, the interactive nature of the exercise allowed them to share their ideas with the facilitators and alleviate the intensity of a more focused discussion.

In parallel to the field research and part of the larger study mentioned in the Overview section, this case study also draws on data collected from a global study of stakeholders working with teachers in refugee and displacement across 16 countries. Nine respondents from Uganda (out of 109 total respondents) completed this survey, which consisted of closed- and open-ended questions about teacher management, professional development, and well-being.

Due to the primary investigator's institutional affiliation, Teachers College, Columbia University's Institutional Review Board approved the overall study. Participants completed consent forms aligned with the data collection activities (e.g., FGDs, interviews) through which they were asked to participate.

Data analysis

Interview transcripts, when available, were transcribed verbatim. Interview and FGD notes were reviewed and refined post-research visit by comparing/contrasting notes taken by two researchers who participated in the interview. Analysis of the FGDs and interviews went through an iterative process of open- and closed-coding, ultimately leading to a codebook informed by the study's objectives, scholarly and grey literature on teachers in refugee and displacement settings, and the participants' ideas. Most of the interviews were coded using NVivo software; queries of the coded data were run by theme, contributing to the final write-up of findings.

Study limitations

According to some NGO actors, Kiryandongo is one of the most neglected settlements in Uganda. Despite the continued increase of refugees within Uganda, the budget for Kiryandongo has remained the same since 2010. It's also one of the first settlements to have its schools coded (i.e., recognized by national authorities); only two schools remained uncoded during our visit. This means the findings may not capture the realities shared across other settlements in the country. We were also unable to meet with the District Inspector of Schools and Centre Coordinating Tutors (CCTs) (key roles explained below) due to school-leaving examinations that were underway during our visit.

In many ways, this report complements the robust *Teacher management in refugee settings: Uganda* study conducted by Bengtsson et al. (2023), which provides a detailed account of teacher policies and practices by providing key updates about efforts to support teachers in Uganda continue to evolve.

Teachers Working in Refugee and Displacement Settings in Uganda

Teacher profiles

There are three categories of teachers working in refugee and displacement settings in Uganda: 'qualified' Ugandan nationals, 'qualified' refugee teachers, and teaching assistants (KII, 2022). Within the category of teaching assistants, there are three subcategories: volunteers from the host community who have received training, volunteers who are refugees who have received training, and refugees who were trained teachers in their countries of origin but whose qualifications have not been recognized by the Ugandan government. See Table 4 below for more details.

Teacher profile	Distinguishing characteristics
National Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ugandan citizens• Nationally recognized teaching qualifications<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Grade III Certificate (Primary school teachers)◦ Grade IV Diploma (Secondary school teachers, but also some primary school teachers)◦ Bachelor's degree (Primary and secondary school teachers)• Salaries either paid by the national government (often referred to as "permanent and pensionable") (Bengtsson et al., 2023) or international agencies for teachers working in refugee-hosting contexts<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ National teachers on government payroll benefit from long-term contracts and pensions
Refugee Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refugee status• Nationally recognized teaching qualifications (typically acquired through Uganda teacher training institutes)• Salaries paid by international agencies for teachers working in refugee-hosting contexts (isolated cases of refugee teachers being included on the government's payroll)• Short-term, temporary contracts (3 months to 1 year)
Teaching Assistants	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Refugee status and/or Ugandan citizens• Unrecognized qualifications from country of origin (in case of refugees) or no formal qualifications<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Participate in teacher professional development activities in settlements• Salaries paid by international agencies for teachers working in refugee-hosting contexts• Short-term, temporary contracts (3 months to 1 year)

Table 4: Teacher profile overview

The Education Response Plan (ERP) Secretariat representative estimated that within the overall group of certified teachers, approximately 5-10 per cent are refugees. She also conjectured that there are more qualified refugee teachers within the host community; however, they are not certified by the Ugandan system for reasons such as location, the language of instruction, and/or lack of documentation. This number fluctuates across different refugee settlements. Within Kiryandongo, the UNHCR representative stated that there are 400-500 total teaching staff, and only three are qualified refugee teachers registered to teach in the Ugandan education system. In addition to these teachers, an NGO representative shared that there are 14 teaching assistants in Kiryandongo on Windle International's payroll.⁴ Teaching assistants, whom the government does not support, are hired by partners and UNHCR. Teaching assistants are frequently qualified refugee teachers from their countries of origin who cannot complete the national certification process due to a lack of documentation.

Key Findings

Teacher management

Teacher management consists of several dimensions: selection, recruitment, and deployment; pre- and in-service teacher professional development (TPD); working conditions; supervision and appraisal; and career paths (Bengtsson et al., 2023). The entity responsible for teacher management varies and often involves coordination across several agencies.

Recruitment and registration

Teacher recruitment is conducted by different actors, including the Ugandan Government, NGOs, and local district education offices (DEO) in partnership with UNHCR (KII, 2022). When NGO partners lead teacher recruitment efforts, they invite government officials to be part of their interviewing panels. They see it as a "joint activity" that ensures government involvement, so when they are ready to take over the teachers, they have been involved in the hiring all along (UNHCR KI, 2022). Qualified teachers are employed by the Ugandan Government, the UN and/or NGOs. Refugee teachers with recognized teaching qualifications are employed almost exclusively by UN agencies and NGOs. Teacher recruitment is based on the availability of openings, informed by both available finances and the budget ceilings set for different refugee settlements.

Many qualified refugee teachers also fill the role of teaching assistants while they wait for their documents to be "equated" on a case-by-case basis (KII, 2022), though in many cases, they lack documentation from their country of origin and cannot pursue this option. Within the current teacher management structure, teaching assistants are not included. This role is solely a humanitarian (UNHCR/NGO) mechanism.

Qualified refugee teachers described challenges registering as certified teachers with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES), a requirement for teachers in Uganda, because of the national identity (ID) requirement and the need to show original education documents. Refugee teachers do not have national ID numbers, given their refugee status. There is also a new online national teacher registration system that has been tricky to navigate for qualified Ugandan and refugee teachers alike. In the case of refugee teachers, similar to in-person registration, they do not have the required national ID number.

⁴ Windle International (WI) is UNHCR's implementing partner in Kiryandongo.

These challenges are compounded by the financial costs of certifying documents (particularly those obtained outside of Uganda) and unclear guidance on registering (e.g. online, in person) without national ID numbers or which agency may support them in these efforts.

