

# Support to UNHCR and WFP country operations in Uganda

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## What is the Joint Hub?

The [UNHCR-WFP Joint Programme Excellence and Targeting Hub \(Joint Hub\)](#) provides strategic and technical support to UNHCR and WFP at the global, regional and country level, to inform protective, people-centred and needs-based solutions for refugees and other forcibly displaced people.

The Joint Hub works to foster collaborative action between the two agencies, along with governments and development actors, through a shared vision and responsibility, in order to strengthen inclusion and support an ethical transition from humanitarian assistance.

This brief presents details of the Joint Hub's work in practice, focusing on support provided to UNHCR and WFP operations in Uganda and the joint provision of assistance and solutions for refugees.

## Overview of country context

Uganda hosts approximately **1.5 million refugees**, originating from South Sudan (57%), Democratic Republic of the Congo (32%), Somalia (4%) Burundi (3%) and the rest from Eritrea, Rwanda and other countries.<sup>1</sup> Refugees have been welcomed, registered, allocated land and provided with legal documents.

The Government of Uganda has committed to ensuring the social and economic inclusion of refugees and is therefore increasing access to work and livelihoods opportunities so that refugees can become more self-reliant and reduce their dependence on humanitarian assistance. However, most refugees in Uganda remain highly vulnerable and continue to rely on assistance. Furthermore, the large scale of the refugee population and the geographically wide area in which refugees reside (13 main settlements across the country, plus urban areas of Kampala), present a complex environment for humanitarian agencies to operate in.

## Shifting to needs-based prioritisation of food assistance for refugees

While needs remain high, the Refugee Response Plan in Uganda is underfunded, and resource shortfalls have intensified the need for household-level prioritisation. From 2020 onwards, **decreases in funding for food assistance** resulted in food rations being progressively reduced for all refugees (firstly to 70% in April 2020, then to 60% in February 2021), disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable refugee households.

In 2019, to better understand the needs and vulnerability of refugees, the **Vulnerability and Essential Needs Analysis (VENA)** was conducted, an inter-agency assessment that found 91 percent

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR Global Focus <https://reporting.unhcr.org/uganda#toc-populations>

of refugee households to be highly vulnerable, and 81 percent of households with overlapping high protection and economic vulnerability.

From 2021 to 2022, UNHCR conducted the **Individual Profiling Exercise (IPE)**, establishing a comprehensive dataset to better understand the needs, vulnerabilities and resilience of individuals and households. The IPE builds upon findings of the VENA by adding predictors of vulnerability to the refugee registry, thereby providing detailed information about each refugee household in all settlements across the country.<sup>2</sup>

While the VENA and IPE provide information about the situation of refugees, due to the large size of the highly vulnerable group identified, and the ongoing nature of the IPE, **it was challenging to translate this data into an operational strategy for prioritisation** that could identify and select the most vulnerable households and provide them with an appropriate level of assistance.

## Support provided by the Joint Hub

**In December 2020, UNHCR and WFP country offices jointly requested support from the Joint Hub** to assist them in (1) revising the socio-economic and protection vulnerability frameworks, in order to facilitate needs-based prioritisation; and (2) operationalising the shift to a needs-based prioritisation approach for the delivery of food assistance.

**In response, the Joint Hub has provided various forms of support** to the operations in Uganda, from early 2021 onwards. Support has included the deployment of a staff member as Joint Hub Country Coordinator for six months in 2022, four in-country missions and ongoing remote technical support.

**The Joint Hub has contributed to building the capacity of staff** in country operations throughout the process so that monitoring, analysis and implementation of the targeting approach, as well as future assessments, continue to be conducted jointly.

## TECHNICAL SUPPORT

**The Joint Hub has led the technical development of a prioritisation approach** for food assistance which takes into account the complexity of the context, the data available and the perspectives and feedback from the community. The analysis considered economic vulnerability, protection needs and the reliance on high-risk coping strategies that expose refugees to protection risks.

With the **Individual Profiling Exercise (IPE)** ongoing, its results have been progressively integrated into the prioritisation strategy. In each phase, as more data was analysed and community feedback was gathered, the prioritisation approach was increasingly refined. Following the food ration reductions for all refugees (up until early 2021), the prioritisation phases were as follows:

- **In Phase 1 (2021)**, geographic prioritisation was adopted, with the ration size adjusted according to location, based on the overall vulnerability level of each settlement (rations at 70% in 5 settlements, 60% in 3 settlements and 40% in 5 settlements). The settlements were divided into these three groups due to important differences between the regions - such as local market prices, economic opportunities and agricultural potential - that had an impact on refugees' food security.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2021, UNHCR combined the IPE with a verification of refugee registration data, for remaining settlements (individual-level data, including socio-demographic and livelihood measures, basic biodata update, biometric check, updates to household size and (validated) specific needs codes).

