



MAPPING OF EXISTING COMPLAINTS, FEEDBACK AND SAFEGUARDING MECHANISMS IN UGANDA'S REFUGEE RESPONSE

DECEMBER 2025

Background of the study

The Uganda Learning, Evidence, Accountability and Research Network (U-Learn) is a UK-aid-funded initiative designed to strengthen the effectiveness, accountability and inclusiveness of Uganda's refugee response by generating evidence, facilitating learning and amplifying refugee voice and choice. Since its launch in 2020, the consortium led by the Uganda Response Innovation Lab (U-RIL), in partnership with IMPACT Initiatives and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), has built a unique system-level model that shifts focus from direct aid delivery to enabling transformative, evidence-driven decision-making across the response. Now in its fifth year of implementation, U-Learn has worked closely with government and humanitarian partners to refine and scale approaches that improve programme design, coordination and responsiveness.

Through its Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) component, IRC supports the integration of AAP principles across 13 refugee settlements by strengthening partners' AAP capacity through the AAP in Action programme, facilitating community feedback and consultation sessions, and increasing awareness of Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH). U-Learn continues to play a critical role in promoting equitable, informed, and people-centred humanitarian action in Uganda.

The overall objective of mapping existing feedback and safeguarding response mechanisms in the supported areas was to facilitate the harmonisation of these mechanisms among all implementing partners, with the aim of ensuring a more coordinated, accountable and responsive service delivery to refugees and host communities.

Methodology

1,929
Respondents

27
FGDs

24
KIIs

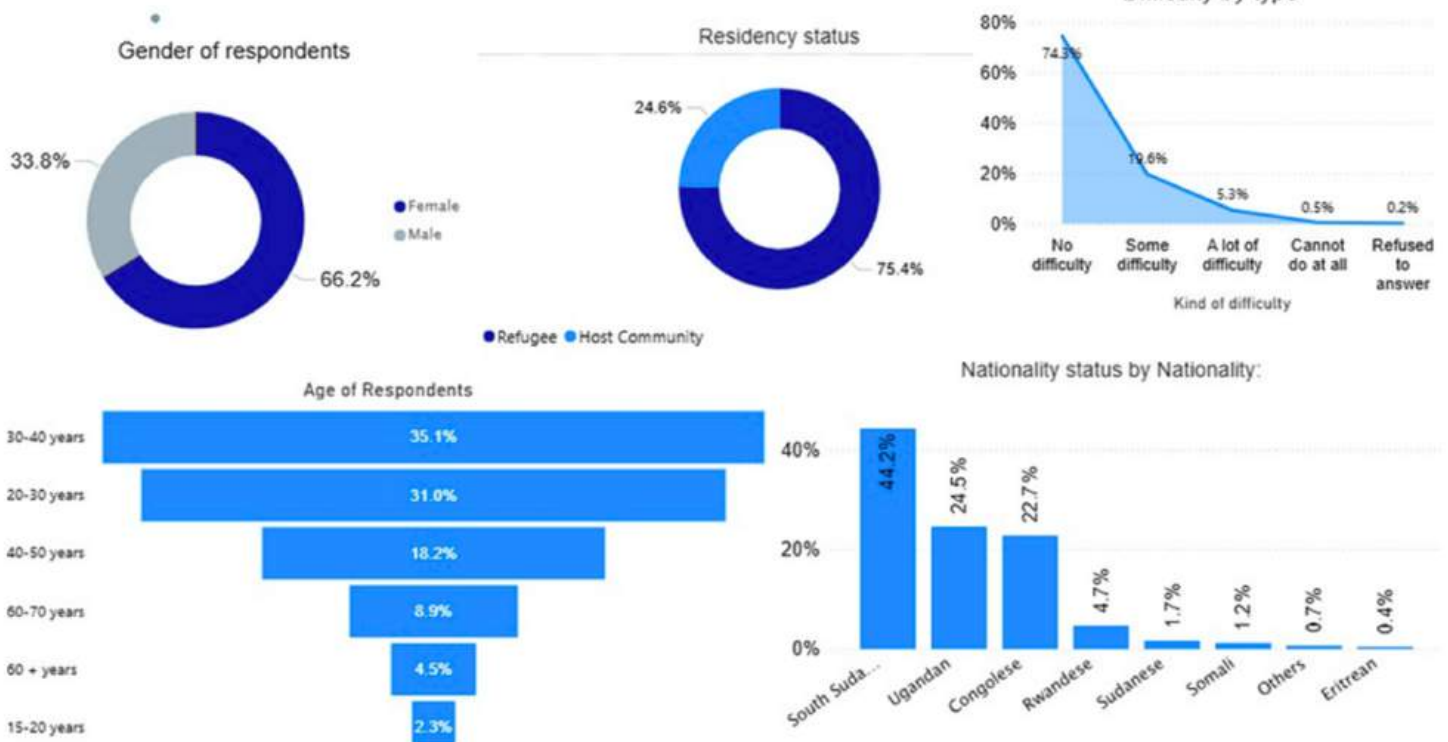
The mapping exercise used a cross-sectional design combining quantitative household surveys and qualitative FGDs and KIIs to assess feedback and safeguarding mechanisms across 13 refugee-hosting districts. A total of 1,929 respondents were reached through stratified random sampling for the survey, complemented by 24 FGDs with youth, the elderly, and persons with disabilities and 24 KIIs with OPM, partner staff, leaders, and stakeholders.