Opportunities and tensions that arise with development funding

Despite its apparent benefits, new education sector funding can disrupt teacher management systems in the settlements while leaving gaps. The World Bank's Uganda Intergovernmental Fiscal Transfers Programme (UgIFT) is a recent example. The UgIFT provides money to the government to support integrated services in education, health, and other sectors. In the education sector, the UgIFT contribution facilitated coding and grant support for 51 refugee-serving community schools to become public institutions. This enabled the government to recruit hundreds of teachers employed through more permanent, multi-year contracts by the MoES and the district local governments. In this case, the government provided wage and non-wage support to recruit 627 teachers. Despite this significant contribution, the needs far exceed the support provided, especially in overcrowded schools. In these situations, UNHCR and its NGO partners continue to supply teachers.

The opportunity for more gainful employment outside the refugee settlements also led to massive teacher attrition in some settlements. One NGO operating in the Bidi Bidi settlement shared that 160 teachers resigned in one month. While this investment is good for the teachers who secure new and more stable contracts, it leaves humanitarian organizations in the settlements scrambling to fill the gaps. It also negatively impacts teacher motivation among the teachers who remain in the settlements. Some of these challenges could be mitigated through more transparent communications and closer coordination about these plans among governments, donors, and international organizations.

In other settlements, this funding mechanism has been less tumultuous and may create opportunities that better position the government to manage teacher salary payments. In two districts, UNHCR has implemented a joint recruitment strategy in which it works with local district government offices to recruit teachers. This model is currently being implemented in two districts—Koboko and Kiryandongo—through Project Partnership Agreements (PPAs) between UNHCR and district local governments (KII, 2022). With financial support from Education Cannot Wait (ECW), UNHCR provides funding directly to the District Local Government with the aim that teachers will be absorbed once the government can account for them in the national budget to the district. This includes 26 teachers (14 in Kiryandongo and 12 in Koboko). However, these teachers have not been absorbed so far and continue to be supported by UNHCR through PPAs with the respective districts (personal communication, UNHCR, April 2024).

Teacher compensation

Concerns about inadequate compensation and benefits were raised by all of the participating national and refugee teachers and teaching assistants (FGDs, 2022). Teachers explained that their salary was insufficient to meet their basic needs and that their work as teachers often prevented them from taking on additional labour due to the demands of teaching. Reported salary ranges from both KIIs and survey data showed that qualified national and refugee teachers earn US\$ 131-157 per month, while teaching assistants earn US\$ 52-90 (see Figure 1 below for reported monthly salary ranges across teacher profiles).⁵ Both national and refugee qualified teachers described delays in receiving their salaries. At the time of the FGD (November 2022), teachers had yet to be paid for October, with qualified refugee teachers expressing doubt that their employers would pay them.

⁵ Early childhood education was not the focus of this study, but it was reported that ECD caregivers earn much less, approximately \$30 USD per month (KII, 2022).

Government Pay Scales (MoES, 2023)	National Qualified	Refugee Qualified	Teaching/Classroom Assistants (Refugee or National Unqualified)
Primary: 131-161 (499,684-613,486 UGX)	Primary: 131-157 (499,684-588,541 UGX)	Primary: 131-150 (499,684-558,541 UGX)	52-90 (200,000-334,837 UGX)
Secondary: 252-344 (960,288-1,311,422 UGX)	Secondary: 252-330 (960,288-1,232,206 UGX)	Secondary: 225-288 (960,288-1,073,399 UGX)	

Figure 1: Reported monthly salary ranges across teacher profiles (US\$)

UNHCR estimates that they cover 80 per cent of teachers' salaries across the refugee settlements (through their partnerships with the government and implementing NGOs). UNHCR is also responsible for the salaries of teaching assistants, as the Ugandan government does not support these roles. Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) also contribute to covering these expenses, but it has become increasingly more challenging for parents and families to sustain this support. UNHCR currently pays 3,700 teachers through PPAs and 1,400 teachers through ECW funding (KII, 2022). In Kiryandongo, UNHCR and its NGO partner pay 150 qualified teachers and 25 teaching assistants through ECW funding.

International organisations have taken it upon themselves to equalise teacher compensation to align with a government circular that calls for salary parity among qualified teachers. Although the ERP II states that teachers' salaries were harmonized to the first level of the government payroll scale (MoES, 2023), at the time of data collection, KIIs were not uniform in their responses when discussing the standardization of teachers' salaries. Some KIIs believed that government and partner-paid salaries had been harmonized, while others shared that this process is ongoing and has challenges. Despite the government circular, one NGO stated that it would be helpful to have a clear policy statement from UNHCR that they could use to convince their human resources colleagues of the need to account for this change in their budgeting practices.

To mitigate these challenges, streamline compensation practices, and achieve salary parity, UNHCR has since moved toward a new institutional model that consolidates responsibility for paying teachers' salaries through two of their main NGO partners whose education work extends to all of the refugee settlements—Finn Church Aid (FCA) and Windle International (WI). Despite these important improvements, it remains challenging to support annual salary increases, and teachers may work for several years before receiving a higher payment. The Ugandan government's decision to significantly increase pay for science teachers also led to massive disruptions inside and outside the settlements (see Box 1 for more details).

Box 1: National teacher compensation policy change triggers sweeping consequences inside/outside of refugee settlements

A new national circular on science teacher compensation has severely affected the recruitment and hiring of science teachers in refugee-hosting districts (and beyond). In an effort to attract more Ugandans to study science and become science teachers in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ugandan government increased the salary for science teachers at the secondary level on the government payroll by approximately 300 per cent.

When this policy was implemented, the lack of coordination left NGO partners with their 'hands-tied' as their annual budgets had already been submitted (KII, 2022). This policy change and the prospects for higher pay hastened science teachers' departure from the settlements. Only 36 per cent of refugee-hosting schools have been coded (i.e. recognized and registered as a public school by the MoES) by the Ugandan government (KII, 2022); thus, most government-paid science positions were located outside refugee-hosting districts. In the case of Kiryandongo, they lost all of their science teachers and had a hard time recruiting replacements.

KIIs from NGOs and the national teacher's union expressed the unfairness and implications this has on teacher motivation for those who do not teach science but experience similar workloads. One of the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU)⁶ representatives also shared that head teachers are stepping down from their roles since science teachers are now paid more than school leaders, leading many to question why they should assume additional responsibilities for so little money.