- **In Phase 2 (2022)**, index-based ranking was used to identify the most vulnerable refugees in the settlements where food rations were lowest (set at 40% in phase 1) as an interim measure before the national rollout of household level prioritisation. These households (approximately 1/5 according to resource availability) started receiving higher food rations (60%), to contribute to meeting their relatively greater food needs. The ranking of households according to their vulnerability level was based on both socio-demographic and protection-related variables (such as household dependency ratio, women/girls at risk, child protection cases, serious medical conditions, disability and older persons at risk).
- **In Phase 3 (2023)**, household level prioritisation is being implemented across all settlements, based on the combination of an (updated) index-based approach (to prioritise the most vulnerable households) and the use of categorical criteria (to phase out self-sufficient refugees from food assistance). Country Offices are leading the phase 3 methodology with support from the Joint Hub (see below for more details).

### Prioritisation approach for food assistance for refugees in Uganda

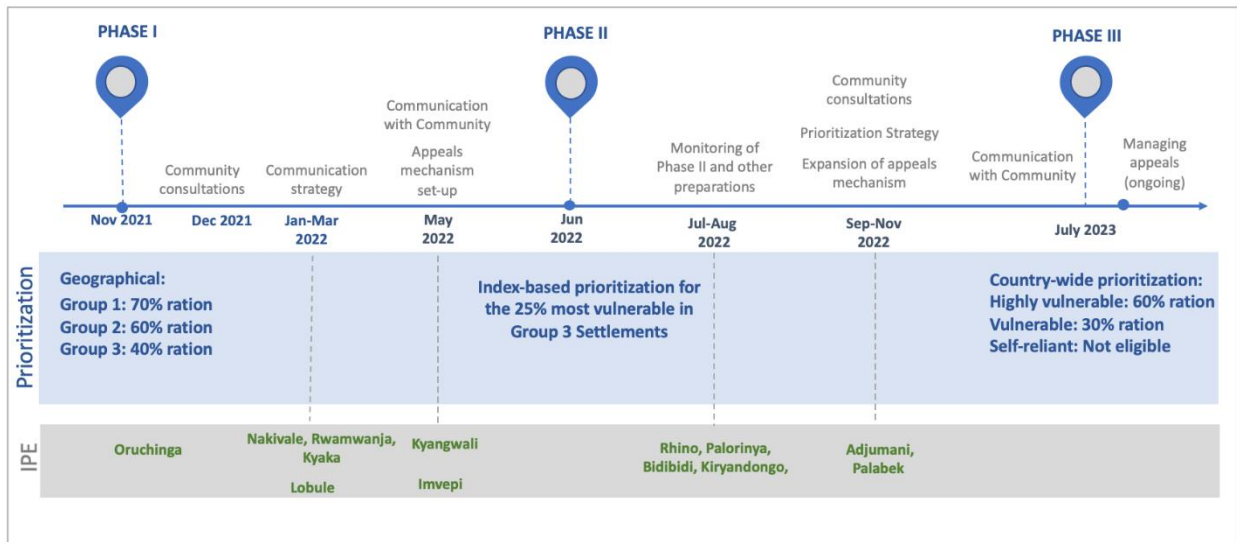
As of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2023, WFP, UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) are implementing a prioritisation approach for food and cash assistance for refugees in all 13 settlements across the country (Adjumani, Bidibidi, Imvepi, Kiryandongo, Kyaka II, Kyangwali, Lobule, Nakivale, Oruchinga, Palabek, Palorinya, Rhino, Rwamwanja).

The prioritisation model is based on statistical analysis and has been adapted according to community feedback; of the model's 13 vulnerability indicators, more than half were identified by refugees and 6 were statistically linked to vulnerability. The index-based approach uses both socio-demographic variables and specific-needs codes contained in proGres registration data to rank households according to their vulnerability and identify those eligible for the two different levels of food assistance. In addition to the index, a categorical approach is used to identify households which are considered self-reliant (and thus not eligible for food assistance). These households include refugees with salaried occupations and/or certain businesses, refugees receiving significant assistance on livelihoods or resilience programmes, and refugees that have not collected their assistance for three consecutive months.

