

## POLICY BRIEF

### MITIGATING THE DRC CONFLICT IMPACT ON UGANDAN PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR REFUGEES IN CAMPS.

#### Executive Summary

The ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has led to an influx of refugees in Uganda, putting a strain on existing psychosocial support structures in refugee camps. This brief highlights the impact of the conflict on these structures and recommends policy actions to strengthen support services for refugees.

#### Introduction

The DRC conflict has resulted in a significant increase in refugees seeking safety in Uganda, with many settling in camps. The existing psychosocial support structures in these camps are facing challenges in providing adequate support to refugees experiencing trauma, stress, and anxiety.

The conflict has displaced thousands of people in Goma and surrounding areas, including the most vulnerable groups (women, children and people living with disabilities), many struggling for safety and basic needs as tensions persist. As of April 2024, Uganda hosted about 1.7 million refugees and asylum seekers from the DRC. Through limited support initiatives from the International communities, Civil Society Organizations and the Government of the Republic of Uganda, there has been some relief support offered to refugees. However, there is still need for more support due to overcrowding at the camps and health facilities which are serving both refugees and surrounding local communities. The mental health infrastructure in Uganda is underdeveloped, leading to limited availability of qualified professionals and treatment options creating barriers for those who seek psychosocial support.

#### Problem Statement

The DRC conflict has exacerbated the psychosocial needs of refugees in Ugandan camps, with limited resources and capacity to provide support services. Over 70% of refugees in Ugandan camps have experienced trauma, stress, or anxiety (UNHCR, 2022).<sup>1</sup> The Existing psychosocial support structures are understaffed and underfunded. Refugees report feelings of isolation, fear, and uncertainty.<sup>2</sup>

Uganda's mental health infrastructure for refugees is facing significant challenges. Many refugees have experienced trauma, stress, and anxiety due to the conflict in their home country, and the existing mental

<sup>1</sup> Kelli N O'Laughlin, "Mental Disorders and Lack of Social Support among Refugees and Ugandan Nationals Screening for HIV at Health Centers in Nakivale Refugee Settlement in Southwestern Uganda - PMC."

<sup>2</sup> "MHPSS Briefing note\_Nov19 (1)."

health services are limited. Some organizations, like the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), are working to provide psychosocial support services, including counseling, group therapy, and community-based support, also trained community members, and known as “Parasocial counsellors,” to provide basic counseling and referrals.<sup>3</sup> However, more resources are needed to address the growing mental health needs of refugees. They face barriers in accessing mental health services, including limited access to healthcare facilities, lack of specialized mental health professionals, and cultural stigma surrounding mental illness.

## **Recommendations to Mitigate DRC Conflict Impact on Ugandans’ Psychosocial Support Structures for Refugees in Camps**

1. To improve the mental health infrastructure, Uganda needs to:
2. Increase funding for psychosocial support services in refugee camps through Lobbying for more funding with international support.
3. Enhance the Capacity of psychosocial support staff by collaborating with various local stakeholders through trainings on mental health sensitization, advocacy campaigns with mobile psychosocial health services.
4. Conduct joint review missions to assess the health system’s response and identify areas for improvement.
5. Establish community-based support groups for refugees
6. Strengthen partnerships with local organizations to enhance support services

## **Conclusion**

The Ugandan government and international organizations must prioritize strengthening psychosocial support structures in refugee camps to address the impact of the DRC conflict on refugees.

## **Bibliography**

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