The Ugandan government has reported that teachers in the arts will be increased to the same levels over the coming years (Public service to streamline salaries, 2023). While this is an important move to elevate teachers' pay and contribute to teachers' job security, the ramifications for these increases on the ability to fundraise to meet salary parity expectations, retain teachers in un-coded schools in the settlements, and mitigate disruptions to student learning as new increases get rolled out are considerable. If the commitment to ensuring salary parity holds amidst these increases, many teachers will be let go, classrooms will become more crowded, and more students may remain out of school.

Despite these efforts, UNHCR, its implementing partners, and the Ugandan government continue to struggle to pay teachers' salaries under constrained and reduced budgets. A senior UNHCR representative stated that the Ugandan government will not discuss teachers' salaries when they perceive that the burden is being shifted rather than shared (KII, 2022). Given the Ugandan government's struggles to compensate national teachers, this is not an easy discussion, leading to the underemployment of qualified teachers (KII, 2022). Donors are also loath to support recurrent teachers' salaries despite the centrality of teachers' roles and responsibilities in the education sector. One UNHCR KI expressed their frustration: "We've been trying to interest LEGO for a long time to bridge the gap and support us in paying teacher salaries. We've not been very successful. They want us to be innovative and do things innovatively, but forget that if you don't have teachers, which is the foundation, how do you go to the next step of adding an innovative programme?" Other donors—namely ECW, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), and the World Bank—provide support for teachers' salaries (or have done so in the past in the case of GPE), but they would prefer not to do so.

Other conditions of work

Besides low teachers' salaries, teachers and other KIIs expressed concern about insufficient benefits for their service. Speaking about benefits afforded to national teachers, a UNATU representative stated: "On paper, their salaries include accommodation, transportation, and medical services; however, the salaries are "meagre" and not enough to cover these additional expenses". He pointed out that these benefits are "consolidated" in teaching, whereas other professions are handled differently. Qualified national teachers lamented that they did not receive hardship allowance, a benefit provided to teachers employed by the government and working in public schools.

⁶ The Uganda National Teachers Union (UNATU) advocates and protects the social, economic, intellectual, and professional interests of teachers working in public schools in Uganda.

Qualified national teachers and refugee teacher assistants explained that few schools have accommodations, and many teachers and teaching assistants live far from the school. In response to the lack of accommodations for teachers and the long distances that teachers need to travel, some teachers were provided bicycles by UNHCR (UNHCR KI). Compounding these challenges is the rent they pay for their accommodations with their low salaries. Qualified refugee teachers and teaching assistants also shared that their food rations were insufficient, and they were not allotted sufficient land to cultivate, which is sometimes limited to what is already available at the school where they work. National teachers living away from their families would need to spend 20-25 per cent of their salary on transportation alone to visit home (KII, 2022).

Limited accommodations are a key factor affecting female teachers' ability to work in the refugee settlements. When accommodations are provided, there may be one room for five teachers, which means only men will take up these positions. Distance between accommodations and schools can further deter female teachers (not to mention distance from their homes and families).

Reflecting on teachers' work contracts, KIIs pointed to the disparity between teachers working in the same school, where some are on long-term contracts while others are on short-term contracts (as little as three months). Qualified refugee teachers also shared challenges with job security due to short-term contracts; at the time of the FGD (November 2022), the teachers' contracts had ended, and two had signed a short-term contract through December, while one teacher had yet to receive a new contract. Short-term and unpredictable funding drives these differences, which prevent long-term planning among hiring organizations.

National and refugee teachers hired and paid for by UNHCR and their NGO partners also miss out on support from pensions. Access to the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) for teachers on NGO and UNHCR payrolls is convoluted. Key informants varied in their understanding of the retirement policy. Some stated that partners contribute to the retirement funds on behalf of teachers, and it becomes accessible after employment. UNHCR indicated that it pays 10 per cent, while teachers contribute 5 per cent. The UNHCR representative indicated that even if they repatriate, they should be able to get it. However, if a staff member at the institutional level does not understand the process, then refugees might not be able to access it. Partners have worked with NSSF to come to settlements to help people understand, but the process remains confusing.

In contrast, others stated that retirement funds are inaccessible for refugee teachers. Similarly, the retirement process for government teachers also includes barriers restricting them from accessing their pensions on time. Upon retirement, which is strictly enforced at age 60, the UNATU representative said teachers are automatically deleted from the payroll, but it may take years to access their pensions.

Teacher attrition

Maintaining a stable teaching corps in the refugee settlements in Uganda is challenging due to competing actors and agendas. Understandably, national teachers leave their jobs in the settlements if they can secure teaching positions in government schools to access longer-term contracts and pensions. Without more effective coordination and planning, infusions of development funding that do not adequately account for teachers in the settlements will continue to draw teachers in search of more stable and long-term opportunities away from their posts. Plans to increase teachers' salaries in the arts/humanities, similar to the new policy for science teachers, will inevitably disrupt teachers' tenure in their schools and negatively affect teacher motivation for those whose salaries remain the same, even if it is a step in the right direction. Until all teachers' and school leaders' salaries are upgraded, equitable, and predictable, there will be continued instability and teacher attrition. UN and NGO agencies, already facing persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers (with an average of three months to fill teacher vacancies), will need considerable time and money to recruit and fill vacancies continuously (NGO KII, 2022).

Teacher data

Although there is no comprehensive report on the different teacher profiles in the Ugandan context, UNESCO initiated a database development project in 2018 in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) through funds provided by ECW to capture the number of South Sudanese refugee teachers needed to support schools in the settlements and host communities in the West Nile region. This project developed a Refugee Teachers Database that captures the profiles of teachers working in nine refugee settlements in the Adjumani, Arua, Moyo, and Yumbe districts (UNESCO & MoES, 2018). Within the population included in this study, 45 per cent of teachers were unqualified and had been deployed by implementing partners to serve as teaching assistants; 37 per cent held a Grade III certificate; 15 per cent held a Grade IV diploma; and 3 per cent had a degree in education (UNESCO & MoES, 2018). The study also investigated the number of refugee teachers versus the total number of teachers per school. Table 5 presents the average number of refugee teachers, national teachers, pupils and the teacher ratio per school disaggregated by settlement (albeit with some inconsistencies).