Entitlement to assistance is adjusted according to levels of vulnerability and self-reliance. Given the serious levels of under-resourcing, the following rations are provided to refugees (subject to update based on funding): highly vulnerable households receive 60% of the food/cash ration, vulnerable households receive 30%, while those who are self-reliant are no longer eligible to receive assistance. It should be noted that the ration size and/or value of the cash transfer is adjusted according to local market prices.

**New arrivals** continue to receive three months of 100% food ration, before being automatically categorized as highly vulnerable (and receiving the higher ration) for a further 3 months. After 6 months in the settlement, the prioritisation index is applied to new arrivals and they receive assistance according to their vulnerability (using the same process described above).

## Uganda: Prioritization ROADMAP for the Refugee Operation



## ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PEOPLE

**Communities have been engaged** and their feedback has informed the overall design of the household-level prioritisation approach from phase 2 onwards, not only the eligibility criteria, but also the way key information is communicated and appeals are received and responded to. With support from the Joint Hub, both agencies have placed an emphasis on including refugee perspectives in decision-making and strengthening regular two-way communication throughout the process.

**Clear and consistent communication, through a variety of channels and in the refugees' main languages,** has been strongly emphasised. Refugees were consulted in order to identify their preferred channels for receiving key information and sharing questions, feedback, complaints and appeals. UNHCR and WFP developed key messages and frequently asked questions (FAQs) for each phase of the prioritisation approach. Key messages and FAQs were tested to ensure they were comprehensive and easily understood by refugees, including illiterate people, people with disabilities and older people, before dissemination via refugees' preferred information channels.

**Refugees were informed of their eligibility for assistance** through anonymised eligibility lists at village level (phase 2 only), as well as SMS messages to refugees' phones (phases 2 and 3). Households could also inquire about their eligibility status at partner help desks and protection desks as well as by calling the WFP hotline or the interagency Feedback, Referral and Resolution Mechanism (FRRM) refugee helpline. For a limited number of highly vulnerable protection cases, house visits were conducted by protection staff to directly inform them of their eligibility for assistance. The country offices decided not to share the eligibility criteria with refugees due to fraud concerns.

**A joint appeals mechanism** was established to enable UNHCR and WFP to work together when receiving, processing and responding to appeals by households concerning their eligibility for assistance. The Joint Hub also supported the country offices to establish an assistance buffer, thereby enabling additional assistance to be allocated to vulnerable households that are identified as eligible through the appeals process.

## SUPPORTING PARTNERSHIP AND NEW WAYS OF WORKING

The Joint Hub played a convening role in Uganda and was mostly perceived as a neutral broker by country office and field-level staff, able to maintain dialogue and support partnership to achieve a shared vision for refugees. Throughout the process, the Joint Hub emphasised the importance of close coordination and partnership with the Government of Uganda to improve government buy-in, guidance, and support.

As a result of Joint Hub support, **UNHCR and WFP country offices have both made significant changes** to their ways of working, with increased dialogue and joint activities, as well as staff undertaking a range of new activities and incorporating new tools and approaches in their daily work. One key success is that the country teams have fully taken over the leadership of the process and are actively collaborating on prioritisation, implementation and monitoring.

### Programmatic outcomes of collaborative action:

- **Evidence-based and phased shift** from food assistance for all refugees (based on status and with reduced rations for all households) to a needs-based prioritisation approach for food assistance, based on three categories of vulnerability, plus new arrivals receiving 100% of the food basket (3 months) and then higher levels of support (for additional 3 months).
- **More efficient use of resources**, with differentiated levels of assistance according to levels of household vulnerability – important in the context of continuous decreases in funding.
- **Joint resourcing for the specific positions** that were put in place to support implementation of the prioritisation approach. For example: WFP is resourcing over 40 case worker positions that were earlier resourced by the Joint Hub; both COs co-resourcing the national Data Analyst position.
- **Protection mainstreamed** and integrated throughout the process, with time and resources invested in community engagement, communications, the joint appeals mechanism and managing other complaints and feedback.

### FURTHER INFORMATION:

Joint Hub (2023) [Community Consultation Report, Phase 3 of WFP food assistance prioritisation in Uganda](#)

Reach, WFP and UNHCR (2020) [Uganda Vulnerability and Essential Needs Assessment, Volume 1.](#)

UNHCR and WFP (2023) [Phase 3 of WFP food assistance prioritisation in Uganda: Community consultation report.](#)

UNHCR and WFP (2023) [Lessons on UNHCR-WFP Collaboration on Prioritization of Assistance to Refugees.](#)

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