Data was collected using electronic questionnaires with built-in validation checks and analysed in Excel and Power BI, while qualitative data was transcribed and thematically analysed in ATLAS.ti. Rigorous quality control measures were implemented, including training, supervision, pretesting, real-time monitoring, and translation, to ensure accuracy and that the entire process adhered to key ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality and participant protection.

Key findings

The client demographics show a predominantly female sample (66.2%), with males comprising 33.8%, and 75.4% were refugees, compared with 24.6% from host communities. Most respondents reported no disability difficulties (74.3%). The sample was more youthful and economically active, with most participants aged 20–40 years (66.1%). Regarding nationality, data reflected a diverse refugee context dominated by South Sudanese (44.2%), followed by Ugandans (24.5%) and Congolese (22.7%), with smaller proportions from Rwanda (4.7%), Sudan (1.7%), Somalia (1.2%), and Eritrea (0.4%). Map existing feedback and safeguarding mechanisms being implemented by partners across all refugee settlements and host communities.

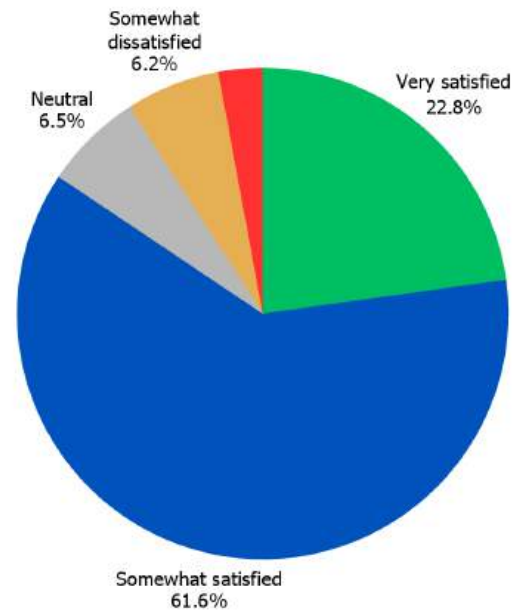
RESPONDENT SOCIAL DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS





Existing feedback and safeguarding mechanisms

The mapping exercise revealed a well-established and widely utilised feedback and safeguarding ecosystem across refugee settlements and host communities, supported by both formal institutional systems and community-based structures. The most commonly used channels include community leaders (58.7%), office walk-ins (45.0%), and community meetings (30.3%), reflecting the importance of proximity and face-to-face engagement. Satisfaction with available channels is high: 84.4% of clients report being satisfied (84% of women and 85% of men).



The functionality and effectiveness of current mechanisms

The feedback and safeguarding system demonstrated high functionality and utilization with 92% of clients reporting use of at least one channel and 89.3% reporting positive experiences with agency responses. Awareness of feedback channels was extremely high (89.9%), and satisfaction with available mechanisms was strong, with 84.4% expressing satisfaction. The presence of multiple channels aligned with AAP standards that require accessibility and choice. Qualitative findings highlighted persistent challenges, including delayed or absent feedback, weak follow-up, leadership bottlenecks, information gaps and physical access barriers that disproportionately affect older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women and remote households.

"If you call FRRM, you feel like you have gone straight to the office, even if you are far away."
-KII with the Youth

"Even if the office is there, if the person cannot speak freely in their own language, they may choose to remain silent rather than risk being misunderstood."