District	Number of schools	Average number of refugee teachers per school	Average number of teachers per school	Average number of pupils per school	Average teacher: pupil ratio per school
Alere	3	4	15	924	62
Ayilo	11	5	21	1844	68
Maaji	11	6	26	1930	72
Nyumanzi	6	2	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.
Pagirinya	9	5	19	1484	79
Invepi	7	4	13	1256	93
Rhino	17	4	17	1179	69
Palorinya	24	11	29	1709	60
BidiBidi	27	5	27	2015	74

Table 5: Teacher-pupil ratio findings disaggregated by settlement, including an average number of refugee teachers per school

Source: (UNESCO & MoES, 2022)

In collaboration with the MoES and UNHCR, UNESCO conducted a study to map and profile different categories of refugee teachers working in six refugee settlements in northern Uganda and outside the West Nile region (UNESCO & MoES, 2020). Similar to the 2018 database development project, this study documents teachers' demographic characteristics (UNESCO & MoES, 2020). It further explores the barriers that inhibit refugee teachers from enrolling in formal teacher training courses and engages in a skills gap analysis to make recommendations for future professional development (UNESCO & MoES, 2020).

Out of the 141 refugee teachers that participated in the UNESCO study, 35 (24.8 per cent) had over 10 years of experience, 45 (31.9 per cent) had 5-9 years of experience, 42 (29.8 per cent) had 1-4 years of experience, and 19 (13.5 per cent) had less than one year of experience (UNESCO & MoES, 2020). Despite 122 (86.5 per cent) of the refugee teachers in the study having more than one year of teaching experience, the majority of the refugee teachers in the survey were deployed as teaching assistants, and 64 (45.1 per cent) refugee teachers reported that they had not enrolled in formal training at a Teacher Training Institute (TTI) though it is unclear if the question referred to participation in TTIs in refugee teachers' countries of origin or Uganda (UNESCO & MoES, 2020).

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
Did not meet the minimum entry requirements for admission into the Teacher Training Institutions.	24	38%
Met the minimum requirements for admission but lacked tuition/financial support.	30	46.9%
They did not have interest in the teaching profession previously.	10	15.6%

Table 6: Reasons attributed by teachers for not enrolling in courses at Teacher Training Institutions

Data collection efforts like these are needed across all refugee settlements and in urban centres to account for the number of national vs refugee teachers (further disaggregated by male vs. female), their qualification status, contract duration, and funding sources, which will inform policy, programmatic, and budgetary decisions about teachers' salaries and needed support for upgrading teaching qualifications (see next section for additional details).

Presently, multiple education actors collect different types of data for different purposes. OPM collects some data but does not have a database of teachers. When OPM periodically conducts refugee validation and profiling exercises, they often collect information about refugees' skill profiles and occupations. Some concerns were expressed about the accuracy of the data collected by OPM, but no specifics were offered. The Education Refugee Response (ERP) captures aggregated education data and does not include teacher profile data at the individual level. UNHCR and its NGO partners, FCA and WI, are handling the transition and consolidation of salaries for 1400 teachers, but it is unclear what indicators are captured.⁷ The NGO representative said they know how many teachers at the national and district level are needed to fill the standard teacher-pupil ratio of 1 to 53 since there is a gap analysis done every three months, but it does not capture who paid or their profiles. She suggested that the Education in Emergencies (EiE) working group play a leadership role in gathering quality data because it is unclear which database is the best to use.

Teacher professional development

Teacher professional development (TPD) is defined as “the activities that develop an individual’s skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher” (West et al., 2022, p. 12). In its implementation, TPD for educators encompasses an extensive range of topics and formats, and how it is operationalized in stable versus crisis-affected contexts will vary, given the different realities across those settings (Mendenhall et al., 2019a). However, literature across settings consistently shows that TPD is most effective when it provides sustained opportunities for continued professional development and supportive networks for teachers to collaborate to change their practices (Ibid).

All teachers working in Uganda, including in the refugee settlements, must be qualified teachers with recognized teaching credentials. The refugee teachers currently working in the settlements either acquired their teaching qualifications during their displacement in Uganda (in previous periods of displacement or more recently) or through Ugandan teacher training institutes that operated in South Sudan in the past.

To bolster the quality of the education system in Uganda, the government introduced a new National Teacher Policy in 2019. The new policy requires prospective teachers to take a pre-entry assessment and prospective and current teachers and tutors to upgrade their qualifications to a minimum of a bachelor’s degree by

⁷ This example is drawn from the group of 1400 teachers who transitioned in 2023 from the Uganda Education consortium (of NGOs) supported by ECW onto UNHCR payroll as part of the arrangements for the implementation of the second ECW-funded Multi-Year Resilience Programme (2023 - 2025). UNHCR and its partners support more than the 1400 teachers mentioned in this example.

2030 (MoES, 2018b). Additionally, the training duration for incoming teachers will be four years, with one practicum year in the field (MoES KII, 2022). This policy change will affect approximately 5,000 national and refugee teachers employed by UNHCR and NGO partners (UNHCR KI, 2023). While the policy included a ten-year grace period for teachers to upgrade their qualifications, not accounting for the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this new policy has already begun to have implications within refugee contexts in Uganda.

All KIs discussed the new National Teacher Policy and saw it as a positive step, noting how it would help standardize the pre-service training for teachers, improve the quality of teachers in schools throughout the country, and elevate teachers' professional identity. The UNATU representative stated that upgrading the status of the teachers will also help bolster advocacy efforts for better salaries. He said that "teachers have an inferiority complex" compared to other professions and that it is hard to advocate for higher salaries for teachers if they are not at the level of other degree holders. However, he also expressed reservations with the notion that having a bachelor's degree equates to being a quality teacher.

The government is simultaneously reducing the number of TTIs in parallel to implementing this new policy. A Ministry representative indicated that this reduction is a positive step to ensure that all colleges meet the "basic requirements and minimum standard" for upholding quality (KII, 2022). The policy calls for harmonising the duration of teacher training programmes and the curricula implemented by teacher training institutions (MoES, 2018b). The KI did not comment on the implications of this reduction for teachers in hard-to-reach areas who need to upgrade to a bachelor's degree to be considered a qualified teacher by the end of the ten-year grace period. The implications of this policy are numerous for both national and refugee teachers. If they cannot find a way to upgrade their qualifications, many will leave or be pushed out of the profession.

Many teachers working in refugee-hosting schools need to upgrade their qualifications. Within the Kiryandongo settlement, the local UNHCR representative estimated that 70-90 per cent of all primary and secondary school district teachers would need to upgrade their qualifications, more so at the primary education level. However, there is no official data on the number of teachers needing to upgrade. As discussed in the previous section, the lack of teacher data carries serious budget implications and significant needs for scholarships if UNHCR and its partners plan to assist teachers in upgrading to a bachelor's degree.

Different teacher training colleges have different tuition rates, but a teacher aiming to upgrade to a degree pays, on average US\$ 295 (or 1,125,000 Ugandan Shillings) per semester (2 semesters/year). A teacher upgrading to a diploma will pay US\$ 245 (or 995,000 Ugandan Shillings) per semester (2 semesters/year). The teachers cover their personal effects like transport, meals and accommodation (KI, 2022). A WI representative estimates that upgrading their degree over four semesters will cost one teacher approximately 8-10 million Ugandan Shillings (or the equivalent of US\$ 2160-US\$ 2700). Teachers on the government payroll can pursue bachelor's degrees free of cost (MoES KII, 2022); however, other teachers must pay tuition. Through a partnership with UNHCR, the Dutch provide some scholarships to support these purposes.

UNHCR is exploring how to mobilize additional funds and increase scholarship support for teacher upgrading in line with the national teacher policy. Within Kiryandongo, they hope to target 50-100 teachers annually. Due to limited teachers within the settlement, teachers will need to participate in courses during breaks and holidays; therefore, a course that would take a teacher one year may take two to three years. The closest TTIs to Kiryandongo are in Gulu and Masindi. Another UNHCR KI recommends that UNHCR and partners prioritize the upskilling of teaching assistants in response to the new policy, given their relative neglect.

Teachers also feel the pressure of this new policy. They commented that while the policy was promising on paper, it was challenging due to a lack of scholarships for upgrading their credentials. Even teachers who would like to upgrade may not be able to meet tuition costs or may have personal and family responsibilities that prevent them from pursuing the necessary training. Amidst limited and unpredictable funding in the refugee settlements, there are no guarantees that teachers will have a job to support the costs of upgrading or returning once they have obtained higher qualifications.

Teaching assistants also expressed their desire to gain qualifications and explained that no support was provided to them to access TPD. The government is working on an option for teaching assistants to get licensed to work as teachers. Refugee teaching assistants have discussed this challenge with their NGO employer, who agreed to support them in accessing training and upgrading, yet nothing has happened since that discussion. See Box 2 below for one NGO's efforts to support teachers in upgrading their credentials.

Box 2: Teacher support for upgrading credentials

Windle International, an NGO operating in Uganda, is working to support teachers to upgrade their teaching credentials in different ways. Teachers are given time to attend in-service training activities during school holidays, including extra days if needed before and after the training. Teachers are paying the tuition directly, but Windle states they are trying to "pay teachers early enough to help them organise for tuition." In the case where teachers have secured scholarship support, their participation in training activities is also supported. The Windle KI shared that 48 primary school teachers (20 female, 28 male) and 17 secondary school teachers (5 female, 12 male) were awarded scholarships to upgrade to diploma and degree levels as needed. This opportunity was also made available to refugee teachers. Four refugee teachers are upgrading to diploma (2 female, 2 male) and two to degree level (1 female, 1 male).

For teachers to receive a merit-based scholarship, they must apply and participate in a competitive process by which a selection committee convenes, interviews candidates, and awards scholarships. Windle needs to manage how many teachers, both scholarship recipients and self-funded candidates, are away from their teaching assignments simultaneously. The decisions about how many teachers can be released for in-service training are made at the school level.

In the case where teaching assistants have their qualifications from their country of origin, the documents can be certified by the National Council for Higher Education to find the equivalent Ugandan professional level. The challenge has been that many teaching assistants claim to have been qualified but have no documents to attest to this.

It was unclear if other organizations also plan to support teachers in their efforts to upgrade.

Recognition of teaching qualifications

While in theory teachers may be able to have their teaching qualifications from other countries verified and equated in their current country of residence (in the case of refugee teachers), this equivalency process may not be available, may not work efficiently, and/or may not be easy to navigate. Qualified refugee teachers and refugee teaching assistants in this study described challenges in having their former training and qualifications recognized and/or certified through equivalency/equation mechanisms. One qualified refugee teacher explained that they had left their original teaching documents in South Sudan when they fled to Uganda

after conflict broke out. While they had photocopies of their documents, they could not register as a certified teacher and thus could not access opportunities for upgrading without their original documents.

A refugee classroom assistant explained that while he had received his Grade III certificate in Kenya, he could not work in Uganda since his qualification was not recognized.

To mitigate these challenges, UNESCO is developing a Qualifications Passport for refugees and asylum seekers "to enable them to access further studies in tertiary and high learning institutions globally" (KI, 2023). This global initiative is aligned with global and regional refugee conventions, including the Djibouti Declaration,⁸ and is ultimately carried out by the "National Qualification Authorities or the responsible authority in the country that undertakes recognition of prior learning." It is already operational in Zambia, and its rollout is underway for Uganda. It entails the development of a National Qualification Framework in line with regional and global frameworks, training credential evaluators, evaluation of applications, and issuance of a Qualifications Passport.⁹ The "passport" is a portfolio assessment of skills obtained by refugees, even in the absence of documentation (personal correspondence, April 2024).

Refugee teachers who have lost their documentation will be able to participate in an interview, and "if assessed worthy", their documents will be equated, and they will be granted a temporary teaching license to teach in the classroom. Evaluators will review any other certificates that might be available and discuss institutions, courses attended and completed, and grades attained. They can also apply for further studies through a "mature entry scheme," open to adults 25 and older who pass the interview (KI, 2023). This approach would expedite the process for refugee teachers to be able to begin pursuing the required bachelor's degree (KI, 2023).

National ministries involved in the Qualifications Passport process have expressed concerns about security due to the increased mobility of people across borders. Another challenge remains how refugee teachers from Francophone countries, especially the DRC, can take advantage of the Qualifications Passport, given challenges related to translating official documents and matching the standards and entry qualifications between the two countries (KI, 2023).¹⁰

Continuous teacher professional development support

In Uganda, CCTs are government affiliates that support TPD in primary schools.¹¹ One MoES KI spoke highly of the CCTs and how they are used to monitor schools, mentor/coach teachers, and provide recommendations for future in-service training. However, other KIs pointed out the lack of effectiveness of CCTs because they are stretched thin and do not have the funding to provide effective coaching and supervision to schools and teachers. One local government official stated that one tutor is allocated to 10 schools. The tutors often cannot fund transportation (vehicles, fuel) to visit schools, undermining their ability to provide support.

Although UNHCR shared that they are unable to support many TPD activities given budget constraints and the need to prioritize covering teachers' salaries, NGOs like FCA and WI are conducting teacher professional development (TPD) within the settlements, even expressing concern that their organizations had implemented so many training sessions that they were worried about teacher fatigue. The deputy head teacher at Ematong Primary School in Kiryandongo reported that teachers had received training on child protection and

⁸ The Djibouti Declaration is a progressive and comprehensive policy that recognizes refugee teachers' professional qualifications in the national education systems of host countries (IGAD, 2017).