- FGD male Participant, Yumbe



Overlaps, gaps and areas for improvement in current mechanisms, good practices and innovative approaches

Results revealed significant overlap at the entry-point level, particularly where community leaders, RWCs, suggestion boxes and office walk-ins serve both general feedback and safeguarding reporting. Although this overlap increases access, it creates confusion around follow-up and accountability, especially when cases do not progress from the community leadership level. Good practices were observed in settlements with decentralised zonal-level structures, such as the Palabek and Bidibidi refugee settlements, where safeguarding cases are rapidly escalated into formal systems and community feedback has informed program adjustments, including the expansion of protection desks by protection partners.



The extent to which client feedback is utilised by implementing partners to inform decision-making processes

Findings indicated that client feedback is actively used by implementing partners to inform operational and programmatic decisions, particularly to improve access and responsiveness. Feedback on service access barriers has led to practical adjustments, such as decentralising protection desks to the zonal level, thereby improving reach for hard-to-access communities. Partners routinely review feedback through coordination, M&E and leadership structures, using it to prioritise high-risk cases, adjust service packages, strengthen partner presence in community forums and refine communication approaches.



The most preferred feedback mechanisms among target communities, highlighting differences between old caseloads and new arrivals

Findings show that community-based mechanisms remain the easiest to access and use, particularly community leaders (58.7%), office walk-ins (45.0%) and community meetings (30.3%), reflecting the importance of proximity and relational access. Preferences vary geographically: community leaders and meetings are preferred in Adjumani and Isingiro, whereas office walk-ins predominate in Isingiro and Kiryandongo. Technology-enabled channels such as toll-free hotlines and WE LINK were valued for rapid information and referrals, especially in Adjumani and Lamwo, but their use is constrained by language barriers, phone ownership, and network access.

Success story

Limited access to mobile phones had emerged as a critical challenge in refugee settlements, significantly undermining communication, accountability and access to services. Many community members relied on informal channels such as word of mouth, leading to misinformation, delayed responses and limited follow-up on community concerns.

AVSI tackled this challenge by implementing a targeted community-wide registration exercise to identify households and individuals without mobile phones. This was followed by verification of eligible community members using National Identification and fingerprint validation to ensure transparency and accountability.

The organisation distributed mobile phones and SIM cards to verified beneficiaries, enabling them to access toll-free hotlines and partner communication platforms in real time. Access to mobile phones has also enhanced livelihoods as individuals receive communication about employment and business opportunities.

AVSI's intervention demonstrated how investing in community needs strengthens Accountability to Affected Populations, improves service delivery and empowers communities to actively engage in programs that affect their wellbeing.

Recommendations

Strengthening coordination and harmonisation in feedback systems: Establish a harmonised inter-agency feedback and safeguarding framework with clear reporting pathways, escalation procedures, standardised referral protocols and response timelines across all settlements.

Improving responsiveness and closing feedback loops: Introduce and enforce minimum response timelines for different categories of feedback and ensure feedback loops are consistently closed through timely client updates using preferred channels. Regular community feedback meetings should be institutionalised to reinforce accountability, and stronger supervision of community leaders is needed to improve follow-up, confidentiality, and reliability.

Enhancing inclusivity and accessibility for vulnerable groups: Expand disability- and gender-inclusive reporting options, including designated focal persons, accessible desks, home-based reporting, and women-friendly spaces. Proven zonal and mobile outreach models need to be scaled to all clients in remote locations.

Deepening community engagement and trust-building: Strengthen trusted community-based structures such as RWCs, elders, women leaders, and advisory committees as first-line feedback and referral points.

Increasing use of feedback in decision-making: Institutionalise simple case-tracking and feedback analysis systems to ensure client feedback informs programme design, service adjustments and coordination discussions.

Scaling good practices and innovations: Scale proven approaches such as decentralised service delivery, inter-agency management of suggestion boxes, women's safe spaces and youth centres. Support refugee-led accountability groups to strengthen community ownership and culturally grounded oversight of feedback systems.



Conclusion

Uganda's refugee response has a wide range of feedback and safeguarding mechanisms with high awareness and usage, but their functionality remains uneven across settlements. Community leaders and local structures are the most trusted channels, while formal mechanisms often face slow follow-up, language barriers and confidentiality concerns, especially affecting vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, women and the elderly.

Key gaps included exclusion of PWDs, corruption, weak feedback loops and long distances to service points. Although agencies collect feedback and some adjustments have been made, utilisation remains inconsistent due to fragmented systems and limited analytics.

Despite these challenges, good practices such as interagency suggestion-box reviews, refugee-led committees and audio-based communication show strong potential for improvement.

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- www.ulearn-uganda.org/
- info@ulearn-uganda.com