⁹ The project aligns well with the recognition of prior learning for lower and secondary education for refugees that UNHCR is leading on (KI, 2023).

¹⁰ It is also unclear how many teachers from Francophone countries need to be considered, pointing to another gap in teacher data and how to support refugee teachers from different countries of origin.

¹¹ Secondary schools no longer benefit from this support due to budgetary constraints.

safeguarding, menstrual hygiene, adolescence management, an abridged curriculum created by the MOES to help children recover lost time following long-term school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and data management.

Three KIs also spoke about the need for EiE-specific training covering topics such as managing large classrooms with diverse groups of learners, providing psychosocial support (including how to access referral pathways), and coping with learners who have experienced different kinds of violence. MoES representatives spoke about the need for specialized training on inclusive pedagogy and how to identify learners with disabilities in classrooms. They also acknowledged that teacher training in Uganda has not emphasized the importance of psychosocial support, which has become more apparent in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Refugee teaching assistants, in particular, lamented inequitable professional development opportunities as teacher training workshops did not include teaching assistants in the settlement. NGO partners also recognized the need to include teachers' voices in planning TPD opportunities that align with their classroom experiences.

One UNHCR KI believed that refugee teachers' vast and diverse experiences have made them more marketable for government-paid positions; however, the national government must offer training to count towards certification. UNHCR holds responsibility for ensuring that refugees have access to these training opportunities (UNHCR KII, 2022).

Teacher well-being

Teacher well-being "encompasses how teachers feel and function in their jobs" and is highly context-specific (Falk et al., 2019, p. 7). The teacher management and TPD policies and practices for teachers working in refugee and displacement settings contribute positively and negatively to teachers' overall sense of well-being, as do the larger contextual factors at play in any setting.

Teachers in Uganda face several challenges that impact their well-being and ability to reach their full capabilities in their professional responsibilities. These challenges lead to a high rate of teacher absenteeism and low teacher motivation. Challenges impacting teacher well-being include low wages and inadequate benefits, gaps in pay, lack of accommodations, limited TPD opportunities, crowded classrooms, inadequate teaching and learning materials, distance to school, and poor provisions of monetary benefits beyond salary (e.g. social security, hardship allowance) and non-monetary incentives. National and refugee teachers face increasing uncertainty due to low pay, short-term contracts (in refugee settlements), and pressure to upgrade their teaching qualifications as mandated by the MoES. A teachers' union representative stated: "The unsustainability of the work conditions and the lack of recognition for teachers is demotivating for teachers, especially as the new National Teacher Policy implies that a bachelor's degree is required to be a quality teacher" (UNATU KI, 2022).

Teaching assistants, who are primarily from the refugee community, are simultaneously neglected and burdened with excessive expectations despite minimal compensation. Refugee teaching assistants described tense relationships with the full-time teachers, explaining that they felt taken advantage of because they were often given more work yet paid much less. There also seem to be limited opportunities for teachers to contribute to the policies and practices that affect them most.

Teachers' voices and engagement overlooked in policies and practices

Given the top-down approach permeating Uganda's education system, there is a lack of teacher voice in implementing new education reforms. A UNATU representative stated: "There is a lack of ownership over reform because teachers have no investment in the reforms but are expected to implement them" (KI, 2022).

At the local level, the UNHCR Kiryandongo representative stated that UNHCR and NGO partners engage teachers in monthly education working groups and suggested that all teachers be invited to these meetings. A representative from WI, however, mentioned that only head teachers participate in these meetings. Additionally, teachers are engaged in quarterly settlement-level meetings with education stakeholders and a Teachers' Day event once a year (Windle KII, 2022). The annual, quarterly, and monthly meetings allow education stakeholders to discuss gaps, resource allocations, and budgets to plan for the next school year (Windle KII, 2022). Additionally, to increase the support for head teachers, UNHCR in Kiryandongo attends PTA meetings (UNHCR KII).

Conversely, during FGDs, teachers explained that they had limited opportunities to share feedback or express their ideas to their employers. This was especially prominent for the refugee teaching assistants who lamented that their lack of voice has contributed to teacher turnover, as speaking up often resulted in termination or being transferred to a faraway school. While qualified refugee teachers did not comment on their relationships with their fellow teachers, nationally qualified teachers shared that they had good relationships with their peers, though they sometimes faced hostility from the refugee community. All of these dynamics can shape teacher motivation positively or negatively.

Teachers supporting teachers

Despite education sector policies and practices that demotivate teachers and teaching assistants, KIs, including school management committee members (SMCs), described teachers' positive relationships with other teachers and the community. Other KIs also described "savings schemes" that teachers have initiated to support one another in upgrading their qualifications, per the new teacher policy. A Windle KI shared: "They know that our resources are dwindling daily, so teachers come together and help each other borrow and save. They have committees who manage the money is kept in the bank. If they want a loan they can do it through the committee—for instance to upgrade their teaching skills, for private business setup, etc."

Implications for Teacher Quality

Qualified, but lack of relevant continuous teacher professional development

National and refugee teachers in the Ugandan context (not including teaching assistants) all have formal qualifications, which provides a strong foundation for ensuring teacher quality. The MoES has also proposed a new policy that requires all teachers to upgrade to a bachelor's degree within 10 years to be considered "qualified." MoES KIs see the new policy as important for bolstering the quality of the teaching profession. One KI also suggested that this policy will ensure that people do not join the profession as a 'last resort,' which may counter some negative community perceptions about the teaching profession presented above.

While there are potential benefits to requiring a bachelor's degree to be a teacher, it is unclear what will change about how teachers are prepared for the profession. Given that most teacher training institutes in Uganda follow a more traditional and didactic approach to TPD (Mendenhall et al., 2021), there are opportunities for the range of education actors working in the education sector in Uganda to encourage and support more varied approaches to TPD, including applied, practical, and experiential strategies. For teachers working in refugee settlements, targeted skills-building opportunities related to classroom management (especially for overcrowded classrooms), psychosocial support (including referral mechanisms), and inclusive pedagogy (related to multilingual learners and students with disabilities) would improve teaching and

learning experiences. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the question of how teachers can utilize educational technologies also warrants more attention.

Overcrowding and double-shifting

Despite how well teachers are trained, they face significant challenges due to overcrowded classrooms. Almost all of the KIs in this study expressed concern about overcrowding and its implications on teacher quality, student retention, and teacher workloads. When efforts are made to construct additional schools and/or classrooms to reduce congestion, even more children show up (DEO KII, 2022). In response to the high prevalence of overcrowded schools in the settlements and a significant number of children who remain out of school, a double-shift system at the lower primary level is being considered in Kiryandongo as part of the broader education response for refugees in Uganda. UNHCR advocates for a double-shift system and emphasized that teachers will still work the same hours but with less planning time. A deputy head teacher shared concerns about teachers' workload and the need for more training in double-shifting models. A DEO official stated that the system would not work in Kiryandongo because of the lack of facilities. Despite the concerns about the lack of facilities, lack of teachers, increased workloads for teachers, and the lack of training on double-shifting, education partners under the leadership of WI have supported the MoES to develop guidelines, which are currently undergoing Ministry validation and approval (personal communication, UNHCR, April 2024).

Implications for Workforce Sustainability

Several intersecting factors may affect teachers' continued work in the profession, including unsustainable workloads, financial and temporal constraints for upgrading their teaching qualifications to a bachelor's degree within the designated time, challenges for refugee teachers to have their teaching qualifications acquired in their countries of origin equated and/or recognized, and limited opportunities to grow in the teaching profession.

Unsustainable teacher workloads

The current state of the education system in refugee settlements is replete with challenges, making it impossible for teachers to manage their responsibilities successfully. Teachers are tasked with unsustainable workloads and overcrowded classrooms with minimal school funding, teacher compensation, and recognition. Coded government schools in the settlement are provided 6,500 Ugandan Shillings per child, approximately US\$ 1.75 per child (UNATU KI, 2022). Teachers are asked to teach multiple subjects, fill teacher shortage gaps and plan lessons. Teacher workloads compromise the personal time teachers have to take care of themselves and their families. The move towards a double-shifting schedule may further exacerbate these challenges.

Potential challenges of new teacher policy

The new policy requiring teachers to upgrade their qualifications to a bachelor's degree within 10 years is a promising development, but it has sweeping implications for the number of teachers who can successfully pursue advanced studies. Teachers are concerned about finding the time and resources to access TTIs and complete the additional training during school holidays, especially since the TTIs are far away from where

refugees are residing, coupled with current efforts to reduce the total number of TTIs nationwide. For teachers who have acquired years of teaching experience but do not have a bachelor's degree, UNATU is exploring alternative pathways that could meet MoES approval. Qualified refugee teachers should, in theory, also have access to these alternatives.

Unclear teaching qualifications equation process

The process for teachers to verify their qualifications is unclear and arduous; it also varies depending on the refugee teacher's country of origin. One key informant described a political agreement between the governments of Uganda and South Sudan that has led to more instances in which South Sudanese refugees can equate their qualifications. In contrast, due to limited political relations between Uganda and the DRC, the process for equating documents is unclear, despite efforts by the Ugandan government to request a standard transcript for a teaching degree from the DRC government (KII, 2022). Although one MoES representative suggested that fluency in English would allow a refugee teacher from the DRC to be certified, no other key informants mentioned this, and examples of this practice have yet to be shared.

A MoES representative clearly stated that the qualification equation process should be managed at the regional level, where the governments commit to a policy that can be operationalized to avoid an ad-hoc, case-by-case review process that is slow and unfair. UNESCO's Qualifications Passport may have a role in filling this gap, but it is in its nascent stage in Uganda.

If and when refugee teachers can verify their teaching qualifications, they still face challenges registering with the Ugandan government since they do not have a national ID. Thus, while refugee teachers may have the equivalent documentation, the system is developed to restrict them from registering.

It is also unclear how teachers can recover missing or lost teaching qualifications. Several teachers and teaching assistants have formal teaching qualifications from South Sudan but cannot verify their credentials due to a lack of documentation. They are also unable to travel home to secure replacement copies. One refugee teacher who obtained her teaching qualifications in Uganda but had since lost the documentation was overwhelmed with the steps that she would need to take to recuperate her certification: report missing/lost documents to the police station and get a police report, travel to the TTI where she studied (far from where she currently resides) and start the process for requesting and replacement of documents. Each of these steps required financial resources to support travel-related expenses and also anxiety about interacting with the police and paying fees related to filing a police report.

Lack of career progression

There are minimal promotional opportunities for teachers. When teachers work for years or sometimes decades and cannot get a promotion, it can be demotivating (KII, 2022). There are also concerns that officials promote people because they know them, not because of hard work (KII, 2022).

For qualified refugee teachers and refugee teaching assistants, the challenges related to upgrading their qualifications or navigating the equation/equivalency process contribute to limited career progression opportunities. While some teachers explained that they initially joined the profession reluctantly due to limited opportunities or because they were sponsored for their Grade III certificate, they have found motivation in their work through their relationships with their learners, witnessing their learners' academic progression and achievement, and feeling as though they were contributing to their communities and countries. Ultimately, teachers expressed frustration at the limited career advancement pathways. Refugee teaching assistants, in particular, shared that while they were initially promised the opportunity to become full teachers, many have remained in their positions for over six years.

Misperceptions of teaching assistants' roles and responsibilities

The understanding of the role of the teaching assistant is not uniform across education stakeholders. Some described the teaching assistant's role as language support, while others saw them take on expanded responsibilities, especially amidst overcrowding. The DEO stated firmly that the role of the teaching assistant is to help teachers mitigate language barriers between teachers and students. The DEO was also in disbelief that teaching assistants were fulfilling the same duties as full-time teachers, though this was reported by teaching assistants, SMCs, and other KIs during our visit. The DEO's suggestions that they need to be monitored more closely misses the point that many teaching assistants are overqualified for the position (NGO KI, 2022). SMC members further acknowledged the excellent work in the schools and the disconnect between what teaching assistants earn and what other teachers earn.

Adding insult to injury, teaching assistants shared that they were regularly excluded from TPD opportunities (as noted above) despite their numerous responsibilities. They also expressed the negative implications on their well-being amidst the total disregard for their work when they are overlooked during t-shirt distribution, among other slights.

Funding constraints

The financial challenges faced by the government, UN agencies, and NGOs are considerable, and there are high expectations and pressures in finding ways forward. A senior UNHCR official pointed out: "If Uganda's progressive model of inclusion fails, the whole region's approach to refugee response fails." In 2021, UNHCR's budget for overall operating costs was reduced from \$118 million to \$64 million, and additional cuts were expected, making it impossible to plan for the year.

Donors like ECW, the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), and the Bureau of Population Refugees and Migration (PRM) make planning easier for NGOs because they know the funds are coming every year and when (KIs, 2022). However, given the protracted refugee-hosting situation, education actors cannot continue to fund education solely through humanitarian funding.

Following sustained advocacy by UNHCR, refugees are now included in the GPE compact and its subsequent Uganda Learning Acceleration Programme (ULEARN). Unfortunately, including teachers' salaries for the refugee response was not approved in the GPE process (UNHCR KI, 2022). The unreliability of some funding has led to salaries being withheld from teachers. UNHCR representatives described a need to affirm to the government that the burden of funding teachers' salaries is shared between UNHCR and implementing partners rather than shifted to the sole responsibility of the government.

Implications for National Inclusion

Some of the challenges and opportunities for workforce sustainability and the implications for national inclusion of teachers intersect. A key issue is the right-to-work policy in Uganda. Different KIs understood the right-to-work policy differently. While there was agreement that refugees have the right to work, this is with "reservations" (DEO KII, 2022) and bottlenecks that prevent refugees from accessing this right. There was also confusion among some key informants about the need for a work permit. A DEO key informant stated that refugees must have a work permit; however, a UNHCR representative confirmed that the requirements for refugees to acquire work permits have been waived. Despite this waiver, the Teacher Management Information System (TMIS) did not anticipate and did not account for refugee teacher registration.

The new Teacher Policy requires teachers to register in TMIS for licensing and employment. To apply for accreditation and licensing in TMIS, teachers must upload a national ID (Ugandans) or work permit (foreigners). Refugee teachers have neither of these (UNHCR KII, 2023).

Either way, national inclusion for refugee teachers in the Ugandan education system requires teachers to be certified to teach in Uganda. The challenges for refugee teachers to confirm, equate, and/or acquire their credentials, including a bachelor's degree, remain significant despite some promising breakthroughs. These challenges depend on whether the Ugandan authorities recognize the refugee teachers' teaching qualifications or if they work as teaching assistants and cannot confirm or obtain full recognition of their training. While there is some progress, sustained attention is needed to identify and mitigate other bottlenecks that may arise (e.g. obtaining work permits, national ID cards, accounting for work permit waivers in online platforms.).

Interestingly, KIs suggested that the push for inclusion of refugee (and even national) teachers into the national system (and payroll) may fare better in districts with both lower numbers of NGOs and refugees, as it helps facilitate an uptick in government responsibility (Kiryandongo being one example).

The Way Forward

Given how many donors and other education actors are engaged in supporting the refugee response in Uganda, the national government and UNHCR might consider new strategies for requiring donors to support teachers' salaries, especially as they push their agendas and expand teachers' responsibilities (e.g., play-based learning approaches, social and emotional learning and education technologies). Given the collaborative partnership models in Uganda, the following recommendations should be pursued jointly to bolster teacher quality and workforce sustainability.

Teacher management

- **Develop and maintain a robust refugee teachers' database:** The data collected and published by UNESCO, in collaboration with the MoES, is a strong model for gathering teacher profiles that inform policy, teacher programming, and support provided to refugee-hosting districts nationwide. This database should be embedded within the EMIS system and updated with data from the refugee settlements that are not currently integrated. These details should account for how many refugee teachers need support reclaiming lost teaching qualifications and acquiring upgraded ones.
- **Harmonize pay structures:** Harmonization must be prioritized and coordinated between the Government of Uganda, UNHCR, and implementing partners, as there is still variability across teacher profiles (including the subjects they teach) and by different actors. Harmonization must also include monetary and non-monetary benefits beyond salary wages. Additionally, the timing of payment needs to be communicated to teachers, as wage gaps impact their well-being and motivation to persist in the profession.
- **Reassess the role and recognition of teaching assistants:** Teaching assistants are not officially recognized in the teacher management systems. However, teaching assistants currently provide critical language support and, in some cases, facilitate learning in crowded classroom environments. The role of the teaching assistant must be discussed among implementing partners and the MoES, as those serving in these positions are providing robust support to students and teachers.
 - » If teaching assistants are fulfilling the role of a teacher, UNHCR and partners need to prioritize equitable compensation for teaching assistants for both their personal and professional well-being.

- **Develop teaching qualifications equivalency system:** The emerging Qualifications Passport led by UNESCO is a promising initiative that may be able to fill this gap; however, if it delays and/or proves ineffective, a new strategy should be put in place to help refugee teachers equate (and/or replace) their teaching qualifications acquired in their countries of origin. Additional steps should be taken to simplify the process of replacing lost documents to reduce the need to travel to TTIs and/or engage with local authorities to file "lost document" reports.

Teacher professional development

- **Increase access to professional development and university coursework:** TPD is instrumental for teacher well-being and education quality. Formal professional development should be available for teaching assistants to upgrade their qualifications. Additionally, teacher training opportunities to upgrade certificates to the requirements outlined in the new National Teacher Policy that takes effect in 2030 need to be coordinated and made accessible to teachers in refugee-hosting areas. Discussions must occur on how to make these teacher training opportunities accessible for teachers in remote areas. Specifically, teachers must be provided with various pathways to upskill their credentials. The government of Uganda, UNHCR, and implementing partners must consider support mechanisms to access transportation, accommodations, and food support to ensure that the barriers to accessing this training are mitigated to the greatest extent possible.
 - » Opportunities to leverage distance and/or virtual learning can also be explored to overcome challenges related to time and distance (see distance learning programme on special needs for diplomas and bachelor's degrees that already exist and could inform a new model).¹²
- **Identify new funding sources to support teacher scholarships** for teacher training institutions to help upgrade teaching qualifications.
- **Line up continuous teacher professional development (CTPD) activities with the Uganda National Institute of Tertiary Education (UNITE):** Leverage UNITE as the primary entity responsible for coordinating CTPD for all teachers.

Teacher well-being

- **Recognize and include all instructional staff – teachers and teaching assistants – in small and large gestures when possible:** Ensure that teaching assistants are recognized and benefit from symbolic gestures (e.g. t-shirt distribution) and professional development opportunities (e.g. invitations to participate in training activities, when possible).
- **Provide better, safer accommodations for teachers:** Build timber houses near school premises for teachers (recommendation by SMC member) as a pilot initiative for overcoming the challenges that arise from the lack of accommodations for teachers.

¹² For an example, see: <https://kyu.ac.ug/departments-of-distance-education/> and <https://kyu.ac.ug/institute-of-distance-education-e-learning-learning-centres/>

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